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Vocational education and training for people from non-English-speaking backgrounds

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Contents

Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACE	Adult and Community Education
AMEP	Australian Migrant Education Program
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
BIMPR	Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research
DETYA	Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (previously DEETYA)
DIMA	Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
DTIR	Department of Training and Industrial Relations
EAC NSW	Ethnic Affairs Commission, New South Wales
ESB	English-speaking background
FECCA	Federation of Ethnic Communities Council
LLN	Language, literacy and numeracy
LOTE	Language other than English
MCGVET	Ministerial Consultative Group on Vocational Education and Training
NBEET	National Board of Employment, Education and Training
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NES	Non-English speaking
NESB	Non-English-speaking background
NOOSR	National Office of Overseas Skill Recognition
NTRA	National training reform agenda
OMA	Office of Multicultural Affairs
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
SEETRC	Senate Employment, Education and Training Reference Committee
TAFE	Technical and further education
VET	Vocational education and training

VETEC	Vocational Education and Training Employment Commission
WELL	Workplace English Language and Literacy Program

Executive summary

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND training (VET) for people from non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB) is becoming increasingly important in Australia as the variety and origins of people from such backgrounds change and as NESB people within and outside the workplace are affected by ongoing workplace restructuring and change. This review of literature to 1998 on non-English speakers in VET:

- teases out the complexity within a simple NESB definition and the effects of constantly changing migration patterns on learner diversity and potential VET clients in Australia
- identifies trends in participation in VET as well as a wide range of influences, beyond language spoken at home, on NESB participation in VET
- locates NESB participation in a national education and training policy context
- summarises conclusive, inconclusive and contested evidence from the literature and draws out some areas for further research

Context

Scope and focus of the review

THERE HAS BEEN considerable literature on the provision of vocational education and training (VET) for the very diverse variety of people in Australia with non-English-speaking backgrounds. Such people are usually (but not always) defined as people who speak a language other than English at home. This review of research examines and summarises much of that literature, to identify some firm conclusions, areas for further research and some emerging policy issues.

The review considers both the extent of disadvantage and the nature of that disadvantage. Disadvantage is identified in the literature as resulting from a broad range of factors beyond language and including culture, learning styles, and cultural attitudes to vocational and other education and to discrimination within society. The literature includes recent Australian data and research completed or in progress to March 1998 on participation in and outcomes of VET. It builds on the earlier reviews of Golding, Volkoff and Ferrier (1997, pp.39–53) and Marshall and McGrath (1997, pp.123–138). Most available data in the literature derive from the technical and further education (TAFE) sector. Information from other sectors of VET is limited. Some data were made available by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA 1998a).

The review first considers different NESB definitions, influences on NESB learner diversity, and the profile of NESB participation and outcomes in VET and factors that affect them. Second, it examines the literature on policies, programs and delivery models for addressing the special and different cultural and linguistic needs of this diverse group of VET participants. Finally, the review analyses the evidence derived from the literature with a view to informing policy-makers, providers and practitioners, providing a source of further information and a focus for future research.

The emphasis of this review will be on VET for people born either in Australia or overseas and who are from a non-English-speaking background; that is, people who usually speak a language other than English at home, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. More than half of Australian residents born overseas came from non-English-speaking countries in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and South America. While the main countries of origin and priority subgroups are continuing to change, the ongoing and major difficulty for NESB learners is the need to achieve proficiency with English language skills (Stephens & Bertone 1995; O'Loughlin & Watson 1997).

Non-English-speaking background learners in Australia

Australia is both multicultural and multilingual. Among contemporary Western societies, Australia has the highest proportion of immigrants (Collins et al. 1997). In 1996, 4.2 million Australian residents had been born overseas, accounting for 23 per cent of Australia's population (ABS 1997a, p.12). This proportion rises to around 40 per cent if Australians with at least one parent born overseas are included (Williams & Batrouney 1998, p.258).

Around 1.2 million people (ABS 1997b), or 14.4 per cent of Australians (ABS 1996 Census), usually speak a language other than English at home. The ethnic and language mix of immigrants to Australia, as well as their education backgrounds, have varied over time with changes in source country and reason for migration. These changes and the age at arrival affect English literacy levels, vocational skills and qualifications, as well as attitudes towards education and training, for many years after arrival. While an increasing number of full-fee-paying overseas students are now accessing VET programs in Australia and may be affected in similar ways, as described in the review, this literature has not been examined or cited.

Is NESB all about migration?

It is misleading to link all people from a non-English-speaking background with immigration. One in five (21 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia (including 74 per cent of indigenous people in the Northern Territory [ABS 1995, p.5]) speak an indigenous language as their

main language. Further, 17 per cent of Australians (394 000) who speak a language other than English at home were born in Australia (ABS 1997b).

For these reasons, the NESB target group is difficult to define, and potential VET participants who are from a non-English-speaking background do not form a homogeneous group by language, age or geographical location. The effects of NESB status on labour force and VET participation, while real and often acute, are also often far from simple. Generalised statements of disadvantage, need and achievement cannot be made (ANTA 1998a, p.21), not only because of the internal diversity of non-English speakers by language, culture and gender (Mawer & Field 1995), but also because of the effects of other factors such as membership of additional groups that are seen to be relatively advantaged or disadvantaged (Golding & Volkoff 1997b; Volkoff & Golding 1998).

Current policy climate and trends

Participation of NESB people in VET is affected by policies outside of VET. Fincher and Nieuwenhuysen (1998, pp.274–275) observed that:

> *. . . during the latter years of the Labor Government (1983–96) and particularly since the inception of the Coalition Government in 1996, there have been a number of policy changes in immigration and settlement in the direction of reduced government expenditure and greater moves towards efficiency and cost recovery principles.*

These changes affect the number and nature of potential NESB VET participants, creating particular difficulties for groups that have both limited English language skills and poor financial resources. Some programs and services available to NESB people specifically have also been reduced. While there has been an increase in the number of skilled migrants in the independent and business skills categories, escalating fees payable for English language tuition and two-year waiting periods for a range of social security benefits and Austudy have posed particular problems for some recently arrived groups (Fincher & Nieuwenhuysen 1998, pp.274–275). The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA 1997a) reported that NESB migrants who entered as part of the humanitarian program, refugees in particular, had special needs and faced particular problems because of their lower levels of English literacy, fewer prior skills or qualifications and lower levels of community support on arrival.

Participation in VET is also related to labour market conditions, which have fluctuated dramatically since 1990. NESB people have been disproportionally affected by retrenchment in the 1990s and have been more subject to unemployment or precarious employment than the general population. Webber et al. (1995, p.13) reported that half of the retrenched workers in their study were NESB people.

Dimensions and perceptions of disadvantage

Lo Bianco (1987) acknowledged the obvious but important fact that 'incapacity with English is not assumed to equate with incapacity in another language'. Nor does being born overseas or in a non-English-speaking country necessarily equate with being a non-English speaker.

Wooden et al. (1994) showed that the main factors leading to disadvantage were period of residence in Australia and English-speaking ability. New arrivals were faced with vastly different employment opportunities (Fincher & Nieuwenhuysen 1998, p.260). Comparatively disadvantaged NESB groups had to put in more effort to maintain their economic position, with significant social costs (Martin 1975). To be able to speak English as a second language 'becomes an issue of the utmost importance to enable the maximum achievement of social participation, and economic and educational opportunity' (Lo Bianco 1987, p.85).

Available literature and data

Previous comprehensive reviews of vocational education and training for NESB people include those that focus on:

- participation and attainment in VET (ANTA 1996b, pp.43–53; ANTA 1997)
- NESB and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in VET (NSW TAFE 1995)
- competency-based training in VET (Mawer & Field 1995)

There are also seminar proceedings on 'new training directions' for NESB people (NESB MCGVET 1995). The literature is also informed by research and reports on NESB in other, related education and training sectors (e.g. adult and community education [FECCA 1996] and higher education

[NBEET 1996, pp.32–36]) and comprehensive reviews on training for particular NESB subgroups, especially women (Bertone 1995; VandenHeuvel & Wooden 1995; Stephens & Bertone 1995) and some cultural groups (e.g. Vietnamese [Phat 1996]).

Who are the NESB learners?

WHILE DEFINITIONS OF NESB usually include self-definition as a non-English speaker at home, there are many surrogates for the descriptor 'NESB' which either expand or restrict this definition. Perceived difficulties with the term NESB (ABS 1997d) include conflicting definitions, oversimplification as an indicator of disadvantage, neglect of culture, linguistic diversity and identity, and its negative connotations for some people.

Previous definitions of NESB

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has traditionally used two methods to identify cultural diversity. The first (and primary) method involved categorisation of people as NESB if they were born overseas and had a first language other than English, or one of their parents had those characteristics. This categorisation was aimed at identifying Australians who might experience disadvantage because of an inability to speak English, a lack of familiarity with Australian institutions, or prejudice associated with their social, cultural or ethnic background (ABS 1997b). It also suggested that an English-speaking background (ESB) was a norm from which such people deviated. The second method involved categorisation on the basis of country of birth. People born in countries designated as main non-English-speaking (NES) countries (see ABS 1997a, p.12) were considered potentially disadvantaged in Australia for similar linguistic and cultural reasons (ABS 1997b). ABS (1997a, p.12) currently regards NES countries as all overseas countries except the United Kingdom, Ireland, New Zealand, Canada, the United States and South Africa. However, use of 'NES country of birth' as an instrument for categorisation is generally regarded as imprecise and outmoded.

Current definitions of NESB

Despite being regarded as imprecise and outmoded, country of birth remains a simple and one of the most important multicultural designators (ABS 1997b). Names of countries in VET data (NCVER 1997b, p.167) are standardised by the ABS based on the Australian Standard Classification of Countries for Social Statistics. NCVER (1997b, p.172) uses a 'language spoken at home' classification to identify any language other than English which is commonly spoken by an individual at home. VET clients are classified according to the main language they speak at home.

The definition of NESB used in the higher education is more limited, including only those 'who were born overseas and arrived in Australia less than ten years ago, and who speak a language other than English at home' (NBEET 1996, p.125). Results of research into NESB people's participation and outcomes within the higher education sector (e.g. Postle et al. 1995; NBEET 1994, pp.29–34) are therefore not always transferable to VET.

The current definition of NESB, limiting membership to those born overseas, might be seen as racially discriminatory, in that it specifically excludes and discounts disadvantage in VET experienced by NESB indigenous people in Australia. It also discriminates against those born in Australia into families where English is generally not spoken in the home.

Proposed definitions of NESB

A decision was made by a Ministerial Council of Australian and State Governments in May 1996 to discontinue use of the term NESB (ANTA 1998a), based on the belief that it was an inappropriate indicator of disadvantage. At the time of writing, ABS (1997d) was developing a two-pronged approach, based on 'first language spoken' or 'main language spoken at home' combined with 'other measures of potential disadvantage'. An ABS project researching cultural diversity measures is due to be completed by November 1998 (Hodgson, personal communication).

Influences on NESB learner diversity

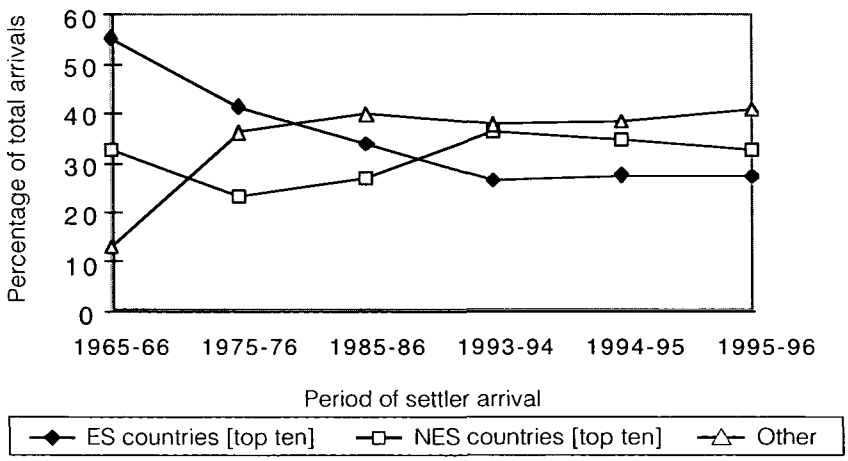
Migration over time

Before 1970 most immigration to Australia was from English-speaking countries (United Kingdom, Ireland and New Zealand). Europe (the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Greece and the former Yugoslavia) then provided the main source of NES settlers. Fincher and Nieuwenhuysen (1998, p.260) summarised the trends over the past 30 years:

> *As a result of the dismantling of the unofficial White Australia Policy between 1966 and 1973, immigration from Asia steadily increased, with the largest groups coming from Vietnam, China, the Philippines, Malaysia, India, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. The range of countries from which Australia draws its immigrants has continued to increase, with significant numbers arriving in recent years from the Middle East, the Pacific rim and South America. Throughout the 1980s the immigrant intake was dominated by settlers born in non-English-speaking (NES) countries, who in 1995–96 represented around 70 per cent of the total intake.*
>
> (BIMPR 1996)

Figure 1 shows the diminishing proportion of English-speaking settler arrivals, the corresponding increasing proportions of non-English-speaking settler arrivals (both taken from the top ten source countries), and the increasing proportion of settlers from a greater number of source countries (other).

Figure 1: Settler arrivals by category



The source countries that have contributed most immigration to Australia have changed radically each decade during the post-war period (DIMA 1997b), although immigration numbers from the United Kingdom and New Zealand have remained at the top of the list for most of the past 30 years. While it is difficult comprehensively and succinctly to summarise the complex and still changing trends in NESB migration to (and from) Australia, it is possible to identify some trends over the past 30 years which are relevant to VET participation (table 1).

Table 1: Settler arrivals in Australia by country of birth, 1965–95 (percentage of total arrivals from top ten NES countries during each period)

Country	1965–66	1975–76	1985–86	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96
Greece	10.5	2.8				
Italy	7.9	2.6				
Former Yugoslavia	5.6	3.4		7.0	7.6	3.4
Lebanon	1.1	2.9	3.0			
Cyprus		5.4				
Chile		3.6				
Vietnam			7.7	7.8	5.8	3.6
Philippines			4.5	6.0	4.7	3.3
China			3.4	3.9	4.2	11.3
Hong Kong			3.4	4.8	4.7	4.4
Iraq					2.9	2.6
Malta	3.0					
Germany	2.6					
Netherlands	1.5					
Malaysia		2.3	2.5			
India			2.3	3.8	4.5	3.7
Former USSR & Baltic States				2.8		

Birthplace, age, language and culture

As the birthplace composition of immigrants has changed, so too have the main non-English languages and cultures. This clearly has implications for VET programs and support services that are targetted for particular language and cultural groups. The 1996 Census recorded 240 languages other

than English spoken at home, including 50 Australian indigenous languages. The proportions of people in Australia who were born in Italy, Greece or the former Yugoslavia and who speak a language other than English at home remain near the top of the list but are declining. A 1997 study of linguistic diversity in Australia (cited in *The Age*, 26 September 1997, p.5) revealed that while Australia-wide, 'the top two [non-English] languages spoken at home are Italian and Greek . . . in Sydney, Arabic and Cantonese are the main [non-English] language groups by a clear margin'.

ANTA (1996b, p.45, citing ABS 1991) demonstrated that the proportion of people who speak a language other than English at home *and* speak English poorly increased markedly with age, particularly for women. Older NESB people in Australia are mainly from Italy, Greece or other European countries; the median age for overseas-born Italian and Greek people is over 50. More recently arrived NESB people are more likely to be from Asia, and to be younger. The median age of overseas-born people from Hong Kong, Malaysia or Vietnam is around 30. The most recent arrivals are less likely to be English speakers (ANTA 1996b, p.44), and the proportion of non-English-speaking arrivals is increasing, while the proportions of many earlier arrived groups are decreasing.

One difficulty with identifying only the 'major groups' of NESB people is that, while the numbers in some language groups are relatively small, they are often highly concentrated geographically. For example 'Melbourne was home to 81 per cent of Yiddish speakers, 72 per cent of Albanian speakers and 70 per cent of those using Somali' (1996 Census, cited in *The Age*, 26 September 1997, p.5). Immigration since the mid-1980s has featured a 'diverse number of small, and emerging communities from countries not previously sourced by Australia such as Burma, Bangladesh, Ghana, Sudan and Ethiopia' (FECCA 1996, p.3). The ABS (1997b, p.17) reported that, while the most common European language groups in Australia were Italian, Greek, Croatian, Spanish, Polish and German, and the most common other language groups were Cantonese, Vietnamese, Mandarin and Arabic, there were many other, smaller language groups.

Indeed, there are more speakers of both 'other European languages' and 'other Asian languages' in Australia than either Italian or Greek speakers. The ABS (1997b) survey makes no mention of the estimated 54 000 Australians (ABS 1995, p.5) who speak an indigenous language, and who, for comparison, outnumber NESB Mandarin speakers in Australia (ABS

1997b). In summary, while some groups dominate numerically, VET provision is required to accommodate the particular and very diverse needs of smaller, often localised NESB groups.

Migration category

The situation for NESB immigrants varies by migration category (family, refugee, special/ humanitarian) and with changes in policy that apply to those categories. While the proportion of refugees and humanitarian migrants has increased in the past decade from 8.5 per cent of all immigrants in 1987–88 to 15.4 per cent in 1995–96 (DIMA 1997a/b), Brindley and Wigglesworth (1997, pp.11, 14) noted that the introduction of mandatory testing of English language skills of skilled immigrants in the 1990s decreased the proportion of skilled migrants arriving with low English language skills. The diversity by migrant category is also reflected geographically. Birrell (cited in *The Age*, 13 December 1997, p.12) noted that 'most migrants arriving in Melbourne do so under the family reunion and humanitarian category. Sydney has a bigger slice of richer migrant groups'.

Williams, Brooks and Murphy (1997, p.267) noted that:

> *. . . migration category is an important factor in determining initial labour market success: those selected to immigrate to Australia on the basis of their labour market potential have much lower initial unemployment rates than their counterparts in the family and humanitarian components.*

However, Collins et al. (1997, p.i) reported that 'about half of all small businesses are owned and operated by first or second generation immigrants'. Further, 'a significant percentage of NESB small business operators and their workers have migrated to Australia under the family reunion scheme' (Collins et al. 1997, p.ii).

Refugees are considered to be the most disadvantaged of all immigrants to Australia, and are more likely to experience poverty than those migrating under the family or skilled components of the migration program (Williams & Batrouney 1998). Studies of communities with high levels of humanitarian immigrants have identified high levels of unemployment (Batrouney 1991; Viviani et al. 1993). Difficulties experienced by refugees extend beyond poor English language proficiency and non-recognition or non-transferability of qualifications acquired overseas, to include specific difficulties such as unpreparedness for departure, experience of torture or trauma in their home

country, disruptions to education and working life and placement in locations with few employment opportunities (Iredale & D'Arcy 1992, p.xii; Jupp 1994).

Settlement location

NESB people are likely to be found in greater concentrations in particular suburbs of Australian capital cities. In major urban areas such as Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Adelaide, first and second-generation migrants make up more than half of the total population (Collins 1991). Collins et al. (1997, p.1) suggested that 'States where ethnic enterprises are most significant in relative terms are Western Australia, Victoria, together with the Territories (NT & ACT)'.

Literacy, education, occupation and work

'Australia has one of the most culturally diverse workforces in the world' (Mawer & Field 1995, p.9). While there is considerable diversity of socio-economic class and cultural background across the various migrant groups, poor English proficiency acts as a great leveller (FECCA 1996, p.162). However, levels of English proficiency vary considerably between migrant groups (FECCA 1996, cited in SEETRC 1997, p.157). The proportion reporting difficulties in speaking English range from three per cent among migrants from India to 50 per cent for migrants from China and El Salvador (FECCA 1996, cited in SEETRC 1997, p.157).

The relationship between skills levels and employment is not straightforward. Mawer and Field (1995, p.9) reported that:

> *Recent immigration policies have resulted in high-skilled NESB migrants coming to Australia. However, for those with professional qualifications, unemployment or underemployment is common. A comparison of employment for Australian degree holders with NESB degree holders reveals that Australian degree holders are almost twice as likely to be employed as managers or professionals as NESB degree holders with qualifications from a NESB country.*

The Federation of Ethnic Community Councils of Australia (FECCA 1996, p.4) confirmed this tendency to underemployment, and the Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee (SEETRC 1997, p.157) noted that:

> *. . . migrants tend to be concentrated at the lower end of the labour force, with unemployment and underemployment being a common experience, even for those with professional qualifications.*

The Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales (EAC NSW 1997) summarised studies by Beggs and Chapman (1988), Wooden and Robertson (1989), Chapman and Iredale (1990), Jones and McAllister (1991) and Iredale and D'Arcy (1992) of the influence of educational qualifications on employment. In particular, they reported that the 'overseas educational qualifications of immigrants do not have the same employment enhancing effect as similar level qualifications obtained in Australia' (EAC NSW 1997, p.5). Wooden (1993) noted that NESB migrants were over-represented in groups of people who were underemployed or discouraged job seekers. Hawthorne (1994, cited in EAC NSW 1997, p.5) found that:

> *. . . middle management judgements of employment readiness of overseas trained engineers were significantly influenced by race, regardless of work skills, with a clear bias in favour of Europeans.*

NESB workers have generally been concentrated at the lower skills levels of the workforce. NESB women have been employed largely in manufacturing industries, particularly textiles and clothing, and the casual labour market (FECCA 1996). The impacts of industry reforms and enterprise restructuring have been most strongly felt in manufacturing industries that have typically employed large proportions of NESB people and this has led to declines in the labour force participation of NESB workers. Many NESB people at the 'lower end of the workforce' are highly qualified in another field *in their own language*, but their qualification or skill is not recognised in Australia and/or jobs are not obtainable without higher level English language skills.

SEETRC (1997, p.58) suggested that the Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP) entitlement of 510 hours, available within three years of arrival, was not sufficient for many NESB speakers to achieve above the declared functional literacy level. This was particularly the case for women, who may not have been able to attend regularly during their entitlement period due to family commitments, and people who were illiterate in their own language. This effectively leaves many NESB people inadequately prepared to tackle VET (SEETRC 1997, pp.58–59) or to enter the workforce.

Williams and Batrouney (1998) reported that, while unemployment figures for immigrants were generally not very reliable during the 1970s, the rates of unemployment for recent immigrants were not significantly different from the Australia-wide average. However, by 1996, 'the unemployment rate for immigrants arriving in the previous five years had risen to 20 per cent, much greater than the Australia-wide average of around nine per cent' (Williams & Batrouney 1998, p.266). For NESB immigrant women, the unemployment rate in March 1996 was 12.6 per cent, compared with 8.6 per cent for all women in Australia (Williams & Batrouney 1998).

The unemployment rate also varies by birthplace, with the rate for those from the Middle East and North Africa reported to have been over 40 per cent by 1996, while the rate for English-speaking immigrants from the United Kingdom and Ireland was only about seven per cent (Williams & Batrouney 1998, p.266). Brooks and Williams (1995) found that during recessions unemployment rates rose relatively more for NESB people than for those born in Australia, and recovery from recessions also took longer. The position of NESB immigrants in relation to income has similarly been deteriorating.

The increasing emphasis on highly skilled labour with technological expertise and high English language and literacy levels, together with the lower participation rates in training for NESB people, have contributed to this decline (Mawer & Field 1995; FECCA 1996). Since 1990, the labour force participation of NESB people has declined substantially, relative to other groups (Mawer & Field 1995, p.1). Even those in employment have participated in training to a lesser extent than those from an English-speaking background. Further, there has been a tendency for employers not to regard training in basic skills such as English language and literacy as their responsibility (Mawer & Field 1995).

Many NESB workers are engaged in small business, as owner-operators, employers and employees. About half of all small business in Australia is owned and operated by either first or second-generation immigrants (Collins et al. 1997). Some ethnic groups, particularly those from Korea, Italy, Cyprus, Hungary, the Netherlands and Lebanon, have a much higher relative representation in small business than Australian-born people.

NESB participation and outcomes in VET

Patterns of participation

AINLEY AND MCKENZIE (1991, p.34) identified an increasing tendency since the late 1970s for NESB people to participate in TAFE. ANTA (1998a) analysed the most recent NESB VET participation data, and noted that an increasing proportion of TAFE graduates are NESB people. A language other than English was spoken by 13 per cent of VET participants and 14 per cent of the general population, and by 24 per cent of TAFE graduates who responded to the 1997 graduate destination survey (NCVER 1997a).

While NESB people's participation in VET paralleled that of the general population overall, they were 'substantially over represented in the lower skill level preparatory courses and under represented in *Operatives*, *Trades* and *Skills* levels' (NSW TAFE 1995; ANTA 1996b, p.48) including apprenticeships. NCVER data (ANTA 1998a/b, p.9) show that people who speak a language other than English at home and who were in apprenticeships or traineeships in 1997 were represented at approximately one-third of their population share.

However, NCVER (1997a, pp.21–22) reported that NESB graduates from TAFE participated at similar levels and in similar fields of studies as all Australian students, apart from being less likely to be in trade certificate courses. SEETRC (1997) also reported that for many NESB people 'English language courses are the first foray into education after a long break from schooling'.

NESB people's VET participation in 1996 (ABS 1996 Census; NCVER 1996 unpublished data) varied significantly by language spoken at home, from 12.7 per cent by Spanish speakers and 10.6 per cent for Vietnamese speakers to 3.2 and 4.1 per cent for Italian and Greek speakers respectively (mean 7.2%).

ANTA's 'concern' about the under-representation in VET of NESB people from some European countries (ANTA 1998a/b, pp.12–13) may be partly explained by age. ABS (1997a, p.14) noted that differences in age profiles of birthplace groups helped to explain why various measures of socio-economic status, such as labour force participation rates, educational attainment and dependency on income support, differed between birthplace groups. It is because these measures are themselves often associated with a person's age (ABS 1997a, p.14).

Mawer and Field (1995, p.12) noted that, while recent Australian investments in training have resulted in 50 per cent of Australian-born or ESB employees accessing training in the past few years, only 35 per cent of NESB employees have done so. The percentage was lower still for NESB women. Wapshere (1996) reported that participation of NESB men in mainstream TAFE courses in Canberra was also significantly lower than would be expected from their representation in the population. A number of other studies confirm that NESB people are less likely to engage in all forms of training than Australian-born and ESB people (Baker & Wooden 1991; Flateau & Hemmings 1991; Foster et al. 1991; Mawer & Field 1995).

Golding and Volkoff (1997b, p.20) observed that:

> *. . . for some NESB VET participants, highly qualified in their first language, participation in and completion of an Australian VET program are merely the first steps in the long haul to re-invent their qualifications.*

A study of NESB small business personnel found that about a quarter of owners had either a post-secondary or a tertiary qualification, a slightly higher rate than for Australian-born small business owners. However, the proportion of those without a high school education was much higher among NESB workers than among English-speaking migrant workers (Collins et al. 1997). NESB small business operators were less likely than other small business operators to have had relevant business management training before starting their business. There was a low level of both on- and off-the-job training for NESB workers in small business (Collins et al. 1997, p.iv). An important factor affecting participation in off-the-job training by NESB small business personnel was that more than a quarter of NESB workers in small business did not speak English well. Therefore, NESB workers in small business were more likely to have their training on the job, delivered by their employers. Of such training, 45.2 per cent was carried out

either bilingually or in a language other than English (LOTE) (Collins et al. 1997, p.v).

Intentions and motivations

NESB TAFE graduates (27%) were more likely than all TAFE graduates (23.3%) to have been undertaking their course for non-vocational reasons which included 'getting into another course of study' (NCVER 1997a, p.23).

This phenomenon was discussed by Golding and Volkoff (1997b, p.4). NESB TAFE graduates were more likely than the national average to be studying in order to get into another course of study, and to actually *undertake* that other course (NCVER 1997a, p.37): 44 per cent were in a new course by 30 May the year after the initial course, compared with 39 per cent of all TAFE graduates. They were undertaking this further study mainly:

- 'to get a job (or own business)'—37 per cent
- 'to get a better job or promotion'—19 per cent
- for 'personal development'—10 per cent

TAFE graduates from non-English-speaking countries were several times more likely than other TAFE graduates to enrol in further study at the full range of provider types, but particularly at adult and community education (ACE) institutions, university and TAFE (NCVER 1997a, p.123).

Employment outcomes

NESB TAFE graduates were more likely to be unemployed or not in the labour force than ESB graduates (NCVER 1997a, p.11): 14 per cent of NESB graduates were still looking for full-time work at 30 May the year after their course, compared to nine per cent of ESB graduates.

Influences on NESB participation and outcomes in VET

Place of birth and first language (including indigenous languages)

FOR NESB SPEAKERS, VET participation by country of birth parallels labour force participation rates, which normally increase markedly in the 20–24-year age group and peak in the 25–44-year range; settler groups (by country of origin) with a high median age had low labour force participation rates and lower than average VET participation. In the survey of 1997 TAFE graduates (NCVER 1997a), the most common respondent groups by country of birth (born outside Australia, apart from New Zealand and the United Kingdom and exceeding one per cent of all respondents) were from China, Vietnam, the Philippines and Hong Kong.

While it has been reported that the experience of second-generation NESB clients differed from that of the first generation (Birrell & Khoo 1995), it is clear that some children of NESB families were disadvantaged through low family income, high rate of parental unemployment, parents' lack of English, parents' limited education, rental and 'high-rise estate' accommodation, comparative lack of social supports for NESB mothers and less use of some medical and health services (Williams & Batrouney 1998, p.271).

The ABS (1997c, p.16) survey into aspects of literacy found that:

> *. . . for those people whose first language was not English, the language in which they express themselves most easily is related to whether they were born in Australia, and for those born outside Australia, to when they arrived.*

After settlement in Australia, many NESB people become more fluent in English. The effects were demonstrated by data from the survey, which reported that only 20 per cent of those people born in Australia whose first

language was not English usually spoke that language at home now, and only six per cent felt they now expressed themselves most easily in that other language (ABS 1997c, p.16).

Gender

Virtually all of the literature on gender and NESB refers to particular disadvantage experienced by NESB women, who have been generally under-represented in their receipt of both formal and informal training than those in more highly skilled occupations. When in employment, they have been located in the lowest skill occupations within the manufacturing industries and have tended to receive far fewer opportunities to engage in training than those in more highly skilled occupations. Where training is available for NESB women in these low-skill occupations, it is more likely to be informal, on the job and non-accredited (ANTA 1994; Bertone 1995; Stephens & Bertone 1995; FECCA 1996). Williams and Batrouney (1998) noted that the unemployment rate for NESB women was 12.6 per cent, compared with 8.6 per cent for all Australian women. However, NESB women were more likely than their Australian-born and ESB counterparts to be small business employers or self-employed. For example, Collins et al. (1997, p.3) found that:

> *. . . 11.6 per cent of Australian-born women were in small business, less than half the rate of small business formation for women born in Korea, Greece, Cyprus, Netherlands and Italy. Women from other birthplace groups such as Lebanon and Israel also have a significantly higher rate of small business formation.*

Stephens and Bertone (1995) reported that NESB women tended not to be offered opportunities in the workplace to move to different types of work, or to become multiskilled. Baker and Wooden (1991, pp.29–30) found that NESB women were 'less likely to receive work-related training, particularly in-house and external formal training compared to ESB workers and NESB male workers'. VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1995, p.iv) concluded that 'all other things held constant, the probability of an NESB immigrant woman participating in in-house training is estimated to be about 0.6 times that of an ESB woman'. In the case of external training supported by the employer, the probability of an NESB woman (arrived in Australia after 1976) receiving such training was 0.34 that of an ESB woman.

NESB women who did access training were more likely than not to be enrolled in prevocational or bridging education courses, which were less likely than the others to offer direct vocational outcomes (Sim & Dhungel 1992). Further, although NESB women students were likely to have a higher level of previous education and training than ESB women, less than 20 per cent of these women had received some recognition of this previous training in their TAFE study (Sim & Dhungel 1992).

FECCA (1996, p.10) noted that many of the migrants who sought educational assistance from the ACE sector were 'women on low incomes for whom cost is a major barrier'. Other important barriers to gaining education and training that NESB women faced include:

- lack of free or low-cost child care
- lack of local venues or transport to more distant ones
- cultural constraints about participating in mixed gender classes
- low levels of proficiency in the English language
- illiteracy in their first language

Lack of culturally appropriate and accessible child-care facilities was a key barrier cited frequently in the literature (including by Zinopoulos 1992; VETEC 1993; Bertone 1995; NSW TAFE 1995; Stephens & Bertone 1995).

Women were also particularly disadvantaged by:

- the monocultural approach of the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA) (Zinopoulos 1992; Mawer & Field 1995)
- the scheduling of training outside work hours, in unpaid time (Bertone 1995; Stephens & Bertone 1995)
- the limited entitlement of 510 hours under the Adult Migrant Education Program, to be used within the first three years after arrival (SEETRC 1997)

Further, FECCA (1996, p.11) noted that in many families:

> . . . *the education needs of women, and in particular elderly women are placed at the bottom of the scale, yet they are also the main conduit of information about health, nutrition and community services for the family.*

Prior educational attainment (in first language and English)

While better educated people were more likely to receive training, this was only the case where the qualification had been completed in Australia (VandenHeuvel & Wooden 1995). Generally, high-level qualifications completed in NES countries did not increase the odds of their recipients gaining training beyond those for people without post-school qualifications.

Labour force participation and unemployment

People born in a non-English-speaking country had a lower labour force participation rate (53.6%) than people born in Australia (66.7%) and experienced a higher unemployment rate (10.4% compared to 7.7%) (ABS 1997b). Non-English speakers, on average, remained unemployed for longer periods (73.9 weeks for NESB compared to 51.8 weeks for Australian-born people) (O'Loughlin & Watson 1997). The factors that affected NESB unemployment rates were (DIMA 1997a/b; O'Loughlin and Watson 1997):

- English language proficiency (the most important factor)
- period of residence in Australia
- category of migration
- skills and qualifications

However, there were wide variations in participation and unemployment rates by country of birth. Plots of VET participation and unemployment before VET by country of birth (ANTA 1998a/b) suggest that increasing employment can generally be linked with higher levels of VET participation.

Employment opportunities were also strongly influenced by the source country of any prior qualification (Birrell & Hawthorne 1997; O'Loughlin & Watson 1997). Even well-educated migrants in Birrell and Hawthorne's study experienced significant difficulty in the labour market due to contracting employment opportunities and relatively poor language skills, as well as non-recognition of overseas qualifications, particularly for recent arrivals. Their study concluded that a successful pattern of integration before 1981 was unlikely to be repeated by recent arrivals, regardless of their willingness to study English and upgrade their qualifications locally.

Pearce, Bertone and Stephens (1995, p.27) noted that a number of studies of NESB workers confirmed that the capacity 'to undertake training is a key factor in their adjustment to workplace change', as is an ability 'to retrain for jobs, or after retrenchment, to access new jobs successfully'.

Knowledge and perceptions of VET

NSW TAFE (1995, p.28) reported that perceptions held by potential NESB students and their parents generally reflected a low opinion and appreciation of VET. Further, TAFE qualifications were generally not valued by NESB communities and target students, and there was a negative perception of the employment value of VET, which was seen as training for the unemployed. The study noted that most NESB communities viewed VET as inferior to university training. While the VET label was not generally recognised or widely understood by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and NESB communities and there was a general lack of detailed knowledge in these communities about the components of VET (NSW TAFE 1995), this may also be true for some English-speaking groups.

NESB parents were particularly important in influencing the career choices of their children, yet their knowledge of VET, in general, was limited (NSW TAFE 1995). Friends and relatives were the most important sources of information about VET for these communities. Inappropriate promotional materials acted as psychological barriers to VET for members of NESB and indigenous communities (NSW TAFE 1995, p.xvi).

Some potential solutions appear in the literature. Phat (1996) completed a study with the Vietnamese community in Melbourne and recommended that educational institutions should consult with students and parents about their concerns, work with migrant liaison officers and welfare service providers to promote courses, and use newsletters and information sessions specifically to educate NESB students and parents.

While there was strong belief in the benefits and role of training on the part of NESB small business personnel, the majority did not consider that extra training would necessarily lead to higher income (Collins et al. 1997). Ethnic small business invested very little in VET:

Training, especially of unskilled workers is seen by many employers as leading to the loss of their workers: they train them up and this enhances their workers' job mobility to the detriment of the employers.

(Collins et al. 1997, p.vi)

Where training was undertaken, NESB workers in small business preferred off-the-job training in publicly funded VET institutions such as TAFE.

Access to information about available programs

There was a lack of comprehensive information to inform the training and information needs of NESB workers (NESB MCGVET 1995). In particular, there was a lack of appropriate information about the availability of training, content and delivery to potential trainees (Bertone 1995, p.67; NESB MCGVET 1995, p.28). Lack of knowledge about training due to language difficulties and poor understanding of options and potential outcomes led to lack of confidence in the benefits of training and consequent unwillingness to take up training options.

Collins et al. (1997) reported that among NESB small business personnel, knowledge about training seemed to be more limited among certain ethnic groups, in particular, Vietnamese, Korean and Arabic groups. They suggested that unfamiliarity with Western culture and lack of fluency in the English language were key deterrents, and recommended that:

. . . [the] ethnic media could be used more extensively to advertise/report on VET matters and how they impact on ethnic entrepreneurs. Ethnic business associations should also be involved in these strategies.

(Collins et al. 1997, p.xi)

Bertone (1995) proposed that the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) and ANTA need to develop and distribute widely an information campaign using a variety of types of publicity, multilingual where possible, aimed at informing NESB women of the national training reform agenda and its relationship to workplace reform. Wapshere (1996) reported that NESB TAFE students were not accessing information on available courses because they found newspaper advertisements and the course handbook hard to read and were unaware of careers advice that was available to them. She recommended the use of

ethnic press and radio for marketing and more reader friendly approaches to handbooks.

In 1995, NSW TAFE recommended a review of the model of career and vocational counselling used by schools and VET systems, in order to identify and eliminate cultural and linguistic bias. They suggested that VET should be packaged and presented to NESB groups in a way that facilitated their identification with the program, by:

- incorporating relevant images in promotional materials
- advertising in the ethnic media
- simplifying presentation of information
- employing members of target communities to disseminate information on VET
- communicating clearer pathways for study and career/employment

(NSW TAFE 1995, pp.29–30)

Zinopoulos (1992) suggested that the processes of recognition of prior learning and training, and the systematic combined assessment of the skills and language level of immigrants, could also be used as a means of effective course referral.

Entry to VET

Suggestions for ways in which entry to VET for NESB people could be assisted include:

- ensuring that student entry and selection guidelines were in line with access and equity principles (NSW TAFE 1995)
- reviewing student entry and selection criteria to ascertain the appropriateness and validity of the English language/literacy level specified or assumed (NSW TAFE 1995)
- developing effective recognition of prior learning (RPL) processes which focussed on distinct issues related to RPL for NESB (Bertone 1995)
- providing appropriate training for staff who enrol students
- conducting skills audits for people from an NESB (Zinopoulos 1992)

- providing cost-effective, accredited VET courses through programs that are integrated into work (e.g. the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program ([WELL]) (Pearson et al. 1996)

Membership of other equity target groups

NESB people are often also members of other groups considered to be disadvantaged; for example, women, long-term unemployed and rural and indigenous people. Several major studies have researched the needs of NESB people who also belong to other groups; for example, Zinopoulos (1992) studied NESB women.

Volkoff and Golding (1998, p.8) reported a striking pattern of greater proportions of VET participants not working being associated with increasing membership of multiple equity target groups. When employment outcomes by equity target group were compared, two 'cross-group' factors emerged as being particularly important. Vocational outcomes were reduced for members of each group who were previously unemployed and even further reduced by the impact of low basic skills before enrolment (Volkoff & Golding 1998, p.8).

English language and literacy levels

The ABS (1996a, p.86) noted that:

> *Literacy difficulties among adults are both serious and pervasive; these difficulties are underestimated (by both the population and by public policy); immigrants of non-English first language are over-represented among the lowest [English literacy] performers; recent policy attempts to tackle the issue have had little impact.*

Students differed greatly in their response to programs depending on whether their language background was English or another language (Plimer & Reark Research 1995, cited in ABS 1996a, p.81). Language background was a highly significant predictor of literacy performance in English (ABS 1996a, p.84). Assessed prose and document literacy skills correlated more strongly with language first spoken than with place of birth or year of arrival in Australia, and revealed a disparity between the longer established southern European immigrant language groups (ABS 1996a,

p.84) and the more recently arrived Asian and other language groups, who performed relatively better. Older NESB clients may be limited in their ability to proceed with literacy and other classes in English due to low levels of literacy in their first language (SEETRC 1997).

The most severe literacy problems among NESB people were experienced by those who were older, were not born in Australia, arrived at the age of more than 16, learned English later, did not have post-school qualifications or were unemployed (ABS 1996a).

Collins et al. (1997, p.iv) found that more than a quarter of NESB small business workers reported that they either did not speak English well or spoke none at all. They recommended that national and State authorities resource the development of a 'train the trainer' package in English and in LOTE for use by trainers in ethnic small business.

Difficulty with English language skills was reported to be the most important barrier to participation by NESB learners in vocational education and training (NSW TAFE 1995; Stephens & Bertone 1995; O'Loughlin & Watson 1997). Sometimes these difficulties resulted from a true lack of required language skills. At other times the difficulties were perceived ones, reflecting low levels of confidence on the part of prospective learners or lack of accurate information regarding the literacy demands of courses. Bertone (1995, p.67) reported a widespread perception held by NESB women that training imposed English literacy demands that they would be unable to meet (Bertone 1995; VandenHeuvel & Wooden 1995).

Wapshere (1997) reported findings from two studies which, she argued, had serious implications for competency-based testing of reading comprehension skills in English as a second language. She suggested (Wapshere 1997, p.108) that 'a demonstrated competence to read one text does not imply an ability to read other texts of a similar type'. Further, she questioned the claim that reading sub-skills can be tested by specific items.

Workplace reforms have placed increasing emphasis on English language and literacy skills. Plimer et al. (1997) reviewed the outcomes and effectiveness of language programs for skilled migrants. Pearson et al. (1996) evaluated WELL programs and, as did Courtenay and Mawer (1995), identified the cost-effectiveness and better student outcomes of integrated provision. The issue of responsibility for the costs to NESB workers of such

training remains unresolved. Mawer and Field (1995, p.2) suggested that English language and literacy skills requirements were frequently overestimated in association with competency-based training, in relation to both the skills required for learning and successful performance at work. Bertone (1995, p.12) identified a tendency in some industries to 'erect unnecessary barriers to entry-level training based on communication competencies'.

Courtenay and Mawer (1995, p.3) suggested that educational programs 'need to meet participants' occupational skills needs while also responding to diversity in learners' language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills, needs and resources'. They stressed, however, that LLN competencies should be based on:

> . . . *accurate job requirements not assumptions: over-estimating or under-estimating LLN requirements can disadvantage both those who are already performing competently in the workplace and those seeking work.*
>
> (Courtenay & Mawer 1995, p.5)

In May 1995, an initiative to incorporate LLN competence into the requirements for competency standards development received ministerial endorsement.

Sefton, Waterhouse and Deakin (1994, p.104) described a teaching methodology that placed emphasis on:

> . . . *working from learner strengths to develop what Mawer called* strategic competence, *whereby participants learned to combine and use strategically the full range of their skills, abilities, attributes and experience.*

This methodology presumed that linguistic and cultural diversity and existing knowledge and skills could be harnessed for positive outcomes. Sefton, Waterhouse and Deakin (1994) also explored the potential importance of first language as a medium for the development of analytical thinking skills.

Educational and cultural traditions

For many NESB people, returning to schooling may be associated with considerable anxiety, particularly if previous education memories are not positive (SEETRC 1997, p.59). Illiteracy in their own language may

compound this anxiety and make it even more difficult to deal with literacy and other classes in English (FECCA 1996, p.163).

Scheduling of training during weekends, while opening up options for some, reduced them for others, due to family obligations and religious observations (Collins et al. 1997). Further, for some ethnic groups there may be a social stigma attached to an individual's admission that they need training. If it is culturally unacceptable to admit deficits, then there may be a tendency to over-rate skills such as language ability. For other ethnic groups, individuals, particularly women, were more likely to under-rate their language ability (Collins et al. 1997, p.109).

Mawer and Field (1995, p.33) reported that some of the 'primary barriers to involvement are conceptual and attitudinal'. The concept of a career path may be new. The notions of a learning culture and lifelong learning may be alien to those who feel that they have finished with formal learning. Previous formal learning experiences may have been unsatisfactory. Workers with experience may consider training unnecessary.

FECCA (1996, p.15) reported that research focussed mainly around the needs of Southern Europeans and Indo–Chinese raised:

> *. . . issues about the different cultural definitions of what it means to be 'aged'; attitudes towards the role and definition of education; and the lack of understanding and familiarity with the concepts that people can be consumers of educational services and have the 'right' to access educational activities, regardless of age, class, sex or race.*

Mawer and Field (1995, p.34) noted several potentially effective deterrents to participation in training within the workplace:

- ❖ fear of revealing knowledge gaps or learning difficulties
- ❖ lack of self-confidence
- ❖ fear of embarrassment and lack of assurance that there will be any benefit from training
- ❖ fear that the process may be designed to test and sort employees for downsizing

Conversely, NESB workers with overseas qualifications may fear appearing to be overqualified, thus jeopardising their job. Strongly Anglo-Western

cultural structures and mechanisms such as consultative committees may fail to recognise cross-cultural attitudes to training and the ways in which it is delivered.

Differences between cultural and educational traditions of Australian-born students and those from an NESB have been recognised, but little formal study has been undertaken except in relation to full-fee-paying overseas students. These differences include attitudes to teachers, learning styles, structure of written work, reading, group work and participation in tests and examinations (Ballard & Clanchy 1991; Karmel 1997; Karmel & Wood 1997).

Ballard and Clanchy (1991) identified three types of difficulties experienced by overseas students from Asia and South-East Asia with their written work:

- problems with the English language
- problems with structure and presentation of ideas due to different cultural traditions
- problems due to different cultural attitudes to knowledge

Karmel and Wood (1997, p.126) proposed guidelines for developing types of assessment to benefit all learners and specifically NESB learners. They also recommended specific support be available from teachers and that teachers receive professional development to assist them to select appropriate assessment instruments.

Forms of education and training delivery

The 'one size fits all' monocultural approach of the NTRA often placed NESB women, in particular, at a disadvantage (Zinopoulos 1992, pp.56–57; Mawer & Field 1995). Training program infrastructure and pathways were barriers to entry and successful outcomes for NESB workers (Mawer & Field 1995; NESB MCGVET 1995). Selection processes for workers often reflected existing power relationships (Mawer & Field 1995, p.5).

Training delivery at inappropriate times posed barriers for NESB people in relation to their family, cultural and religious commitments (Stephens & Bertone 1995). Women were particularly disadvantaged by training outside work hours, in unpaid time. Their ability to participate was often

complicated by child-care difficulties (Bertone 1995, p.67; Stephens & Bertone 1995). Training could also be perceived as being 'too long', requiring a commitment over a very lengthy period of time rather than being accessible in smaller modules or chunks that could be perceived as achievable.

Inappropriate delivery modes and methods, including day-long intensives, large groups with mixed abilities, detached lecture modes, cultural inappropriateness and overemphasis on theory, all had the potential to limit participation (Mawer & Field 1995, p.67).

Collins et al. (1997, p.xi) recommended that:

> *. . . bilingual modes of teaching VET be encouraged by TAFE and other VET providers, to help those small business entrepreneurs who face difficulties with the English language.*

They also recommended that ethno-specific small business courses be established in areas of high ethnic concentration; for example, '[a] Vietnamese small business course in the Richmond region of Melbourne; [an] Arabic small business course in the Auburn region of Sydney' (Collins et al. 1997, p.xi).

Collins et al. (1997) found that over 40 per cent of NESB small business owners surveyed, agreed that they would like training to be delivered on the internet. Those resident in Australia for the longest period were the least interested, although one in four still were. Other recommendations for improvement of training delivery included:

- implementation of principles of flexible delivery and open learning in the development and delivery of courses for NESB people (NSW TAFE 1995, p.53)
- scheduling of workplace training courses, wherever possible during paid working time (Bertone 1995, p.2)
- establishment of cross-cultural awareness training for VET staff as an integral part of the overall human resource development plan at both State and national levels (Zinopoulos 1992, p.66)
- involvement of qualified members of target communities in delivery of professional development for trainers (NSW TAFE 1995)
- provision of professional development for training providers on ways of incorporating productive diversity in their training, and on ways of

disseminating information and sharing resources (Lewis 1994; NESB MCGVET 1995; Wapshere 1996)

Appropriateness of curriculum

Lack of integration of language and literacy training into vocational training in the past has severely limited participation (Bertone 1995). Some vocational courses overestimate the English language skills required by workplaces. Further, most vocational curriculum was not linked to operator-level training. There was a scarcity of financial resources and documented examples to assist standards bodies and curriculum developers (Mawer & Field 1995, p.226; NESB MCGVET 1995). Lack of co-ordination between different bodies and agencies meant that few people were aware of the models of good practice and the resources that did exist (Mawer & Field 1995).

Suggestions for improvement included:

- the development of inclusive, responsive curriculum using interdisciplinary teams (Mawer & Field 1995)
- use of bilingual strategies where appropriate and valuing of bilingual skills as pathways to training and multiskilling (NESB MCGVET 1995, p.viii)
- integration of language, literacy and cultural issues and understanding within VET and the training reform agenda (Bertone 1995; NESB MCGVET 1995)
- development of a methodology for reviewing competency standards to ensure that they integrate past experience and cultural and linguistic understanding (NESB MCGVET 1995)
- review of accreditation guidelines to check appropriateness of language, literacy and culture

Provider type

Postle et al. (1995, p.70) reported that there were 'significant variations in access and participation rates among different ethnic or language-speaking groups' in higher education. These differences have also been reflected in

VET participation (ANTA 1998a/b). There was also evidence that NESB access to higher education was restricted to certain fields of study (Postle et al. 1995, p.70), possibly because of language difficulties. Further, there was strong parallel evidence that NESB people studying at university were in higher socio-economic groups than other equity target groups (Postle et al. 1995, p.86). The combined effect of ethnicity, language and socio-economic status was also likely to affect choice of field of study and provider type in VET, although little research evidence was available.

Golding and Volkoff (1997a, p.13) remarked on the tendency to consider the diverse vocational education and training providers under the one VET banner. They pointed out that 'different providers make up a segmented, quasi market catering to very different target groups', access being determined in many instances by ability to pay.

Workplace culture

Mawer and Field (1995, p.22) reported that the particular contributions that NESB workers can make; for example, bilingual skills, were often undervalued in the workplace. The influence of the training reform agenda on shifting the focus onto functions rather than people has led to an undervaluing of the resources that NESB people can bring to their work. Rather than focussing on the additional capacity a culturally diverse workforce could bring, there was a tendency to consider only English language-based skills and credentials. There was a tendency for employers and trainers to focus on what was lacking in NESB people's skill profile, rather than on what they had to offer (NESB MCGVET 1995). The result was a deficit model, rather than the productive diversity model endorsed by Cope and Kalantzis (1997), who suggested that 'making the differences work now needs to be the central fact of all organisational cultures' (Cope & Kalantzis 1997, p.126).

Collins (1991, p.9) noted that in the context of the cultural diversity of the Australian nation and the internationalisation of the economy:

> *. . . [the] mono-lingual and mono-cultural approach to the training reform agenda appeared to be the greatest barrier to the chances of access and equity for NESB and [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] people in Australia today.*

FECCA (1996, p.4) argued that, while competency-based training may offer:

> . . . *more flexible means of skill acquisition and career progression for all groups in society . . . the actual ability of many NESB workers to participate in training depends partly on the workplace culture in which they work and the extent of support for learning.* (Mawer & Field 1995, also in FECCA 1996)

Bertone (1995) reported that discriminatory attitudes towards NESB employees were a key factor in limiting participation. Further, current resources, change agents and processes did not focus on NESB people's issues in the workplace (NESB MCGVET 1995). Access and equity tended to be dealt with in a passive way in many workplaces and there was lack of good models and practical strategies for making training accessible (Mawer & Field 1995). NESB women tended not to be offered opportunities in the workplace to move to different types of work, or to become multiskilled (Stephens & Bertone 1995).

NESB MCGVET (1995, p.vii) recommended inclusion of cultural understanding in all management, supervisory and union courses.

Distance of education and training provider from location of residence

The settlement locations of migrants often disadvantaged them in relation to public transport, child-care and other services. When the migrants were rural and isolated, these effects were exacerbated (VETEC 1993, p.32). Access to VET by members of indigenous and NESB communities living in rural and remote country regions was limited by transport and course availability (NSW TAFE 1995).

Costs and fees

Williams and Batrouney (1998, p.275) noted that the Coalition Government's (1996) introduction of two-year waiting periods for social security benefits and Austudy posed particular problems for poor immigrants.

Collins et al. (1997) reported that the most common difficulties faced by NESB small business people in providing training for their staff were the cost

of time release (faced by one in three NESB business owners) and the cost of the actual training.

Zinopoulos (1992, p.6) reported that tuition fees were an issue, particularly for NESB women. Administration fees, cost of textbooks, travel costs, and sometimes the need to pay by cheque or credit card rather than cash, provided barriers for NESB people, particularly women.

Recognition of existing skills and prior learning

The National Office of Overseas Skill Recognition (NOOSR), established in 1989, made considerable progress in matching overseas qualifications with those gained in Australia using a competency-based approach to assessment and recognition (Marginson 1993). In practice, however, recognition of prior learning was not able to serve the needs of NESB people. Mawer and Field (1995, pp.4–5) identified:

- a lack of structural incentives for institutions to implement RPL
- a need for clear and consistent criteria to determine RPL
- a lack of awareness of RPL processes among potential applicants
- a need for resources to support applicants in the RPL process

Understanding was inadequate and there was inappropriate implementation of RPL assessment procedures at all levels—by employers, unions, industry trainers and middle management (NESB MCGVET 1995).

Bertone (1995, p.13) suggested that the lack of recognition of NESB workers' bilingual and intercultural skills, and confusion of occupational competence with English competence were common barriers for NESB workers. Competency-based assessment was often inadequate with respect to recognising experience, cultural skills and languages other than English (NESB MCGVET 1995). A focus on skills that were lacking, rather than identifying and exploring how the NESB individual could use the particular skills and talents they did have, denied the individual access to training and work, and the labour force and economy their potential contribution.

NESB MCGVET (1995, p.ix) recommended professional development for training providers and assessors of RPL:

- to broaden their understanding of RPL

- ❖ to value and integrate linguistic and cultural diversity in RPL
- ❖ to integrate RPL into training and, through enterprise bargaining, into awards

Within the TAFE sector, Wapshere (1996, p.5) found that, while 42 per cent of enrolled NESB students had some form of tertiary qualification (compared with 32% of enrolled ESB students), the NESB students received a lower rate of advanced standing (14.5%) than ESB students (17.%).

Deen's (1994) survey of NESB women in the western suburbs of Sydney revealed that only 19 per cent of such women who had previous vocational training had been successful in gaining some recognition for this training. Deen suggested that, contrary to the principles of RPL, *where* the learning was undertaken remained an issue in Australia (Deen 1994, p.20). O'Loughlin and Watson (1997) confirmed this finding and suggested that the key factor determining labour market outcome for an NESB job seeker was the source country of their qualification.

The Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA 1994) guide for assessors of RPL for NESB people confirmed the value for both individuals and industry of taking advantage of the full range of skills of Australia's multicultural workforce.

Family responsibilities

NESB women in particular were limited in their participation in training when there was inadequate provision of accessible and culturally appropriate child-care facilities (Zinopoulos 1992; VETEC 1993; Bertone 1995; NSW TAFE 1995; Stephens and Bertone 1995).

Access to learning support

Lewis (1994) found in his study of Western Australian colleges of TAFE that, while three-quarters of the lecturers surveyed believed that NESB students did not have sufficient English language skills to cope with their studies, there were 'very few resources devoted to helping migrants who are having trouble coping' (Lewis 1994, p.23). He observed that where some support services did exist they were associated with high levels of enrolment of full-fee-paying overseas students.

This observation was supported by Wapshere (1996, p.76), whose study highlighted:

> *. . . the discrepancy between the level of support offered to overseas students and that offered to NESB permanent residents, as well as the limited support procedures in place for students who express a need for help with English on their mainstream enrolment forms.*

Further, Wapshere (1996) found, as did Lewis (1994), that the burden of providing additional support fell to mainstream teachers. This had implications for the professional development of teachers and also for workload issues.

Anderton and Nicholson (1995) suggested that new technologies such as audio-conferencing, video-conferencing and audiographics had an important role to play in the provision of support to learners, but that some key factors needed to be considered in selection of the appropriate technology for a particular context. These factors included costs, reliability, lesson preparation time and student access to the technology, to training and to technological support, as well as the extent to which the technology promoted student-to-student interaction (Anderton & Nicholson 1995, p.67).

Program resourcing/funding

NESB students generally received less support than other students from their employers for institution-based training and particularly for internal training (ANTA 1996b, p.51). Training programs that targetted the needs of NESB employees were generally not the result of major funding initiatives from the vocational training system, but were funded by individuals or on a short-term basis (Mawer & Field 1995). With the increased cost of training, there was little agreement as to who was responsible for training NESB workers with limited language skills.

Access to relevant employment

The effectiveness of training programs may be limited if relevant jobs do not exist or are perceived not to exist by the NESB learner (Phat 1996). NESB TAFE graduates were less likely than ESB graduates to be employed or in the labour force after their course (NCVER 1997a, p.12).

Golding and Volkoff (1997b) reported that, when only the NESB TAFE graduate cohort was examined (ABS 1995, unpublished data), it was clear that this group was disadvantaged compared to English-speaking graduates in terms of labour market outcomes (Golding & Volkoff 1997b, p.4). While NESB people were much more likely to be unemployed or not in the labour force after completing their course of study, any outcome comparisons with other groups needed to take account of their labour force status before commencement of the course.

Volkoff and Golding (1997) analysed the reduction in unemployment following completion of a TAFE course for five equity target groups, using unpublished TAFE graduate data (ABS 1995, unpublished data). They reported that, while different groups had different starting points in relation to unemployment before the course, the rate of reduction in unemployment for NESB people was higher than the rates for other groups and for all TAFE graduates. By contrast, the rate of increase in participation in the labour force for NESB people was considerably lower than the rates for female, rural and all TAFE graduates, and higher than the rates for only indigenous people and those with a disability (Volkoff & Golding 1997, p.136). This suggests that, while NESB people already seeking work had better employment outcomes than other groups following completion of their course, there were additional factors which prevented NESB people from joining the labour force. For example, for NESB women, this may have been lack of appropriate child-care facilities or other family responsibilities.

Policies and VET provision for NESB people

Policy context

BEFORE 1970, AUSTRALIAN governments pursued policies of assimilation, whereby immigrants were expected and encouraged to 'dissociate themselves from their cultural, ethnic and linguistic heritage and quickly adopt Australian ways' (Jupp 1988, p.925). Fincher and Nieuwenhuysen (1998, p.274) contrasted the policy scenarios put forward at the start of the 'multicultural' era that developed in the mid-1970s with those during the latter years of the Labor Government (1983–96) and particularly since the inception of the Coalition Government in 1996. In the earlier era, special services and programs were proposed to meet the special needs of migrants and ensure equality of access and provision. More recently there has been reduced government responsibility and expenditure. Policies proposed by Martin (1975, p.180) and reflected in Galbally (1978) were designed to reduce extreme variations in the distribution of economic wellbeing, particularly for people of non-English-speaking origins. The Galbally report (cited in Jupp 1988, p.926) argued for educational policies based on equal access to programs and services, and that migrant needs should be met by both mainstream and special programs and services designed and operated in full consultation with clients.

In recent times, Fincher and Nieuwenhuysen (1998, pp.274–275) have identified 'a number of policy changes in immigration and settlement in the direction of reduced government expenditure and greater moves towards efficiency and cost recovery principles'. Policy changes that have particular impact on VET participation include:

- the introduction of two-year waiting periods for social security and Austudy
- an increase in skilled migration
- increases in fees for English language tuition

- tendering out of Adult Migrant English Programs
- payment requirements for previously free Adult Migrant English Programs

These policy changes impact particularly heavily on poor immigrants, often refugees, who are also faced with what Fincher and Nieuwenhuysen (1998, p.260) argued are 'vastly different employment opportunities' from those which existed in the mid-1970s. In May 1974, the unemployment rate for those born overseas, though higher than for Australian-born people, was only 1.8 per cent. In March 1996 the unemployment rate for those born in a non-English-speaking country was 12.4 per cent, significantly higher than that for the Australian population as a whole.

Existing policies

People from non-English-speaking backgrounds are from one of several groups which have historically been seen as under-represented and disadvantaged in VET (ANTA 1996a, 1996b; DTIR 1997). Lundberg and Cleary (1995) summarised approaches to equity in VET in Australia, noting that State and Territory policies were 'shaped by national policies for VET, including equity policies' (Lundberg & Cleary 1995, p.55). The first ANTA National Strategy, in 1994, included increased access as one of its four key themes (cited in ANTA 1996a), and regarded people from non-English backgrounds as a disadvantaged group. ANTA (1996b, p.53) acknowledged concern about:

- English language and literacy training
- access to relevant and appropriate training
- provision of relevant and accessible information
- recognition of prior learning

They also acknowledged concern about monocultural attitudes and employer discrimination against people from a non-English-speaking background as a group. However, ANTA (1996b) also recognised that intragroup cultural diversity might be masking very poor outcomes for some NESB subgroups. *Equity 2001* (ANTA 1996a, p.3) therefore suggested that, while improving access will continue to be important, 'intervention which

stops at participation as a sole measure of success, will invariably fail to deliver the increase in skill levels Australia is seeking'.

Citing Barnett (1993) and Lundberg (1994), Lundberg and Cleary (1995) observed that without something like a national fair participation strategy (backed up by consistent policies, definitions, funding, targets and reporting of data):

> . . . *there is likely to be a deterioration in the fairness of access to and participation in VET as the provision of education and training services becomes more subject to competitive market pressure.* (Lundberg & Cleary 1995, p.71)

Henry (1996, p.13) stressed that 'there is a need to acknowledge that private training markets, given the competitive pressures in which they operate, will find it difficult to make equity a priority'. Since that time, ANTA and some States and Territories appear to have moved away from policy approaches that target particular groups such as NESB people. Taylor and Henry (1996, p.52) documented:

> . . . *a series of discursive shifts through which equity target groups became individual* clients, *individual clients became individual enterprises and responsiveness to the needs of target groups shifted to responsiveness to the needs of individual enterprises.*

There remains a diversity of approaches to access and equity in general and for NESB people in VET in particular. Most States have VET policy frameworks which include NESB people as a targetted client group. However, the implementation and action plans that flow from them vary. Crump et al. (1997, p.54) noted 'important systemic differences in the organisation of VET provision in New South Wales and Victoria', with the Victorian TAFE system being much more devolved. They argued that such devolution:

> . . . *militates against perspectives that look across enterprises to identify issues of an inter-enterprise kind. In this context, the needs of special groups are increasingly read as diversity that can be systematically concentrated within particular social groups.* (Crump et al. 1997, p.54)

The policies associated with such shifts are linked to ongoing VET reforms, increasingly focussed on the individual and choice rather than on systemic or group inequality. Ferrier (1995, p.53) concluded:

. . . [that] the commitment to the achievement of equity is rhetorical rather than substantial; that equity initiatives have only had low levels of success; and that it is possible that equity may be adversely affected by some of the reforms.

Modes of provision

The continuing shift from group targetting in a public training system to individual choice in a training market has clear implications for provision of VET for NESB people. As ABS (1997c, p.87) argued:

> *. . . [if] literacy issues are perceived principally as a problem for individuals (no matter how many) they tend to be construed as a social welfare issue and removed from their proper presence in comprehensive policies for lifelong learning and adult education.*

Problems with English literacy for NESB people not in work cannot be addressed solely on an industry basis, either by job initiatives or by what ABS (1997c, p.87) called 'an eradicative approach based on early schooling'. ABS (1997, p.87) suggested that:

> *As the knowledge content of jobs rapidly evolves, and low-skill production is displaced or reallocated, new job literacy demands require on-the-job literacy education as part of general workplace training programs. Achieving success for many learners will . . . require programs designed around personal, community and family settings rather than in vocationally oriented, or job-training programs.*

Strategies to address barriers

Clyne (1991, cited in NBEET 1994, p.29) summarised the history of varying approaches to programs for NESB people that 'have changed from a solely language centred orientation . . . to more recent approaches, which include a much wider range of identifying values, such as religion and family structures' that need to be recognised. Courtenay and Mawer (1995) argued for cost-effectiveness and better student outcomes from VET provision that is integrated into work. Involvement of NESB people at the decision-making levels associated with VET was also recommended (Zinopoulos 1992; Mawer & Field 1995).

In the case of indigenous VET, Teasdale and Teasdale (1996, p.70) urged recognition of the legitimacy of indigenous languages, and exploration of indigenous speakers' ways of teaching courses in their own right. They argued (Teasdale & Teasdale 1996, p.71) that:

> *Aboriginal languages and cultures could be the educational vehicles for teaching . . . subjects currently taught in isolation to indigenous Australians under the guise of basic education, educational access and vocational preparation.*

Volkoff and Golding (1998, p.7) noted that:

> *. . . it is too simple to categorise many NESB people as simply having low literacy skills: many are fluent, highly educated and cultured in their own language, and are disadvantaged by having to confront what they see as an uncompromising society, culture and workplace.*

NSW TAFE (1995, p.48) recommended provision of incentives such as subsidies to small businesses, to encourage them to employ young men and women from NESB communities, using as a model the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Special Broadcasting Service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander/NESB schemes.

It is also too easy to see the NESB learner as the problem. Programs may need to be customised for the learners, such as through culturally specific staff training. NSW TAFE (1995) suggested that VET systems should set a target for employment of educational support staff from the specific communities to improve the quality of services and relations with those communities.

Given that around one-quarter of NESB graduates undertake a subsequent course, outcomes may need to be defined more broadly, encompassing more than the immediately vocational. ABS (1996a, p.88) also suggested that:

> *Policy must be sensitive to literacy problems beyond their economic effects alone, and address citizenship and social participation as well as individuals' personal motivation and goals.*

Findings and directions for future research

AUSTRALIA HAS A higher proportion of immigrants than other contemporary Western societies. Contemporary Australia is a multicultural and multilingual country. However, not all NESB people in Australia are immigrants. NESB people include both indigenous people and the children of immigrants.

Immigration trends have changed over recent decades from primarily English-speaking migrants to primarily non-English-speaking migrants. The proportion of refugees and humanitarian migrants has almost doubled in the past decade. Generally, the newer migrants are more likely to be from Asia and to be younger, and less likely to be English speakers.

Australia has one of the most culturally diverse workforces in the world. There is a lower labour force participation rate and a higher unemployment rate among people born in a non-English-speaking country than among people born in Australia. NESB people's employment is more likely to be adversely affected by recessions and for a longer period of time. When employed, migrants tend to be concentrated at the end of the labour force that requires the least skills. Women in particular have been employed largely in the manufacturing industries. Recent restructuring of these industries has led to declines in employment of NESB workers. Even when NESB migrants are highly skilled and hold professional qualifications, they commonly experience unemployment or underemployment. NESB people's participation in small business as employers and employees has been greater than for Australian-born and ESB people. This is true for NESB women as well as for men.

Levels of English language proficiency vary greatly, but where they are low they pose the greatest barrier to training and employment for NESB people. As Misko (1997, p.61) argued, 'being of non-English-speaking background

seems of little relevance to being employed as an apprentice or trainee. What was important was the ability to speak English'. For NESB women, lack of appropriate and accessible child-care facilities is another key barrier.

A number of studies reported that NESB people's participation rates in VET courses were lower than those for ESB people, and they were more likely to be in lower skill level, preparatory or English language courses. However, there has been an increasing tendency for NESB people to participate in VET. Recent data suggest that during the 1990s, NESB people's participation in VET has been similar to that of ESB people, with the exception of trade certificate courses. NESB women, however, remain under-represented in both formal and informal training, at a time when VET participation in the workplace is becoming increasingly important because of workplace restructure and change.

NESB TAFE graduates were more likely than all TAFE graduates to have been undertaking their course for non-vocational reasons, several times more likely to enrol in further study and less likely to be in the labour force than ESB graduates. Many NESB workers were engaged in small business, where training, if available, was more likely to be on the job, possibly bilingual or in the worker's first language.

Key barriers to training for NESB people have been:

- inadequate, or perceived to be inadequate, levels of English language proficiency
- lack of employer support for training, particularly for women
- lack of opportunity to access training during paid work time for the self-employed and others in paid employment
- lack of appropriate and accessible child-care and family support, particularly for women
- costs of training
- lack of appropriate and accessible information about training options
- lack of recognition and accommodation of different cultural and educational traditions within training
- inadequate recognition of previous education and training, including professional qualifications

- ❖ inappropriate forms of training delivery
- ❖ lack of inclusivity and integration of language and literacy within curricula
- ❖ lack of learning support when required

There has been no single consistent or commonly accepted definition of NESB in the VET sector. Consequently, it has been difficult to compare data between studies involving NESB people in VET and with studies involving NESB people in higher education.

It is clear from the literature that there has been a lack of comprehensive information for NESB people to inform their choices of education and training options. A number of studies have made recommendations for improvement, including through multilingual information campaigns, more appropriate forms of advertising, use of members of target communities and ethnic media. However, it is not clear whether these recommendations have been embraced by training providers or if access to such information has improved for NESB people.

While it has been suggested that recognition of prior learning processes have improved, there is little evidence to suggest that NESB people have benefitted from these improvements.

There is evidence that many NESB people require greater learning support than has generally been available. There has been some research into the needs of full-fee-paying overseas students, but little is known about the specific learning support needs of NESB migrants. While there is evidence that lack of understanding and accommodation of educational and cultural traditions in training delivery disadvantages NESB people, there is insufficient knowledge of the needs of specific cultural groups in relation to learning and assessment or of the ways in which particular approaches to teaching and forms of delivery impact on NESB learners. Where studies have been undertaken, they have again been in relation to full-fee-paying overseas students.

A number of studies suggest that training options for NESB people would be extended by the use of flexible delivery modes, including training delivered through the internet. However, there is no literature on the proportions of NESB people who might prefer or take up such delivery options for their

training, or case studies of those who have undertaken such forms of training.

While it is clear that lack of English language proficiency is the key barrier to NESB people's participation in education and training, it is debatable whether the level of proficiency presumed to be required is actually necessary. More investigation is needed of the possibilities arising from and desirability of bilingual training and training in the learner's first language. A number of studies have pointed to the need for more inclusive and responsive curricula, but little is known generally about whether NESB people have benefitted from improvements. Some exceptions include studies of integrated training outcomes by Pearson, Courtenay and Mawer, and Sefton (in Sefton, Waterhouse & Deakin [eds] 1994).

There is evidence to suggest that NESB TAFE graduates are more likely to have undertaken their course for non-vocational reasons and that they are more likely to have studied in order to get into another course of study, and to proceed with that study. However, there has been little investigation of the roles played in these choices by:

- course counselling and RPL processes
- perceptions of the employment value of qualifications completed within the VET and other education and training sectors
- costs of training in both the VET and higher education sectors
- labour force participation

It has been suggested that NESB people who are also members of other equity target groups (women, rural, unemployed, low skills) experience greater disadvantage in participating in training and in gaining successful outcomes than those who are not (e.g. employed NESB males living in an urban area). There has been little research on the effects of such multiple membership, except for NESB women and NESB retrenched workers.

While the research confirms disadvantages for some NESB subgroups, it also suggests that it is increasingly difficult to assume that a single NESB policy will accommodate the various forms of disadvantage experienced by non-English

speakers in Australia. It is also clear that many NESB people do not proceed directly to work after completing one VET program, and that VET needs to be seen as part of a more protracted pathway to work, often involving other study in other sectors and sites.

Apart from the many research questions posed by the inconclusive evidence and contested issues outlined above, there is a particular need to contextualise NESB VET participation with participation in and movement to other sectors (ACE, higher education, school), as well as with integration into work, using consistent definitions of NESB. There remains a poor knowledge of perceptions of VET by NESB people, and of the factors that shape them. Studies that focus on the needs of particular language and cultural groups, and which take account of overlap with other equity target groups, are likely to be productive.

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