SUPPORT DOCUMENT

The role of vocational education and training in welfare to work: Support document

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Appendix 1: Literature review

Introduction

In 2005 the Commonwealth government introduced the 'Welfare to Work' reform program into the 2005-2006 budget. It is designed to increase workforce participation and reduce welfare dependency. It is a key plank of the government's labour market reform (Costello 2006). The main features of the reform include obligations of parents (receiving welfare) of children aged 6–15 years to seek part time work and increased services for those seeking work. People with disabilities who receive welfare and who are assessed as being capable of working 15–29 hours per week will be obliged to seek work. Newstart recipients over 50 years old will be obliged to seek full-time work the same as younger recipients. As part of the additional services provided through the program, additional vocational education and training places will be made available and the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program will be expanded. The reform recognises that while work is a desired outcome, 'some people will require access to education or training before being able to seek a job'. The Commonwealth's *Welfare to Work* overview, shows that the bulk of new places will be in the areas of prevocational assistance and employment preparation (Commonwealth of Australia 2005:9). The underpinning rationales for *Welfare to Work* are described in terms of the need to increase workforce participation in order to maintain Australia's standard of living. The assertions are based in part on the *Intergenerational Report* (Commonwealth of Australia 2002), which assessed the impacts of increasing labour force participation on budget spending into the future.

Training is often seen as an integral part of welfare to work strategies. It is widely acknowledged that improved employment outcomes are achieved by those who engage in further education and training, and particularly for those who gain qualifications. For example, Robinson (2001) reports increased retention and lower levels of unemployment for those who complete traineeships and apprenticeships. It is generally accepted that literacy and numeracy levels are directly associated with employment and economic well-being outcomes (ABS 1997; Falk and Guenther 2002; OECD 2004). The employment benefits of adults engaging with learning are also widely supported in the literature (Doyle and Kerr 2000; Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia 2001; OECD 2001, 2003a; NCVER 2006a). Similarly Birch et al. (2003) and Ryan (2002 2002) assert that the financial returns for engagement in adult learning generally and vocational qualifications more specifically, are significant and measurable.

In addition to the direct employability and skills related benefits associated with training for welfare to work clients there is a growing body of evidence that a range of concomitant factors contribute to the propensity of employment disadvantaged clients to gain work. Most notable among these are factors associated with a person's identity/self-concept and factors associated with a group's capacity to draw on and build social capital (Kearns 2004; Schuller et al. 2004; Guenther 2005b). Learning is strongly associated with peoples' ability to create social networks. They do this when the training environment supports interactions between trainees, trainers, employers and others who they come in contact with as a consequence of their learning experiences. Balatti et al. (2006:5) report that: 'Social capital outcomes were realised as a result of specific teaching strategies, such as promoting interaction with peers, and through the new networks and relationships experienced in the course'.

While these generalisations are widely accepted, the role of training for the specific target groups of welfare to work programs is perhaps somewhat less well understood. One of the concerns of a major project commissioned by the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training in 2004, titled *Creating effective pathways to employment and training for the employment disadvantaged in the Northern Territory* (Northern Territory Council of Social Service 2004) was to uncover 'what works' for employment disadvantaged groups across Australia. A literature review was also conducted as part of this project, to assess what was already known about the needs of nine employment disadvantaged groups, including: mature aged people; long term unemployed people; women; the underemployed; and people with a disability. These groups are also in the scope of this welfare to work research. The literature reported here draws on and updates the literature of that report.

Welfare to Work in the Australian context

Historical development of policy

A number of contextual factors have led to the current policies for the Australian Government's Welfare to Work initiatives. These include:

- An ageing population and the economic impact of this particularly in relation to skills and employment. The 2002 *Intergenerational Report* (Commonwealth of Australia 2002) suggested that as a result, higher labour force participation was required;
- A perception that a significant number of very long-term unemployed persons are capable of working (Commonwealth of Australia 2005:6);
- Steep increases over the long term in the number of Parenting Payment and Disability Support Pension recipients (Commonwealth of Australia 2005). The Australian Government argues that these increases are unsustainable;
- Significant and sustained skills shortages in some occupations (DEWR 2004)

The measures introduced in the 2005 Commonwealth Budget and commenced at 1 July 2006 are most often described by the Government in terms of providing 'greater assistance' but participation is ensured through increased obligation and penalties if the targeted people are not compliant (Centrelink 2006c). Some argue that rather than providing incentives to work, welfare to work punishes the long term unemployed. Davidson (2005) suggests that what is needed for long term unemployed people is understanding and practical help to change their circumstances. The government acknowledges that the policy has a 'work first' focus (Hockey 2005).

Definitions and issues

This section outlines the definitions and issues related to each of the three welfare to work target groups covered by this project.

The *Job Seeker Classification Index* (JSCI) is used by the Job Network in Australia to provide an 'objective measure of a job seeker's relative labour market disadvantage' (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2006c). It provides a weighted index of disadvantage for a number of indicators of disadvantage. It is used to determine eligibility for various levels of Australian Government support. 'The JSCI is designed to immediately identify job seekers who, because of their individual circumstances, are likely to become long-term unemployed'.

Mature aged people

Short definition: People aged 45+ currently looking for work.

There are various definitions of what constitutes 'mature aged'. Most definitions rely on an arbitrary age-specific cut-off point. Costello (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2005) refers to 'people who are mature workers, those over 55'. Others (e.g. ABS 2005c; Hudson 2006c) place the cut-off at 45 years. The Council of the Ageing (Council of the Ageing (NSW) 2005) refer to those over 45. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2006a) uses 50 as the cut-off. Because most Australian statistics are based on a cut-off at age 45, for practical purposes this cut-off will be adopted here as well as in the associated profiles.

Encel (2001) for example, classifies the definitions of 'older worker' according to the following typology: a) *Legal/chronological* which, as the Treasurer's recent announcement indicates, is subject to pragmatic change; b) *Functional* which pertains to various measures of performance such as sight and hearing; c) *Psycho-social* which embraces many of the public stereotypes of aging behaviour; d) *Organisational,* encompassing the length of time in the job and role in the organisation. This is associated with 'delayering', the process designed to redistribute experience concentrated at the top; and e) *Individual or 'life-span'* approaches which challenge conventional views of chronology and which is where those involved in service delivery and job placement organizations will need to direct their attention as a matter of urgency.

A recent ABS survey into job-search experience (ABS 2005b) shows that 26 percent of unemployed people aged 45 to 54 believed that their main difficulty in finding work was because of their age. This figure rises to 49 percent for those aged 55 years and older. According to the latest labour force data (ABS 2006e) for August 2006, for people aged 55-59, the workforce participation rate was 65 percent compared with 64 percent for the whole working age population, for those between 60 and 64 years of age the figure fell to 45 percent, while only eight percent of those over the age of 65 were participating in the workforce. These data suggest that in the current climate, labour force participation declines rapidly from about age 60.

Several factors contribute to a person's decision to retire. There are both voluntary and involuntary factors. While the incentives to retire—including those relating to superannuation schemes—may push people to retire earlier, other factors may be pushing people to retire later. Ingles (2000), commenting on structural ageing and labour market adjustment suggests that 'The availability of lump sum termination payments at age 55 has made this a de-facto early retirement age'. One of the involuntary factors—forced redundancy due to enterprise downsizing—has largely disappeared since the recession of the early 1990s. Toohey (2004) claims the challenge of longevity is well within society's normal adaptive capacity. ABS figures support this assertion. Time series labour force data show that in the five years to August 2006, labour force participation for the 55–59 year age group has increased from 61 percent to 65 percent. In the same period the participation rate for 60–64 year olds has increased from 34 to 45 percent. Foreshadowing recent government changes with regards to retirement age and access to superannuation, Encel (2001) condemned involuntary retirement and early exit from the workforce as a short-term solution to problems of employment. There has been an increasing desire among policy planners to encourage people to remain in the workforce. The average of retirement from the labour force in the period from 1997 to 2005 increased from 50 to 52 (ABS 1998, 2006g), suggesting that in recent years there has been very little change in people's retirement behaviours.

With regards to women, some commentators have seen a continuing gendering of employment opportunities together with the gendered provision of welfare support across all ages groups. Barnes and Preston (2002:24), for example, demonstrate how casualisation and part-time jobs have disadvantaged women, and they provide evidence of hidden unemployment constituting approximately 36 percent of total female employment. Many women who remain as the primary carer to children or another 'dependent' person, find later employment choices and options are limited (2002:29). With this in mind it is evident that there is a need for flexible working arrangements to accommodate the caring needs and the lifestyle expectations of mature workers. Hudson (2006b) suggests that the 'majority of Australian employers are still failing to proactively seek to attract and retain mature aged workers'. One reason for the apparent reluctance of

employers attracting mature aged workers relates to a failure among employers to adopt work/life balance practices in their workplaces (Hudson 2006a).

Parents returning to work

> Short definition: Parents and carers of children who have previously worked and because of child-care responsibilities have been out of the workforce for two years or more.

Parents returning to work are typically (though not always) women aged between 20 and 45 who have left the workforce to take care of children. By definition they have previously been in the workforce and may face multiple disadvantages. Many may, because of ongoing parenting responsibilities, be underemployed—that is they may want to work more, but are unable to get beyond part-time work (up to 15 hours per week). This group, according to the Australian Council of Social Service (2003b), is predominantly women, who face a unique set of barriers to full-time employment (for example access to and the availability of affordable child care). According the ABS (2005d), the ratio of women to men who are underemployed is about three to two. The number of underemployed has changed very little over the last three years (since 2002) at between 570- and 580,000 people. Many may also have been disconnected from the labour force for such a long time that they face similar barriers to the long-term unemployed and mature aged people, who are inhibited by lack of recent work experience and resulting self-confidence.

There is a long-term trend of increasing labour market participation among women with young children. In the period from 1991 to 2005, labour force participation among women with children 0–4 has increased from 44.5 percent to 51.7 percent. In the same period the proportion of women working part time (compared to all women employed) increased from 40.4 percent to 45.3 percent (ABS 2002a, 2006a). These data, put together suggest that those women with young children who are returning to work are working predominantly part time and could be considered 'underemployed' (Australian Council of Social Service 2003a).

The literature suggests that flexible working arrangements are an important consideration for parents returning to work. It has been suggested in research on the topic, that women returning to work prefer flexibility over remuneration as a factor that attracts them back to work (Hewlett et al. 2005; Hudson 2006a). Similarly, the reason that women remain on welfare support is the fear that in work they will be unable to balance work and family (Gregory et al. 2003).

Another factor that contributes to a woman's return to work after childbirth is pre-birth education levels. There is an inverse correlation between the level of post-school education and the rates of return to work. Mothers who have completed secondary education or attained a post-secondary qualification are approximately 50 percent more likely to return to work than those who have not completed secondary education (Baxter 2005b). According to Baxter (2005a:4) 'usually, women with more education are less likely to leave work on childbearing and to return to work faster'. Some economic modelling suggests that there is little benefit—if not a disincentive—for single parents return to work because of the loss of direct and indirect benefits associated with pensions, allowances and concessions (Harding et al. 2005).

People with a disability

> Short definition: Persons unemployed who have a disability, medical condition or addiction.

There is little argument in the literature about what constitutes disability. Many Australian agencies (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2003; ABS 2004; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2006a) have adopted the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) definition, which describes 'disability' as an umbrella term for any or all of these components: impairment, activity limitation and participation restriction, as influenced by environmental factors (World Health Organisation 2002). Australians are also restricted in their interpretation of 'disability' by the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Commonwealth of Australia 2006a), which in

some ways could be considered to be a broader definition, based on loss of function, disease, illness or disorders or the potential for the above.

However, operational definitions and approaches to measuring disability vary substantially, depending on the purpose for which they are developed (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2003). For example, Centrelink's (2006a) criteria for assessing eligibility of Disability Support Pension (DSP) payments is dependent on whether an individual is:

- Aged 16 or over and under Age Pension age, and
- Assessed as not being able to work or be retrained for work of at least 15 hours per week within two years because of your illness, injury or disability, or
- Permanently blind, or
- Participating in the Supported Wage System (SWS).

The assessment process attempts to quantify the extent of disability according to one of a number of instruments described by Centrelink (2006b) as 'impairment tables' and described in the Social Security Act 1991 (Commonwealth of Australia 2006b) as an 'Adult Disability Assessment Tool'. The above determinants of disability status could be described as 'legal' or 'administrative', while the general determinants of disability described earlier are more likely based on self-assessed status. The OECD (2006c) describes this difference as 'objective' and 'subjective' disability.

These differences in definition need to be taken into account when considering approaches to employment and training for people with disabilities. We also note that as people age they are more likely to have disabilities and this further impacts on their employability (Wilkins 2003; ABS 2004).

Training as a vehicle for welfare to work

Training has for a long time been seen to be a 'way in' for people to access jobs. The focus of 'welfare to work' programs differs somewhat from this long held view in that it not only specifically targets people who are currently not in the workforce but it a) targets those who have either been unable or reluctant to enter the workforce and therefore are dependent on social security safety nets; and b) it is designed to address skills gaps and shortages in a labour market where labour demand is high. The OECD (2006d), reporting on the results of a five-country study into welfare-to-work initiatives suggests:

> Policies concerned with workforce development and skills upgrading initiatives, while sitting within the adult learning agenda, address a narrower, more modest objective. That objective is to improve the skills, competencies and qualifications of low-qualified incumbent workers, and thereby respond to "skills shortages" and "skills gaps" experienced in local labour markets and within organisations. (p. 39)

The imperative for new welfare to work initiatives in Australia is no different. This was explicitly stated when the current reforms were announced in 2005 (Commonwealth of Australia 2005). They are underpinned by a strong recognition of an ageing population, which was highlighted in the *Intergenerational Report* released at the time of the 2002-03 Commonwealth Budget (Commonwealth of Australia 2002). While there has always been a fiscal imperative to minimise the financial burden of the cost of welfare, it is interesting to note that the current initiatives—which are arguably more focussed than ever before on transitioning people from welfare to work—come at a time when unemployment is at 30 year lows.

As elsewhere, not all sectors of the Australian community are engaged in the so-called knowledge economy (Cumming 1997; Falk and Guenther 2002; Statistics Canada and OECD 2005). Some sectors of the community are inequitably under-represented in education and training participation data (Baldwin 2003; Boughton and Durnan 2004; Golding and Pattison 2004). A third reason provides perhaps the greatest impetus: national skills shortages are forcing industries to look

beyond the 'easy to access' labour markets to the more difficult and as yet untapped markets, where considerable investment in training and skill development is required (Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Education References Committee 2003).

Impact of policy on welfare to work groups

Despite the above discussion about the needs for training, there is little emphasis on this in Australian Government's Welfare to Work strategy. This is reflected in the budget where less than 10 percent of the 3.6 billion dollar budget for the program is dedicated to training. (Commonwealth of Australia 2005). It would also appear that the Welfare to Work strategy discourages JobNetwork, training providers and job-seekers from engaging in pre-employment learning activities beyond basic occupational health and safety training. For example the conditions for Community Work Coordinators (CWCs) allow for up to 20 percent of an activity's time to be taken up with training, but the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) do not specifically mention training at all (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2006a).Watts (2006) argues that:

> Welfare-to-work establishes a way of churning low-skill labour in and out of that part of the labour market characterised by low pay, low skill and precarious employment a sector now left even less regulated or protected than ever before (p. 7).

There are some international evaluations that demonstrate that better long term outcomes are achieved when more intentional training is provided in conjunction with job search support (Australian Council of Social Service 2007).

Having said this, a separate Australian Government initiative—*Skills for the future* (Prime Minister of Australia The Hon John Howard MP 2006)—potentially offers some Welfare to Work groups the opportunity of accessing Certificate II or Year 12 equivalent qualifications.

While it is still 'early days' for Welfare to Work in Australia, a number of questions remain unanswered about the efficacy of the program in terms of: a) meeting the skill needs of clients, employers and industry more generally; b) meeting the challenges of building a more skilled labour force into the future; and c) managing the impact of a potential downturn in the Australian economy and the labour market.

The role of the AQF

The Welfare to Work profiles suggest that among the priority groups lone parents and people with disabilities tend to hold lower qualification levels and for the latter group, there is evidence that participation levels are well below what would be expected for the population as a whole. In any case, regression analysis presented by Karmel and Nguyen (2006) suggest that there is no employment or wage value to be gained by completing an AQF I or II qualification. While there are several reasons for this one reason must be that many in these groups do not have the prerequisite competencies (especially literacy and numeracy) required to advance to higher levels of study within the AQF structure. While the integration of literacy and numeracy into Training Packages has had 'a limited degree of success' (Wignell 2003) the reality may be that other add-on programs like the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program do more for increasing literacy and numeracy skills of individuals. Given the limited employment value of AQF I and II qualifications we are left asking the question: what is the value of such qualifications? One answer is that the outcomes of effective VET programs at these (and other levels too) are more about identity formation than about employment outcomes (Falk and Balatti 2004; Guenther 2005a).

The role of enterprises

Enterprise RTOs (ERTOs) typically provide entry level training to new employees, based upon their requirements and leading to the issue of a nationally recognized qualification at Certificate II or Certificate III to staff completing the training program. The Enterprise Registered Training

Organisation Association (ERTOA) includes many large Australian and international businesses and the members provide employment for over one million people (Enterprise Registered Training Organisation Association 2006). They represent a major component of the Australian VET sector both in the number of students and the number of qualifications issued. While it was expected that few ERTOs would have an explicit process in place to respond to the Welfare-to-Work initiative, the employment and training practices they use will have a substantial influence on moving the target groups into long term fulltime work. As enterprises that also provide training—and therefore are not focussed solely on training/assessment—these organisations face particular issues that as a group are only just being recognised (Mitchell 2005b, a). ERTOs *are* concerned about the skills needs of the enterprises they support and in a time of labour and skills shortages are increasingly looking for innovative ways of meeting their business imperatives. These will undoubtedly require a degree of flexibility, alternative sources of funding, and an increasing role for transferable and generic skills (The Allen Consulting Group 2004b). These same issues affect Welfare to Work groups.

Training for mature aged people

Mature aged people are more likely not to have a qualification beyond year 10 than younger people and are also less likely to hold bachelor qualifications (ABS 2005a). ABS survey data (2005c) suggests that while proportionally fewer mature aged people (than other age groups) participate in training for employment reasons, they are no less likely to achieve employment outcomes—when that is their reason for training—than those aged 25–44. However, it is evident from the same data that older persons are less likely to study for a qualification than those aged 44 or less. OECD (2006b) suggests that training alone is not the solution to increasing employment outcomes of mature aged people through skill development:

> Evidence from those initiatives that have sought to increase participation among older workers shows that provision is not the same as participation, and that participation in training does not always bring unequivocal benefits in terms of labour market outcomes. (p. 121)

Mature aged males and females report different barriers to training (ABS 2005c). Males report that the greatest barriers to training are a lack of time and too much work. Females on the other hand report financial reasons and a lack of time. The OECD (2006a:128) suggests that older job seekers in Australia 'lacked motivation to take up training'. An evaluation of the Job Network (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2002) showed that the employment outcomes from Job Search Training were lowest among the mature aged group. The introduction of the Active Participation Model in 2003 may have improved these outcomes Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2006b) though mature aged people appear to be most reluctant—or unable—to take advantage of initiatives that target disadvantaged job seekers. It is possible that one of the reasons for the reluctance is not so much about the external barriers to training, but the intrinsic nature of formalised learning processes, which may not be as conducive as non-formal or informal learning more commonly associated with mature aged learners (Hamilton 2005).

Despite the recognition of the need to upskill mature aged workers because of skills shortages, and despite the incentives available (see page 11) the participation rate among those aged 45 to 64 has remained more or less constant over the five years to 2005 at around 19 percent of all trainees (NCVER 2006b). Commonwealth, State and Territory programs relating to mature aged people are detailed in the welfare to work profiles.

Training for parents returning to work

Parents returning to work face multiple barriers to employment and training as they attempt to make the transition from welfare dependence. These are well articulated in the recent Australian Council of Social Services report titled *The Role of Further Education and Training in Welfare to Work Policies* (2007) and include: 1) financial disincentives for income support recipients; 2) restrictions on

child care subsidies; 3) activity requirements that leave little scope for education and training; and 4) financial disincentives for Job Network providers (pp. 8-9). These barriers are included in an earlier report *The Way Forward: The Importance of VET to Australian Women in Poverty*, which added cost of training, lack of awareness and access to information and lack of flexibility to the above list (Zeller Turner 2006).

Commonwealth, State and Territory programs relating to parents returning to work are detailed in the welfare to work profiles.

Training for people with a disability

According to the ABS *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers* (ABS 2004), 20 percent of the Australian population had a disability in 2003. The Survey found that people with disabilities were more likely to be unemployed, more likely to be engaged in part time work and had lower labour force participation rates. They were also less likely to have completed a higher educational qualification than those without a disability.

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA 2000) states that while 80 percent of the general population is participating in the workforce, only 53 percent of people with a disability do. The proportion of the Australian population with a disability aged between 15 and 64 who currently participate in Vocational Education and Training is estimated at 5.9 percent, yet the proportion of all Australians aged between 15-64 who currently participate in VET is 11.4 percent (NCVER 2006c). ANTA (2003) has acknowledged that:

> People with a disability are significantly underrepresented in the national system, and their training is not leading to jobs often enough.

The VET participation rate among people with a disability has improved significantly over recent years. In 2000, 61,500 students participating in VET training reported a disability. In 2005 this had increased to 96,300 (NCVER 2006c). The increase is not explained by increases in the uptake of VET generally—as has been the case previously (Barnett 2004).

According to Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement data collated by the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (2006b:59) 89 percent of Commonwealth funded service outlets provide employment services, comprising eight percent of all funded outlets. More than 95 percent of Commonwealth funded outlets are managed by non-government organisations. States and Territories' funding was focused on accommodation support. Of the 8448 Commonwealth/State and Territory funded disability services, just 12 were funded to provide training. It should be noted though that many organisations providing community access support services also provide 'Learning and life skills development' programs. This subcategory accounts for one in eight service users. Approximately one-third of all users access employment services. These data seem to suggest that given the policy to transition people with disabilities from welfare to work, increased funding for employment and training services may be required.

This apparent mismatch in demand and service provision is echoed in examples from recent qualitative research that suggests the quality of training designed to transition people from Disability Support Pension to work needs to be improved (Humpage 2005). Supporting the view that financial support for employment and training services is relatively low, the Australian Council of Social Service (2005) suggests that a 'major reason for the low employment rate among disability pensioners in Australia is that they are less likely to receive help to get a job, or rehabilitation or training'. Supporting this argument ACOSS use OECD (2003b:116) data to suggest that the 'Australian Government only spends about two thirds of the OECD average expenditure on these services' (p. 8). There are however questions in the international literature (OECD 2006c) about the effectiveness of such training programs, especially for those with congenital conditions.

Commonwealth, State and Territory programs relating to people with disabilities are detailed in the welfare to work profiles.

Funding models and incentives

A range of incentives and initiatives to assist people to get into apprenticeships and traineeships emerged from the (Department of Education Science and Training 2002) *Review of the Commonwealth New Apprenticeships Incentives Programme*. This provided the basis for the current incentives available particularly for employers, mature aged job seekers and people with disabilities seeking work (Australian Government 2006b).

Mature aged people

Under the *Apprenticeships Incentive Programme* (Australian Government 2006a), 'an employer of a disadvantaged worker (aged 45 years or older) may attract a special $750 Mature Aged Worker Commencement Incentive and a $750 Mature Aged Worker Completion Incentive' (Australian Government 2006b). Some states are promoting training and job programs for older workers. These include:

- Western Australia's *Profit from Experience* employment initiative, which provides employability skills training, career guidance and other training options;
- Tasmania's *Skills Equip,* a bilaterally funded program promoting training for a variety of employment disadvantaged groups, including Welfare to Work groups
- *South Australia Works*, providing training, up-skilling and employment programs for mature aged workers and job seekers; and
- Queensland's *Experience Pays Awareness Strategy,* designed to raise awareness of the value of and options for mature aged workers looking for jobs.

These initiatives provide a targeted state-based adjunct to the Australian Government's programs.

Parents returning to work

The Victorian State Government's *Parents returning to work program* (Adult Multicultural Education Services 2006) offers parents returning to work a $1000 grant to assist parents enrolling in training that will improve their workforce skills. The eligibility criteria for parents wanting to take advantage of the program indicate that applicants must:

- have been caring for a dependent child/ren and has not worked more than the equivalent of 4 months full-time during the last 2 years
- have at least 1 dependent child aged 12 years or younger.
- not currently be employed and intend to return to paid work (full time or part time) in the next 12 months
- have been in the paid workforce at some stage in the past
- intend to enrol in a training course to assist in re-entry to the work force
- be an Australian resident living in Victoria

The South Australian government offers a $1200 grant for parents with similar criteria (Department of Further Education Employment Science and Technology 2006).

People with a disability

A range of Commonwealth and State and Territory incentives are available to assist people with disabilities access training programs. Australian Apprenticeships (Australian Government 2006b) attract incentives for people with disabilities. These are listed as:

- Disabled Australian Apprentice Wage Support is available to an employer who currently employs an Australian Apprentice with a disability and has been assessed as a person requiring assistance.

- ✧ An employer of an Australian Apprentice with a disability who satisfies the eligibility criteria may receive wage support of either $104.30 (exclusive of GST) for a full-time Australian Apprentice, or pro-rata amount for part time Apprentices.
- ✧ Assistance for Tutorial, Interpreter and Mentor Services is payable directly to the Registered Training Provider in respect of an Australian Apprentice with a disability who has been assessed as eligible for Disabled Australian Apprentice Wage Support and who requires additional assistance with off-the-job training. An Australian Apprentice with a disability may attract this form of assistance regardless of whether their employer receives Disabled Australian Apprentice Wage Support.
- ✧ Financial assistance available for tutorial services for an Australian Apprentice is $38.50 an hour up to a maximum of $5,500 annually (inclusive of GST); and for interpreter/mentor services, $38.50 an hour, up to a maximum of $5,500 annually (inclusive of GST).
- ✧ Workplace Modifications. Funding for necessary modifications to the workplace may be provided to employers of Australian Apprentices who are disabled. These may include such things as the purchase, lease or hire of equipment to help the Australian Apprentice in their work.

The provision of disability support services in Australia is governed to a large extent by the Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA), which sets out the roles and responsibilities of governments in relation to funding, research and development, maintaining transparency and public accountability and supporting innovation and quality service.

> State and Territory Governments have responsibility for planning, policy setting and management of accommodation support, community support, community access and respite for people with disabilities. The Australian Government has similar responsibilities for specialised employment assistance. Both levels of government are responsible for planning and managing advocacy, information and print disability services. (Australian Healthcare Associates 2006:7)

The current CSTDA is due to expire in June 2007. Anticipating changes to the next Agreement, the National Industry Association for Disability Services suggests that apparent disparities between jurisdictions (both at the State and Commonwealth level) should be addressed (ACROD 2006).

Is VET an appropriate vehicle to effectively transition people from welfare to work?

Questions remain about the role of VET as a vehicle to assist the transition of parents, people with disabilities and mature aged people into work. Is VET an appropriate vehicle? Should the emphasis be on providing training to people once they do get into work?

What kinds of skills are needed?

Based on the DEWR skills shortage data and reports the skills in greatest demand are those among the health professions and the trades (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2005, 2006d). Most of these professions and trades, perhaps with the exception of child care workers which are also in strong demand, require higher level qualifications with strong underpinning standards of literacy and numeracy. People who describe themselves as labourers are six times more likely to be unemployed than those who are in 'professional', 'management' or 'advanced clerical' occupation categories (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2007).

But the skills held by those in Welfare to Work groups by and large do not match those in the DEWR skills shortage groups. The Welfare to Work Profiles developed for this project suggest that typically lone parents and people with disabilities are underrepresented in qualification areas beyond Certificate I and II. An analysis of qualification data from the 2003 *Survey of Education and Work* (ABS 2003a) show that lone parents are three times more likely to hold Certificate I and II qualifications than the rest of the population and one third more likely not to have completed Year

10 at school. Based on the same survey, mature aged people are about 25 percent more likely to have only completed Year 10 compared to the population as a whole. Similarly, the 2003 *Disability, Ageing and Carers Survey* shows that people with a reported disability are only half as likely to have completed Year 12 at school and almost half as likely to hold a bachelor qualification (ABS 2004:24). These data suggest that while demand is strong for higher level qualifications, the skills set of Welfare to Work groups needs to be significantly upgraded in order for them to tap into those occupations.

In the current economic climate where labour shortages generally result in employment opportunities for low-skilled labour market entrants, the imperative for education and training as a way in to work is clearly not as pronounced compared to some years ago when unemployment was higher. However, with employers now accessing the segment of the market that has either avoided being in the labour market or previously unable to access jobs, there is a greater focus on employability skills. An Australian Government funded report titled *Employability Skills* (The Allen Consulting Group 2004a) stated that:

> It is only as we move into a 'knowledge economy' that the focus has swung to a greater demand for the development of generic skills and a consequential closer examination of the nature of generic skills and the way they are developed. (p.15)

Until recently much of the literature has focused on the need for employability skills in younger 'novice workers' (Smith and Comyn 2003) and while the references may not always be explicitly related to youth it is often implied that younger trainees are the ones who need employability or 'generic' skills (Callan 2003; Curtin 2004). But there is a recognition that for older workers—who are less likely to engage in training and less likely to have higher educational qualifications than younger labour market entrants—'an important requirement for improving the employment prospects of older workers is to upgrade their skills' (OECD 2006d:118). More generally, a recent report prepared by the Allen Consulting Group, explaining the findings of an Employer Survey of skills needs, suggests that businesses are finding it difficult to find people with a mix of technical and non-technical skills: 'between one–third and one–half of respondents also had difficulty securing a range of non–technical skills and people with a positive attitude to work' (Australian Industry Group and The Allen Consulting Group 2006:50).

Are non-formal approaches to training and identity formation and reformation appropriate?

Identity formation—and reformation—are important aspects of any learning program. Guenther (2005b; Guenther 2005a) argues that identity formation is more significant as a factor that makes training effective, than employment outcomes. One of the common threads through this relatively small amount of literature is that identity formation in learning occurs through a series of interactions (Falk and Balatti 2004). These interactions include engagement with learning resources and environment, engagement with people within the learning environment and engagement with those outside the learning environment. Aspects of identity formation such as self-esteem, self-confidence and motivation are frequently reported in research as personal outcomes of participation in VET (Dawe 2004) and are often described under the umbrella of generic skills (Curtin 2004) or employability skills (DET 2004).

The Australian Industry Group's *World Class Skills* report suggests that in Australian workplaces, employers are placing as much if not more importance on 'informal on-the-job training' as formal training (Australian Industry Group and The Allen Consulting Group 2006:106). The purpose of this training is directed at building soft or generic skills (e.g. communication, interpersonal skills, listening, team work, relational, leadership) for workers. It may follow then, that opportunity for non-formal training ought to be given to labour market entrants prior to employment, to better prepare them for the workforce—not just in the workforce. As noted earlier there is a need in the workforce for a range of employability skills associated with identity formation and reformation. This is not just to maintain the demands of current industry productivity and competitiveness needs

but the future demands of globalised industries in an environment where innovation is becoming increasingly important. However, according to a recent Business Council of Australia report (2006),

> Research suggests not only the importance of the development of strong technical skills in the workforce but also those associated with communication, teamwork, problem solving, entrepreneurship and leadership.

These skills are invariably tied up with non-formal learnings associated with identity reformation and require non-formal approaches to training. While the report alludes to the likelihood that these skills would be taught in the workplace it could be equally argued that skills such as teamwork, problem solving and communication are learnable outside the workplace and can have a preparatory and formative impact on participants. These learnings are often associated with adult learning or adult and community education 'ACE' and sometimes referred to as 'second chance' learning (Golding et al. 2001; Clemans et al. 2003; Harris and Rainey 2006), and which are most frequently learned in non-formal learning environments.

The question that introduced this section asks if non-formal approaches to training and identity formation and reformation are appropriate. The evidence from the literature suggests that identify formation plays an important role in building effective outcomes for any training or learning program. As such non-formal approaches to learning, which foster changing identities can be taught either within formal or non-formal courses on the job, or in formal and in non-formal programs off the job. They do not require technical skills to be learnt and are therefore well suited to off-the job employment preparation programs.

Are training providers equipped for the different demands of welfare to work trainees?

Even if VET is a valuable tool for facilitating a transition from welfare to work, questions remain about the VET sector's capacity to cope with the demands of trainees who may be offered training. Typically welfare to work clients will place greater demands on trainers for a number of reasons including physical and mental disabilities; low education levels; low motivation; and difficulty juggling care and other responsibilities with training. These demands are recognised in the recent *TAFE Futures* report (Kell 2006). One submission to the report suggested that: 'the demand for support services, such as counselling, was seen as "going through the roof" with the advent of the welfare to work reforms commencing in July 2006' (p. 25). The report concluded that there was a need for restoration of 'specialist equity programs' in response to this new demand (p.36).The recent TAFE Directors Australia report *Investing in Productivity*, while recognising the imperative for training to 'activate skills development' and engage with those outside the workforce, fails to identify any specific strategies to address the skills needs of welfare to work target groups that are the subject of this research. This important omission is perhaps an indication that Australia's largest VET provider (reportedly with 86 percent of all VET enrolments) is not ready for these demands.

The readiness of private RTOs as training providers for Welfare to Work clients is also unclear. Given that training is at the periphery of emphasis in Welfare to Work (see Training as a vehicle for welfare to work, page 7) it is unlikely that many private RTOs will engage with welfare to work clients. An exception to this may be organisations that have training and Job Network arms. Mission Australia, for example, act as a LLNP provider, a Job Network member and a Work for the Dole provider and are therefore ideally placed to support Welfare to Work clients.

How can social capital and identity formation be built into programs and training for clients?

The role that training plays in establishing and building social networks is well documented in the literature (e.g. Feinstein 2003; Kilpatrick 2003). There is also an emerging body of literature that supports a view that learning is particularly significant for developing individual identity within trainees (e.g. Ashmore and Jussim 1997; Falk and Balatti 2003). Indeed the two things appear to go hand in hand (e.g. Wenger 1998; Schuller et al. 2004). But are these just incidental products of training that will happen regardless of the program or can they be intentionally built into the design

of training programs. It is also well reported in the literature that for those who face the greatest employment disadvantage social isolation and poor self-concept are among the greatest barriers to engagement in either training or work (e.g. Côté 2001; Green et al. 2003; OECD 2004).

While it may well be difficult to assess competencies associated with identity formation and social capital it is certainly possible to build these ideas into the learning environment. Certainly, learning, teaching practices and pedagogies are associated with identity formation (Chappell et al. 2003; Rhodes and Sheeres 2003). Guenther (2005b) argues that training program design can be engineered to specifically include elements that build trainees' identity: by raising individuals' awareness for example through 'workplace exchanges', by encouraging individuals to make choices, and by supporting experimentation and risk taking in decision making.

Are there still stigmas associated with taking on people with disabilities and mature aged people?

There is some evidence in the literature that discrimination—or at least negative attitudes to employment—against disadvantaged people in Welfare to Work target groups (Boardman 2003; Northern Territory Council of Social Service 2004). The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's report *WORKability II Solutions* (HREOC 2005:13) identifies three barriers to employment:

1 Information – an absence of easily accessible and comprehensive information and advice that assists in decision making processes and responds to ongoing needs

2 Cost – concern about costs of participation for people with disability and possible costs borne by employers when employing a person with disability

3 Risk – concern about any possible financial and personal impact on people with disability and their employers, especially if a job does not work out.

The Commission has also identified age discrimination as an issue in Australia (HREOC 2000). While longitudinal ABS data suggests that age discrimination has declined in the last six years, almost thirty percent of all job seekers aged 45+ believed that they had failed to get a job because they were too old (ABS 2006d).

Conclusions

This literature review is designed to provide an overview of the issues related to vocational training and the Federal Government's Welfare to Work initiative. Much of the literature in this field is still emerging as the program develops and as its impacts are felt. We have however noted the context for welfare to work reforms and considered some of the definitions and issues surrounding each of the three groups under consideration.

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Appendix 2: Welfare to Work Profiles

Introduction

The purpose of the profiles contained in this report is to provide a quick snapshot of relevant employment and training data available for each of the following welfare to work groups: people with disabilities; mature aged people; and parents returning to work. The profiles also briefly summarise the employment and training programs that are pertinent to each group for each state and territory of Australia. Consideration is first given to the range of potential data sources that were reviewed in preparation for these profiles.

The basis for choice of indicators is provided along with an explanation and definition of each indicator. Cautions and source summaries are also provided ahead of the actual profiles. A profile is given for Australia and for each state and territory. The report concludes with a brief commentary on the data presented.

Data sources

Several potential data sources were investigated in preparation for the development of these profiles. These included:

- 2001 Census data (e.g. ABS 2002);
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) survey data (on specific topics);
- *State of the Regions* (e.g. National Economics and Australian Local Government Association 2004, 2005) data;
- DEWR labour market data (e.g Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2006);
- Income support data from the Australian Government (e.g. Department of Families Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 2006);
- A range of participation and outcomes data from NCVER; and
- State/Territory specific data sources highlighting data relevant to welfare to work (e.g. DEET 2005; Tasmania Together Progress Board 2006).

After careful consideration of these sources two main sources were used: The Australian Bureau of Statistics and the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research. Data accessed from these sources included:

- Confidentialised Unit Record Files (CURFs) for the ABS 2005 *Education and Work Survey* and the 2003 *Disability, Ageing and Carers Survey*, together with associated publications (ABS 2004, 2005a, 2006b, c);
- ABS labour force survey data cubes (ABS 2006).
- NCVER 2005 national students and courses data tables (NCVER 2006).

Some supplemental data was required to fill in some areas where these data did not meet the profile requirements, most notably for the smaller jurisdictions (Tasmania, Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory). In these cases relevant 2001 Census data (ABS 2003) was substituted.

Indicators and definitions

Basis of indicator choices

A number of criteria were used to select the range of indicators that best describe each welfare to work group. The welfare to work groups include people with a disability, mature aged people and parents. The latter group is not specifically differentiated between partnered and lone parents in programs designed to assist people re-enter the workforce. However, to better assist the interpretation the comparisons for both partnered and lone parents is provided.

Availability and accessibility

The need for each indicator to be available and accessible may appear to be stating the obvious. However, it was felt that in order to provide a useful set of indicators that could be checked over time and by other researchers, the data must be either publicly available or available for use by a research body, such as a university.

Reliability and credibility

Sources such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the NCVER offer data that is arguably the best of its kind in Australia. It is less likely to be disputed than other data sources, which may involve smaller sample sizes.

Comparability across jurisdictions and with the general population

For the purpose of these profiles it was essential to have as much of the data comparable at a state or territory jurisdictional level. The data also needs to be comparable with other data collected for the entire population.

Recency

Survey data does have limitations associated with the sample size, which affects ability to meaningfully interpret the data. However, this profile has opted to use survey data because alternative census from 2001 data is now effectively 'past its use-by' for this application.

Simplicity

A number of descriptive statistics could have been chosen to more fully explore the issues associated with specific groups. However, the purpose of these profiles is to provide a simple picture of a) the size of the group; b) its participation in the labour market; c) its participation in vocational training; d) its un/employment characteristics; and e) its qualification characteristics.

Understanding the profiles

This section firstly explains briefly the definitions used for each group. It then goes on to detail what the numbers in the tables represent. Finally, a summary table of sources is provided. In order to keep the presentation as readable and simple as possible, we have selected six indicators to report on. The emphasis is on the data for mature aged people, people with disabilities and parents returning to work. As such the numbers relate to the population counts and percentages associated with each group.

People with disabilities

In the profiles, the definition of disability is derived from the data source (ABS 2006c). In the survey the basis of measurement is self-reported disability. This does not differentiate profound or long-term disabilities from short term or disabilities that have a lesser impact on ability to participate in work or other aspects of life. The data used does not differentiate between people with physical or other disabilities. The tables refer only to those people aged 15–64.

Mature aged people

While the starting and ending age for 'mature aged' can be variously defined, the tables use ABS definitions (ABS 2005c)—people aged between 45 and 64.

Parents returning to work

Most welfare to work programs do not specifically discriminate between partnered and lone parents. The tables do however separate the two groups because of the different characteristics of the two groups. Parents are defined here as those people with at least one dependent child.

Total 15-64 population '000

This figure represents the total population aged between 15 and 64. The total 15–64 year old population represents a close approximation to the potential labour force in each jurisdiction.

Percent of total 15-64 population

The percentage figure shown indicates the proportional representation of the relevant welfare to work group within the 15–64 year population. For example, 19.2 percent of the 15–64 year population in Australia is reported to have a disability. One hundred percent represents the entire 15–64 year population. The categories are not discrete. That is, it is possible that a proportion of the population could be mature aged, lone parents and have a disability.

Percent of group participating in labour force

The percentage figure shown indicates the proportional participation of the group in the labour force. Definitions of labour force participation are drawn from the data source (ABS 2006f). For example the profile for Australia shows that 72.6 percent of mature aged people participate in the labour force. This compares with 80.2 percent of the total working aged population.

Percent of group unemployed

The percentage figure shown in the tables represents the official unemployment rate (for mature aged, parents and total population) based on the most recent labour force survey (ABS 2006d) and the calculated unemployment rate for people with disabilities, drawn from the 2003 Disability, Ageing and Carers Survey (ABS 2006b). While there is a three year gap in the data sets the difference in the unemployment rate for the general population is half of one percent (5.3 percent at the 2003 Survey compared with 4.8 percent at September 2006). People who are unemployed are defined as those that are in the labour force but not working and who are looking for part-time or full-time work or were waiting to start a new job.

Percent of all students participating in VET

The percentage figure given at this part of the table represents the proportion of the total VET student cohort that belongs to the specific welfare to work group. The total cohort is represented by 100 percent in the right hand column. For example, 5.9 percent of VET students are (self)

reported as having disabilities in Australia. This figure can then be contrasted with the overall population. In this case, 19.2 percent of the total 15–64 year old population self report disabilities.

Percent of group with VET qualifications

The percentage figure given here indicates the proportion of the welfare to work group with VET qualifications. VET qualifications are here taken to be those defined from AQF levels I to IV as well as those 'not further defined'. For example in Australia, 11.8 percent of the population with disabilities reported having VET qualifications. This compares with 17.4 percent of all lone parents. Disability and mature aged percentages are drawn from 2005 NCVER students and courses data. Percentages for parents are drawn from the 2005 ABS Education and Work Survey.

Programs

The programs listed in the last section of the profile tables summarise current Australian welfare to work initiatives identified through a web-based search. Profile 1 shows programs initiated by the Australian Government and non-government organisations at a national level. From Profile 2 on, the programs listed are state-based initiatives. The government programs are divided into those that are specifically designed to assist people into employment and those that are designed to move people into work through training. The programs listed include: a) employment support programs and allowances for job seekers; b) training support programs and allowances for job seekers; c) targeted strategies and policy initiatives; and d) employer incentives.

The list does not attempt to give weight or significance to any particular program but is simply meant to give an indication of the breadth (or lack of breadth) of programs offered for particular groups. Programs listed under the 'General population' column are not specifically targeted at any one group but may benefit some groups. For example youth programs may be of some assistance to people with disabilities and possibly also lone parents returning to work.

Cautions

A number of cautions apply to the interpretation of the data in the profiles. There are some risks in comparing data sets across welfare to work groups and across jurisdictions. For the smaller jurisdictions (Tasmania, Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory) the ABS advises that relative standard errors associated with results are sometimes too high to be meaningful. In some cases they agglomerated the smaller jurisdictions. In other cases the sample was considered too small.

It is also acknowledged that care must be taken when comparing data from different surveys. While definitions are generally consistent the timing, survey sample and emphasis may vary. For example while the labour force survey data cubes differentiate between lone parents with and without dependents the Survey of Education and Work (ABS 2006) does not.

A further caution noted is that the data does not address gender differences that might be evident. Nor does it differentiate between part time or full time employment and in terms of VET qualifications. It groups all qualifications together. Similarly for some of the welfare to work groups, no differentiation is made between people with profound disabilities and those with less severe disabilities. For mature aged people the data does not distinguish between the older and younger age groups within the 20 year age span.

For some states NCVER data tables provide cautions about the proportion of respondents with an 'unknown' disability status. Where this is the case it is noted on the corresponding state table.

Source summary

Table 1 summarises the sources used for each cell in the profile tables. A complete reference list is provided at the end of this report.

Table 1: Welfare to work profile sources

Indicator	*People with a disability*	*Mature aged people*	*Partnered parents*	*Lone parents*	*General population*
Total 15-64 population '000	ABS 2004, ABS 2006b	ABS 2006d	ABS 2006d	ABS 2006d	ABS 2006f
Percent of total 15-64 population	ABS 2004, ABS 2006b	ABS 2006d	ABS 2006d	ABS 2006d	
Percent of group participating in labour force	ABS 2004, ABS 2006b	ABS 2006d	ABS 2006d	ABS 2006d	ABS 2004
Percent of group unemployed	ABS 2004, ABS 2006b	ABS 2006d	ABS 2006d	ABS 2006d	ABS 2006f
Percent of VET students who are members of this group	NCVER 2006	NCVER 2006	ABS 2006a	ABS 2006a	
Percent of group with VET qualifications	ABS 2004, ABS 2006c	ABS 2006a (AUST, NSW, VIC, SA, WA, QLD) ABS 2003 (TAS, NT and ACT)	ABS 2006a	ABS 2006a	ABS 2005a

Welfare to work training and employment profiles

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Profile 1: Welfare to work profile: Australia

Australia	*People with a disability*	*Mature aged people*	*Partnered parents*	*Lone parents*	*General population*
Total 15-64 population '000	2339	5129	3574	474	13850
Percent of total 15-64 population	19.2%	37.0%	25.8%	3.4%	100.0%
Percent of group participating in labour force	53.2%	72.6%	81.0%	62.4%	65.5%
Percent of group unemployed	8.6%	3.2%	2.6%	12.9%	4.8%
Percent of all VET students who are members of this group	5.9%	19.0%	24.4%	7.5%	100.0%
Percent of group with VET qualifications	11.8%	17.6%	18.2%	17.4%	15.9%
Australian Government employment initiatives	Job Network Service Specialists, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Disability Employment Network, JobAccess, Early Intervention and Engagement Pilot, Supported Wage System, National Disability Recruitment Coordinator	JobWise, New Enterprise Incentive Scheme			Job Placement Services, JobJuice
Australian Government training initiatives	Personal Support Programme, Mobility Allowance, Disability Coordination Officer Programmes	Age Management Training, Australian Apprenticeships Access Programme, Employment Preparation		Employment Preparation	Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET) program, Austudy, Literacy and Numeracy Programme

Profile 2: Welfare to work profile: New South Wales

New South Wales	*People with a disability*	*Mature aged people*	*Partnered parents*	*Lone parents*	*General population*
Total 15-64 population '000	743	1691	1225	161	4561
Percent of total 15-64 population	16.3%	37.1%	26.9%	3.5%	100.0%
Percent of group participating in labour force	50.4%	70.7%	80.8%	58.4%	63.9%
Percent of group unemployed	8.2%	4.1%	3.0%	17.6%	5.5%
Percent of all VET students who are members of this group	6.7%	20.1%	23.8%	6.0%	100.0%
Percent of group with VET qualifications	* 11.5%	16.9%	18.4%	15.7%	15.1%
New South Wales Government employment initiatives	Disability Council of NSW				
New South Wales Government training initiatives	NSW Apprenticeship Program for People with Disabilities, Disability Access	Partnering - Training for Older Workers			

Note: * 26% of all respondents' disability status was 'unknown' in 2005 (NCVER 2006)

Profile 3: Welfare to work profile: Victoria

Victoria	*People with a disability*	*Mature aged people*	*Partnered parents*	*Lone parents*	*General population*
Total 15-64 population '000	632	1253	878	108	3436
Percent of total 15-64 population	18.4%	36.5%	25.6%	3.1%	100.0%
Percent of group participating in labour force	54.0%	73.3%	79.8%	63.2%	65.1%
Percent of group unemployed	8.7%	3.2%	2.1%	13.8%	4.7%
Percent of all VET students who are members of this group	5.9%	19.1%	24.7%	5.5%	100.0%
Percent of group with VET qualifications	11.6%	16.0%	16.7%	18.7%	14.6%
Victorian State Government employment initiatives	Disability Advisory Council of Victoria				
Victorian State Government training initiatives			Parents returning to work program	Parents returning to work program	Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs)

Profile 4: Welfare to work profile: Queensland

Queensland	*People with a disability*	*Mature aged people*	*Partnered parents*	*Lone parents*	*General population*
Total 15-64 population '000	587	1007	691	95	2730
Percent of total 15-64 population	21.5%	36.9%	25.3%	3.5%	100.0%
Percent of group participating in labour force	53.4%	74.8%	82.5%	69.2%	68.3%
Percent of group unemployed	9.0%	2.9%	2.7%	13.5%	4.5%
Percent of all VET students who are members of this group	* 4.0%	19.1%	29.4%	10.3%	100.0%
Percent of group with VET qualifications	16.6%	20.6%	19.7%	17.6%	18.3%
Queensland Government employment initiatives	Disability Council of Queensland and Regional Disability Councils	Experience Pays Strategy (Breaking the Unemployment Cycle)		Back to Work: Parents and Carers program (Breaking the Unemployment Cycle)	Breaking the Unemployment Cycle
Queensland Government training initiatives	Vocational Education and Training Disability Support Service				Smart Queensland Smart State Strategy

Note: * 26.5% of all respondents' disability status was 'unknown' in 2005 (NCVER 2006)

Profile 5: Welfare to work profile: South Australia

South Australia	*People with a disability*	*Mature aged people*	*Partnered parents*	*Lone parents*	*General population*
Total 15-64 population '000	232	405	247	41	1031
Percent of total 15-64 population	22.5%	39.3%	24.0%	4.0%	100.0%
Percent of group participating in labour force	50.5%	69.7%	81.9%	59.9%	62.8%
Percent of group unemployed	8.8%	2.4%	3.0%	15.8%	4.7%
Percent of all VET students who are members of this group	6.4%	19.7%	24.8%	9.0%	100.0%
Percent of group with VET qualifications	12.7%	17.4%	18.0%	21.6%	16.2%
South Australian Government employment initiatives	Employment Assistance Program	Employment Assistance Program		Employment Assistance Program	
South Australian Government training initiatives		South Australia Works (for Mature Aged People)	Parents Return to Work Program	Parents Return to Work Program	

Profile 6: Welfare to work profile: Western Australia

Western Australia	*People with a disability*	*Mature aged people*	*Partnered parents*	*Lone parents*	*General population*
Total 15-64 population '000	275	516	369	43	1401
Percent of total 15-64 population	19.6%	36.8%	26.3%	3.1%	100.0%
Percent of group participating in labour force	54.8%	75.0%	80.0%	63.4%	67.7%
Percent of group unemployed	7.3%	2.0%	2.5%	8.7%	3.4%
Percent of all VET students who are members of this group	* 4.8%	13.4%	19.6%	7.8%	100.0%
Percent of group with VET qualifications	14.0%	18.5%	18.5%	15.5%	16.6%
Western Australian Government employment initiatives	Alternatives to Employment Programme	Profit from Experience			
Western Australian Government training initiatives	Post-school Options Programme				

Note: * 24.1% of all respondents' disability status was 'unknown' in 2005

Profile 7: Welfare to work profile: Tasmania

Tasmania	*People with a disability*	*Mature aged people*	*Partnered parents*	*Lone parents*	*General population*
Total 15-64 population '000	76	131	81	13	321
Percent of total 15-64 population	23.7%	40.8%	25.2%	4.0%	100.0%
Percent of group participating in labour force	52.5%	66.0%	80.7%	53.8%	60.6%
Percent of group unemployed	8.5%	4.3%	3.6%	12.9%	7.2%
Percent of all VET students who are members of this group	7.6%	20.7%	**	**	100.0%
Percent of group with VET qualifications	13.2%	* 15.9%	**	**	16.9%
Tasmanian Government employment initiatives				Women on Wheels Workshops	
Tasmanian Government training initiatives	Equal Partners Stage 2, Skills Equip Program	Skills Equip Program		Skills Equip Program	

Note: * 2001 Census figure

** Data for Tasmania, Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory are combined in the CURF

Profile 8: Welfare to work profile: Northern Territory

Northern Territory	*People with a disability*	*Mature aged people*	*Partnered parents*	*Lone parents*	*General population*
Total 15-64 population '000	20	45	29	4	141
Percent of total 15-64 population	13.9%	31.9%	20.6%	2.8%	100.0%
Percent of group participating in labour force	*	78.0%	83.7%	55.9%	70.9%
Percent of group unemployed	*	1.7%	1.2%	4.8%	2.6%
Percent of all VET students who are members of this group	7.0%	15.0%	**	**	100.0%
Percent of group with VET qualifications	*	*** 16.7%	**	**	20.9%
Northern Territory Government employment initiatives	Employment Disadvantaged Pathways Project	Employment Disadvantaged Pathways Project, NT Strategy for Senior Territorians		Employment Disadvantaged Pathways Project	
Northern Territory Government training initiatives	Australians Working Together Grants program	Australians Working Together Grants program		Australians Working Together Grants program	

Notes: * Sample too small

** Data for Tasmania, Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory are combined in the CURF

*** 2001 Census figure

Profile 9: Welfare to work profile: Australian Capital Territory

Australian Capital Territory	*People with a disability*	*Mature aged people*	*Partnered parents*	*Lone parents*	*General population*
Total 15-64 population '000	31	81	54	8	229
Percent of total 15-64 population	13.7%	35.4%	23.6%	3.5%	100.0%
Percent of group participating in labour force	65.0%	80.9%	91.5%	74.5%	75.7%
Percent of group unemployed	*	1.8%	1.5%	1.3%	2.6%
Percent of all VET students who are members of this group	5.7%	15.7%	**	**	100.0%
Percent of group with VET qualifications	*	*** 14.0%	**	**	11.4%
Australian Capital Territory Government employment initiatives					
Australian Capital Territory Government training initiatives	Disability Advisory Council				

Notes: * Sample too small

** Data for Tasmania, Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory are combined in the CURF

*** 2001 Census figure

Discussion

The discussion provided here is designed to provide a very brief commentary on the tables and offer some generalised statements about the significance of the data. Comment is first made on each welfare to work group. The discussion concludes with comment on the differences between Commonwealth, State and Territory profiles.

Welfare to work groups

People with disabilities

The tables show that across Australia, approximately one in five people report having at least one disability. The disability rate in the 15–64 year old population group varies from state to state. The tables show that the Australian Capital Territory has the lowest rate (13.5 percent) and South Australia has the highest disability rate (22.5 percent).

People with disabilities are relatively under-represented in the labour force. Approximately half (53.2 percent) of those reporting having a disability are in the labour force compared with 65.5 percent of the total working aged population. Among the states and territories, the Australian Capital Territory reported the highest participation rate (65 percent) and New South Wales had the lowest rate (50.4 percent). Unemployment rates for people with disabilities are approximately 50 percent higher (based on 2003 data) than for the general population. In Queensland 9.0 percent of those in the labour force with disabilities were unemployed. This compares with 6.2 percent for the general population in September 2003 (ABS 2006c). In 2003 Western Australia had the lowest reported unemployment rate for people with disabilities (7.3 percent). Of all states, Western Australia currently has the lowest unemployment rate (3.4 percent).

The profiles show that people with disabilities are relatively under-represented among VET students. The difference may be expected due to the age-sensitivity of disability statistics (older people are more likely to report disabilities). Nationally, those aged 55–64 are more than three times as likely to report having a disability than those aged 15–24 (ABS 2004). In 2005, this younger age group make up 43 percent of all VET participants (NCVER 2006). People with disabilities are also relatively under-represented in terms of VET qualifications. Nationally, 11.8 percent of people with disabilities have VET qualifications, compared to 15.9 percent for the population as a whole. In New South Wales, 11.5 percent of people with disabilities have VET qualifications. In Queensland 16.6 percent of people with disabilities have VET qualifications. The difference is at least in part explained by the higher overall uptake of VET qualifications in that state.

In summary then, the profiles show that people with disabilities are relatively under-represented for all indicators shown. That is, their participation in the labour force and in employment, their participation in vocational training and their qualification levels are all lower than in the general population. There are some differences at state and territory levels but overall even where the levels are higher in some states, they are still relatively under-represented compared to the overall population of that state. The profiles do not suggest that an increase in participation will necessarily result in increases in employment.

Mature aged people

Mature aged people (those aged 45–64) make up 37 percent of the Australian working aged population. In Tasmania this rises to 40.8 percent of the working population. Mature aged people are well represented in the labour force. Nationally, 72.6 percent of the age group participate in the labour market. This compares to 65.5 percent of all working aged people. In the Northern

Territory, labour force participation of this group rises to 78 percent of the mature aged population. The level of unemployment among this group is also relatively low—3.2 percent compared with 4.8 percent for the whole labour force. This is in part explained by the voluntary withdrawal of some in this group who prefer to retire early. It is also partly explained by the forced retirement of some of the group, who would otherwise have preferred to stay on in employment.

Nationally, 19 percent of VET students can be described as 'mature aged'. This may be interpreted as a significant under-representation of the group but this interpretation does not take into account the likelihood that many people in this age group already hold vocational qualifications. Indeed nationally, mature aged people with vocational qualifications are slightly over-represented, with 17.6 percent holding vocational qualifications, compared to 15.9 percent for the general population. In Queensland more than one in five mature aged people hold a vocational qualification, well above the national average.

The employment and training picture for *mature aged people* is relatively strong compared to the other Welfare to Work priority groups. The profiles show that *mature aged* people are well represented in terms of vocational qualifications. However, the profiles do not show us how relevant or up-to-date their qualifications are and it is difficult to say whether more training is a priority for this group. There is however a perception among mature aged unemployed people that the reason they cannot find work is because of their age (ABS 2005b) and there may be a reluctance on the part of some employers to take full advantage of the depth of knowledge and experience offered by more mature people (Hudson 2006). The value of training for this group as a vehicle for transition from welfare to work is uncertain (OECD 2006).

Parents returning to work

Of note in the profiles is the clear differences that exist between partnered parents and lone parents for most variables. Nationally, partnered parents make up 25.8 percent of the labour force compared with lone parents at 3.4 percent. Nationally, 81 percent of partnered parents are in the labour force compared to 62.4 percent for lone parents. Unemployment rates are similarly divergent: 2.6 percent of partnered parents are counted as unemployed compared to 12.9 percent of lone parents.

In terms of VET, lone parents are well represented among students with 7.5 percent of the total student cohort being made up of lone parents. Participation rates for partnered parents are proportionally representative of the group. VET qualification rates among this group are slightly higher than in the general population. The tables do not however show the level of qualifications that are being achieved. A more detailed analysis of the Survey of Education and Work (ABS 2006a) shows that lone parents are more likely to achieve Certificate I and II qualifications (and also less likely to achieve Bachelor qualifications) than the population as a whole. This may at least in part explain the lower employment outcomes for this group.

The picture painted by the profiles for lone parents suggests that while participation in VET among the group is as might be expected, employment outcomes are among the lowest for any of the welfare to work groups. This may point to a conclusion that VET as is, does not effectively facilitate transition from welfare to work for this group. However, it may also point to the possibility that the types of learning offered by VET are not appropriate for this group, and that there may be other roles for VET in the transition apart from a direct facilitation role.

Commonwealth, State and Territory programs

This section very briefly comments on programs provided at a Commonwealth, State and Territory level for each of the welfare to work groups. The survey provided for the profiles only attempts to indicate the extent and coverage of these programs. It does not attempt to indicate the uptake of programs or the resources applied to them.

A quick glance at the range of programs available for welfare to work groups by the Australian Government is skewed in favour of people with disabilities. Ten different Commonwealth training and employment programs designed for people with disabilities were identified. Five mature aged initiatives were identified. One lone parent program was identified. The majority of Commonwealth initiatives for people with disabilities are focused on employment outcomes. For mature aged people the majority of programs are training programs.

States and territories offer a small number of programs and services for each welfare to work group. Most states use a Disability Advisory Council to advise the state government (and in the case of the Northern Territory there is an Employment Disadvantaged Pathways Project). Only two states (Western Australia and Queensland) have programs specifically designed to assist mature aged people into employment. Two states (New South Wales and South Australia) have training programs specifically designed for mature aged people. Tasmania and the Northern Territory have non-specific programs that include training for mature aged people. Several jurisdictions have either training or employment initiatives designed for lone parents returning to work, though in the case of the Northern Territory, this is limited to an advisory group and a Commonwealth funded grants program. No programs for lone parents were identified in the Australia Capital Territory, New South Wales or Western Australia.

Apart from the comprehensive array of Australian Government programs, particularly for people with disabilities and mature aged people, the survey of programs designed to address welfare to work groups yielded what appears to be a patchy response to both training and employment needs at a state and territory level. In most states there were programs designed to meet the needs of specific target groups (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia) or a program designed to meet the needs of employment disadvantaged people more generally (South Australia, Tasmania, Northern Territory). Apart from an advisory council, the Australian Capital Territory had no specific programs designed to meet the training or employment needs of welfare to work groups.

Conclusions

The welfare to work profiles shown in this report provide a succinct summary of employment and training statistics for welfare to work groups in all Australian states and territories. People with disabilities tend to show the greatest disadvantage in terms of employment, participation in training and vocational qualifications. Mature aged people show almost no disadvantage in terms of employment or qualifications. Lone parents are significantly disadvantaged in terms of employment but show strong participation in VET programs and vocational qualifications. The profiles may suggest that VET, as it is currently offered, should not be relied upon as one size fits all solution to assist people move from welfare to work. The role of VET in the transition from welfare to work may however offer and alternative pathway from welfare that may or may not lead directly to employment. The data may also suggest that for some groups VET may need to be reconfigured to better meet their needs. Most welfare to work programs are offered by the Australian Government. States and territories tend to offer specialised programs for particular groups or generalised programs for several groups.

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Appendix 3: Links to Australian Government, State and Territory welfare to work programs

Australian Government

Early Intervention and Engagement Pilot	http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Individual/DisadvantagedJobseekers/EarlyInterventionandEngagementPilot-ServiceProviders.htm
JobAccess	http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Individual/DisadvantagedJobseekers/JobAccess.htm
Disability Employment Network	http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Individual/DisadvantagedJobseekers/DisabilityEmploymentNetwork/DisabilityEmploymentNetwork.htm
Vocational Rehabilitation Services	http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Individual/DisadvantagedJobseekers/VocationalRehabilitationServices.htm
Job Network Service Specialists	http://jobsearch.gov.au/public/providers/jnss/
Mobility Allowance	http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/mobility.htm
National Disability Recruitment Coordinator	http://www.dwa.org.au/about.htm
Personal Support Programme	http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Individual/DisadvantagedJobseekers/PersonalSupportProgramme/PersonalSupportProgrammePSP.htm
Disability Support Officer Programmes	http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/programmes_funding/programme_categories/special_needs_disadvantage/disability_coordination_officer_programme.htm
Association of Competitive Employment	http://www.acenational.org.au/public/who.shtml
JobWise	http://www.jobwise.gov.au/
Mature Age Employment and Workplace Strategy	http://www.jobwise.gov.au/Jobwise/Information/MAEWSStrategy.htm
Employment Preparation	http://jobsearch.gov.au/Jobseeker/LoneParent.aspx?WHCode=0
Age Management Training	http://www.jobwise.gov.au/Jobwise/Information/AgeManagementTraining.htm
New Enterprise Incentive Scheme	http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Category/SchemesInitiatives/NEIS/
Australian Apprenticeships Access Programme,	https://accesstraining.dest.gov.au/
Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programme	http://www.llnp.dest.gov.au/about_the_programme.htm#Target_Groups/Clients

New South Wales

Disability Council of NSW	http://www.disabilitycouncil.nsw.gov.au/about/kras.html
NSW Apprenticeship Program for People with Disabilities	https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/industryprograms/programs/apprprog/Empguide.doc
Disability Access	https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/communityed/disabilityacces/da_edtraining.htm
Partnering - Training for Older Workers	https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/eas/partnering/

Victoria

Disability Advisory Council of Victoria	http://www.dac.vic.gov.au/
Parents returning to work program	http://www.parentsreturntowork.net.au/

Queensland

Disability Councils	http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/community/disabilitycouncils/
Vocational Education and Training Disability Support Service	http://www.trainandemploy.qld.gov.au/partners/training_delivery/advice_tools_resources/people_specific_needs/disability/vdss.html
Experience Pays Strategy (Breaking the Unemployment Cycle)	http://www.trainandemploy.qld.gov.au/client/about_us/programs_strategies_policies/employment_programs/experience_pays.html
Back to Work: Parents and Carers program	http://www.trainandemploy.qld.gov.au/client/funding_and_incentives/individuals/parents_carers.html

South Australia

Employment Assistance Program	http://www.employment.sa.gov.au/employ/
South Australia Works	http://www.saworks.sa.gov.au/
Parents Return to Work Program	http://www.returntowork.sa.gov.au/parents.php

Western Australia

Alternatives to Employment Programme	http://www.dsc.wa.gov.au/cproot/857/2/FactSheet9.pdf
Post-school Options Programme	http://www.dsc.wa.gov.au/default.aspx?et=2&ei=233&subSiteID=67
Profit From Experience	http://www.employmentdirections.net.au/pfe.html

Tasmania

Equal Partners Stage 2	http://www.education.tas.gov.au/annualreport/05-06/vetace/initiatives/vet
Skills Equip Program	http://www.education.tas.gov.au/annualreport/05-06/vetace/initiatives/vet
Women on wheels	http://www.women.tas.gov.au/women_on_wheels_2006/

Northern Territory

Employment Disadvantaged Pathways Project	http://www.deet.nt.gov.au/employment/employment_disadvantaged/employment_disadvantaged_pathways_project.shtml
Australians Working Together Grants program	http://www.deet.nt.gov.au/employment/aus_working_together/

Australian Capital Territory

Disability Advisory Council	http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/DisabilityACT/AdvisoryCouncil/Council.htm

Appendix 4: Intervention case reports

Case 1
The Certificate III in Aged Care Work at TAFE: Perspectives on unemployed, mature-aged women training to become assistants-in-nursing

Stephen Black
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Introduction

This case study features the perspectives of a group of 10 mostly unemployed, mature-aged women (over 45 years) on their training at TAFE in the Certificate III in Aged Care Work which prepares them for a role as assistants-in-nursing (AIN). It also features the perspectives of the head teacher of the Nursing section at the TAFE college and two other Nursing teachers of the course. Increasingly, the Certificate III in Aged Care Work is becoming a pre-requisite for work in this field and a high percentage (nearly 80% according to Richardson & Martin 2004:28) of current aged care workers have this qualification.

This case study is considered significant within the umbrella of welfare-to-work reforms due to the current demand for and supply of labour in the field of nursing generally and aged care work in particular. Currently, on the one hand, nursing generally suffers from acute staffing shortages in Australia (Jackson & Daly 2004) and indeed globally (Oulton 2006), while on the other hand, there are many unemployed, mature-aged people who may be particularly suited for training for nursing, and especially in aged care. The situation in aged care nursing will become ever more acute with the ageing of the Australian population with a projected 21% increase in the over 65 population in the next 30 years (Booth *et al* 2005: 9).

Assistants-in-nursing (also known as personal carers) are not qualified nurses, but they are nevertheless considered to be part of the 'nursing family' (Australian Nursing Federation 2005:3), and many later train for the Certificate 1V in enrolled nursing (EN) and some later undertake a degree to qualify as a registered nurse (RN). Mostly, AINs work in the aged care sector, mainly in nursing homes, where staff shortages are particularly acute due in part to the low status and image of aged care nursing (Department of Education, Science & Training 2001). Richardson and Martin (2004:31) indicate there is a 24% turnover each year of aged care workers, and a more recent survey indicates these workers are twice likely as other employed women to be dissatisfied with their jobs (Healy & Moskos 2005:iv).

Previous research has tried to explain the apparent contradiction in the existence of relatively large numbers of unemployed, mature-aged people with the skills to work in aged care and the great need for such labour in the aged care sector (Price *et al* 2004). While the available research showed evidence of a positive relationship between ageing and a willingness to undertake formal education in aged care work, other factors such as health, period of unemployment, qualifications, costs, and the psychological impact of unemployment were found to have some effect on the decision to do undertake such training (Price *et al* 2005). These factors can generally be described as 'risk' factors which accompany transitions in people's lives (Ziguras *et al* 2005).

The main focus in this study is on how the 10 students in the Certificate III course have managed their transition from unemployment to training for aged care work. The study is a reflection of the effectiveness of this course and the way it is managed in bringing about employment in the aged care sector for this group of mature-aged women.

Context

The TAFE course details

The site for this research is a large TAFE college located in the Sydney metropolitan area. The Certificate III in Aged Care Work is regularly conducted at this college which is conveniently located next to a major Sydney hospital. This particular course was promoted in the local media to attract mature-aged women and the promotion stated that '12 government-funded places are available free of charge'. This included enrolment fees and approximately $100 of materials, workbooks etc. The funding source was the 2006 State Government's Strategic Skills Training Program (SSTP) - Partnering – Training for Older Workers. It was advertised as a 'career development opportunity for aged care workers' though in fact only one of the students interviewed in this study actually worked in the aged care sector, all the rest were unemployed or not working at the time (one was recuperating from an operation).

The course was for one semester (18 weeks), commencing mid July 2006. Sessions were conducted for three days each week, 9.00am to 3.00pm, though in fact for many students it was four days a week as there was an optional 'flexible' study day which many students felt they needed to attend. The Certificate III course is nationally accredited to comply with the requirements of the aged care sector. As conducted at this TAFE college, the course includes the Senior First Aid course and a work experience placement in an aged care facility which is undertaken by students for two weeks (40 hours) just prior to the conclusion of the course. Students are encouraged and assisted in obtaining placements close to where they live because it increases the chances of obtaining work locally at the conclusion of the course.

As is the case with many courses, there was an initial difficulty in recruiting sufficient eligible students for this course, and as a result it was decided that the 'mature-aged' women (10 of them) join the regular Certificate III aged care classes rather than form a separate 'mature-aged' class. This provided students with greater choice of days to attend and it meant they studied with students across the whole age ranges. As we will see, this had largely positive consequences for the mature-aged students.

Training providers and employment opportunities

The Certificate III in Aged Care Work is conducted by a very wide range of registered training organisations (RTOs) including major public VET providers like TAFE colleges and community colleges, and many private-run organisations. Increasingly, the model proposed for training existing aged care workers involves partnerships between VET providers and aged care organisations (see Booth *et al* 2005). Some larger aged care facilities with their own RTO status provide the Certificate III in-house for their existing workers. The format of the course varies considerably. Some RTOs conduct the course over a period of up to one year, while others can offer the course in more concentrated form over several months. Some organisations involve lengthy periods of practical work in aged care facilities, while others include work experience over a couple of weeks. For some students there is recognition of prior learning (RPL) which may reduce the time spent in formal study (Booth *et al* 2005). Costs also vary markedly. Students in this study referred to costs of approximately $1600 for some private RTOs. In NSW TAFE at the time of this research the cost for a one-semester Certificate III course was less than $300.

As indicated already, there is currently considerable demand for aged care workers. As one of the students in this study noted, "You see it all the time in the papers, they're desperate for people". Recent government action to improve the quality of aged care (e.g. Aged Care Act 1997) and the subsequent accreditation requirements will also ensure that those who enter and work in the field need to be suitably qualified.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study was essentially qualitative – semi-structured interviews with a cohort of 10 mature-aged students at the one TAFE college, the head teacher of the Nursing section, and two teachers of the Certificate III course. The aim was to gain insights into how mature-aged students perceived the training they were receiving and how teachers tried to meet the particular needs of these students.

The interviews were undertaken during a two-week period at the mid-way point in the 18 week course. With ethics approval (from Charles Darwin University) and institutional permission, initial contact was made with the head teacher of Nursing and the research study fully was explained to her. The researcher was introduced to students at the commencement of a class and he briefly explained to them the rationale and the procedures of the study. The students chose the most suitable interview times that did not interfere with their course commitments and individual appointments were made for interviews in the adjacent study area in the library. The head teacher was interviewed at the time of the initial meeting and the two teachers were interviewed by appointment following the student interviews. The interviews followed the open-ended questionnaire format established by the welfare-to-work research team. Most interviews took between 30 and 40 minutes and they were all tape recorded and later transcribed in full.

All students interviewed were female and over 45 years of age, and they were training for AIN jobs in which 94% are female and the average age is 50 (Richardson & Martin 2004:3). All except two were unemployed on commencing the course. One of these already had some limited part time work in a nursing home and the other was on unpaid sick leave from her job as a wardsperson in a hospital following an operation. Six of the ten were Australian born, while three were of non-English speaking background (two Chinese, one Iranian), and one described herself as an Indigenous New Zealander. The three teachers were highly experienced Nursing teachers, all of whom had worked previously as registered nurses. In fact one continues to work part time as a midwife.

Intervention case findings

Training program outcomes

The outcomes of this Certificate III in Aged Care Work can be seen in terms of both human and social capital. In human capital terms, clearly jobs are the most significant outcome. This vocational course was designed to prepare students for a particular job role – assistants-in-nursing (AIN). The success or effectiveness of the course needs to be judged according to job outcomes, though this is somewhat problematic in this study given the students were interviewed at the midway point in the course. Nevertheless, teachers and students were in a position to make informed comments about likely job outcomes. Course outcomes can also be seen according to the development of the specific job skills that make up the role of an AIN. Another important outcome of the course which can also be considered human capital (see Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004:13), is personal development in the form of improved confidence and self esteem on the part of the students. In social capital terms, how the students developed their social networks and membership of various groups needs to be considered.

Jobs

The head teacher of Nursing said there are "unlimited work opportunities" for those who pass the course. One of the teachers stated that those course participants who want work as an AIN certainly do so and this is due in no small part to the "massive, massive demand" for such workers. The other teacher said, "it's the one area of nursing, I mean there's a chronic shortage of nurses

everywhere, but aged care is the huge growth area". On the basis of these comments there can be little doubt that AIN jobs in aged care are there for the taking and that students, following the course, would have little difficulty in obtaining at the very least, casual work. As one teacher explained, it is simply a matter of "walk in, have you got a job, oh well, we haven't got anything full time or part time, but we've got casual". This same teacher commented that, "the lucky thing about being an AIN is that there are so many places that need (AINs), if you are having a tough time somewhere, go somewhere else, leave, you don't have to put up with it". In this sense it would appear indeed to be an employees market.

Job outcomes from the course, however, should not be confined to AIN jobs. All three teachers mentioned the course being a "stepping stone" to get into the EN course. There are no figures available but the head teacher said "quite a lot" of students later sit the entrance test for enrolled nursing. Of the ten students interviewed in this study, five specifically said they wanted to go on to do the EN course.

The Certificate III course is meant to prepare students for, but not to directly place them in, jobs. Nevertheless, unofficially teachers have targeted "high achievers" in the course and they said they have "directed" them to more demanding AIN jobs in the adjacent major hospital rather than in the aged care sector. This happens due to the close links between the two institutions and the fact that the hospital now employs AINs. One such high achiever in the course had at the time of interview been offered a traineeship as an EN. One teacher said the hospital "can just ring me up" if they are in need of AINs.

The two-week (40 hours) work experience at the end of the course serves as a de facto employment placement process. Students are encouraged to obtain a placement in a nursing home near their homes because so often the placement results in the offer of employment at the conclusion of the work experience.

Learning the skills of an AIN

The job of an AIN is basically "hands on personal care". One teacher said that anyone can be taught to be an AIN on the job but this course "tells them why they are doing it, why it is important". The course is broad and thorough. Teachers mentioned that students learn the clinical skills of nursing, occupational health and safety, first aid, manual handling, infection control and hygiene generally. One teacher mentioned in addition, "employability" skills ("so what is your employer looking for?"), team approaches and basic computer skills. Another teacher added "documentation, reports, charts, things like that which most of them would not be familiar with". Human biology also features quite extensively as does the study of aged care subjects such as dementia and various aspects of cross cultural understanding and job-seeking skills (resumes, interview practice).

Students spoke confidently of learning about clinical nursing skills: "well I can do the blood pressure, temperature, respiration and how to do dressings". One student, well credentialed and experienced with a background in the corporate training world said her skills had improved "massively":

> I was absolutely amazed. I was arrogant enough to think I knew most of this through common sense and my skills … but there's been a lot of things that I've gone, oh … even washing your hands, I know that sounds daft …

While the clinical skills, the practical aspects of nursing and personal care were valued highly, nevertheless, several students mentioned they thought the course aimed to teach them too much, much more than was required to be an AIN. Comments included:

> we've learnt too much about the body … I feel the whole course has been bulked out if that's the right word … a lot of things aren't necessary

it's not 100% necessary to know all the workings of the heart

By way of some justification for the depth and rigour of the course, one teacher commented that acute centres are starting to use AINs a lot in the hospitals to make up for the shortfall in nursing staff. Thus there was a deliberate emphasis on providing thorough training that would assist AINs in all aspects of nursing work and for further studies in the field. One student commented on a teacher working through a text in class: "she'll always say you are an AIN and you don't need to know that, but …"

Linked to developing these vocational skills is another, related outcome of the course, study skills. Most of these mature-aged women haven't undertaken any academic study since their schooling days. They needed to learn how to schedule study times into their busy lives, how to use the library, revise notes, write assignments, prepare for class presentations. For some, the technology of learning presented difficulties. One woman said she didn't even know how to turn on the computer when she first started the course.

Personal development skills – self confidence and self esteem

Improved self confidence and self esteem were cited by most students as a key outcome for them of doing the course. One of the teachers explained that one of her roles as a teacher in this course is, "to empower people so that they have the belief in themselves that they can learn and I think once they've got that they can go anywhere". For several of the students the results of this teacher role were clearly evident, and for two of the students in particular there were quite marked transformations in the way they viewed themselves resulting from the course. One of these students was studying for the first time since leaving a very fractured schooling many years ago (she recounted she went to 26 schools as a child). She was excelling in this AIN course and it convinced her that she was as good as everyone else and it "opened" her up as a person:

> I actually feel, I know this sounds funny, but I actually feel now that I am mature, I know that's really weird … I always felt I was lacking compared to everyone else, because I always thought everyone else, well I know everyone else is not educated, but even just doing their HSC or whatever, I just somehow had these niggly doubts in me that everyone was a bit better … but now it's almost like, um, I do feel on a level playing field now, which is, I never felt that before, and it's really funny, just on the weekend I actually said to myself, I really feel mature … this whole course has really opened me up as a person.

Another student had a background in corporate training but found the work personally damaging to her self esteem:

> Yes, it's one of the things that dropped to rock bottom before I joined this course. I wore the right make-up every day, I put the suit on everyday, I walked the talk everyday, and inside I was completely and utterly convinced that anything that I was had disappeared … frankly, my ability to get on with people was zero … corporate (world) … in the end it was a dog eat dog, my feeling was that it was always my fault …

As the result of studying in this course she now feels valued:

> … my confidence in learning with people as a team and people just accepted me for who I was as a human being and valuing something in me has been really, really nice actually … it's been a long, long time since it's been ok most of the time.

One of the teachers, referring to students developing confidence in themselves, indicated how their identities as mature-aged women changed through this course:

> … and I think they look at themselves quite differently, because a lot of the mature-aged women see themselves as a wife for 20 or 30 years, you see identity is always seen by somebody else, it's never 'I'm a person in my own right, I'm capable of these things', you know.

Social network outcomes

If we adopt a fairly broad definition of social capital and see it related to network qualities, structures, transactions and types (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004), then there is evidence of extensive social capital outcomes. It has already been indicated that some women had changed in their beliefs about their personal influence on their own lives and action to solve their problems (network qualities). There was also evidence of changes in beliefs and interactions with others who are 'different' from the students in so far as they learnt how to work with older people in nursing homes, and in class, they worked together also with younger students and students from a range of different languages and cultures. One student said, "we've become a little family" indicating bonding ties (network types). Certainly many students supported other students in the course, and in particular with English language assistance (network transactions).

Increased cross-cultural understanding and a sharing of cultures was an outcome that occurred naturally through the informal interactions between students in and out of the classroom. Asked about how she got on with other overseas-born students one student said, "yes, lunches, marvellous girls, like the Nepalese girls, they couldn't eat unless they shared their lunches, we all share". Cross-cultural understanding in fact was deliberately fostered as part of the curriculum. A major exercise in the course was an individual class presentation on aspects of a different culture: "they have to research a culture and come back … we have a cultural day, they bring food from that culture and they dress in that culture's clothing, and then they do a presentation …". This aspect of the course aimed to assist students working in multicultural aged care environment, and as one teacher said, "one of the key things you have as a nurse is tolerance of others".

Issues faced by students

The interviews indicated a number of issues which present as barriers for this mature-aged group of women as they participate in training to become AINs. They included the following:

Busy, overstretched lives

Several of the women explained that their family commitments and life circumstances generally were significant barriers. An Iranian student was finding it difficult to find time to do assignments because she had three children at home. She said she would love to go to the library, sit down and relax and do her assignments, but it wasn't possible. Several students were always juggling child care times, and as a teacher noted, they have to leave earlier from classes. Another student lived some distance from the college in Sydney's outer western suburbs. She had the travel to contend with plus three boys, the oldest being 16. She was separated from her husband and she worked nights at Woolworths to make ends meet. These life circumstances were hardly conducive to studying well in her course.

Stress, vulnerability and feelings of inadequacy

Several students mentioned the stress of commencing formal studies, often for the first time since leaving school. They didn't know whether they could cope with the course, whether they had the ability, and this was reflected in quite a number of comments. One student, even with a background in corporate training, said, "I was really scared actually 'cos studying like this was very different …". A teacher spoke of another student who was particularly stressed:

> ... and she was in tears at the end of the first day, she said she needed to see me … she was really scared she wasn't going to, and she's a really articulate, clever person, but never had anyone to tell her you can do it, and I think that's how a lot of them (feel)

This same student stated in her interview: "I didn't even know if I was capable of studying" because of her fractured school history. She spoke about approaching the teacher after that first lesson

saying: "I'd like you to know a little bit about me, and I wanted her to know because, in a sense I was saying if I'm doing something wrong, be a mentor please, help me".

Some students were more indirect in demonstrating their fears, making excuses for possibly not performing too well. One said, "we're a bit slower than normal" and she said she needed to shuffle some things out of her brain so she could fit more information in, "you've really got to push it in there". Another said she was a pretty slow learner and did everything thoroughly and that, "there are other people in the course that do it with less time and effort". She compared herself to the one 20 year old in the class who didn't get stressed at all. One of the teacher said some students were putting too much pressure on themselves, "testing" themselves, and in some cases spending far too much time on the course.

One woman expressed her fears about how she might be seen by younger students in the class: "probably think, oh God this awful old woman …".

Language, literacy and numeracy

Poor spoken and written English skills were particular barriers for two of the three non English speaking background (NESB) students interviewed. Students were not screened for entry into this course, and inevitably some students had trouble coping with the language demands of the course. The one Chinese student was unable to express herself adequately in English in the interview, even with the assistance of her (also Chinese) friend. Some students had nothing but admiration for the NESB students in the course: "they have their little computers in front of them … it's just amazing ... I first thought how can they do it, how is this possible, but they do it, it's amazing". Many students provided active English language support to the NESB students recognising that it's only the language that is a barrier: "we kinda support each other … it has nothing to do with intelligence levels simply language can sometimes be a problem …". But this issue is quite complex. Another student was quite against these students being in the course because to her aged care work is essentially about communicating, "and some of these people can't even say boo". She said further that they don't contribute in class and that "if I see them getting passed it's going to devalue my certificate". The head teacher was in a difficult position but admitted that she couldn't pass students who she knew could not independently meet certain requirements in the work environment, such as writing reports. It has to be acknowledged that the work of an AIN has become increasingly "textual" in recent years due to quality system requirements and greater reporting (see Booth *et al* 2005; Wyse & Casarotto 2004).

Maths also was a barrier, but not so much for AIN work, rather for those students who wished to train as enrolled nurses. The entrance test for Certificate 1V alone was a Maths barrier for some students.

Physical ailments

Mature-aged students are more likely to have some physical/injury problems that might prove a barrier to their work. Only two students specifically made mention of this. One was off work following an operation and lifting was now out of the question in a work environment. The other student had a back injury which prevented her from lifting or standing for long periods. Optimistically she said, "it's a machine that is going to do all the lifting".

Financial costs

Financial costs as a barrier are dependant on the individual financial circumstances of students. It is not enough to assume that because there were no course fees or materials charges for these students that finance was not an issue, for some it was. One student complained about the length of the course (18 weeks) which effectively cut back her possible earning capacity during this time. She would rather have paid a lot of money up front for a shorter course as she explained:

> In actual fact, to be quite truthful, after I got started here, if I knew what I know now I probably wouldn't have done this, but my husband told me about an 8 week course for $1500. I would've actually done that … I mean, $1500 every fortnight, I'm used to getting that

Childcare and transport costs were affecting some of the students. For example, turning up for the extra (4th) day, the optional study day for one student, a single parent, was a financial sacrifice:

> I'm allotting a certain amount of money to save to get down here so I need to budget for that … for me to get home it's over an hour, so the costs come down to that, school care, extra parking for the car, petrol

One student, as indicated earlier, was offered a traineeship for enrolled nursing, but she was forced to reject the offer: "It's a year, I can't do it because with what little money you get as an enrolled nurse, it's roughly $500 a week, um, I'll be paying too much rent" (in Sydney). Instead she was anxious to get her Certificate III and then return to country NSW to work.

For another student, a single mother in outer Sydney, additional Centrelink payments of $60 per fortnight were crucial for paying her transport costs to and from the college.

The job of an AIN

The final significant barrier mentioned by the students was the nature and various aspects of the work for which they were training. It wasn't so much that the AIN job was messy and dirty, but, linked to the financial issues described above, that the pay and conditions could prevent them from working in the role. One student said "if" she pursues AIN work her fear is that after 6 or 9 months in the job she will still be on $12 an hour:

> it just would not be enough, do you know what I mean … The only way I could bump it up would be to work all night, so that's my only concern, the money just wouldn't be quite enough to keep the house going … but that's not the fault of the course

In addition to messy work and poor pay there was also the issue of shift times:

> The timing's going to be a problem because of the times most of the shifts seem to stop … which I didn't realize, you can't get day care that starts before 7.30 in the morning, and you can't get one that goes on to 6pm at night, so that's going to be a problem, juggling that

And one last issue relating to the work of an AIN as a barrier is the relative respect or lack of, that an AIN may experience. While valuable, AINs do not command high status and one former professional women in the research group anticipated some difficulties:

> My other concern is the background I've got already, um, people wonder why I am doing it, getting a bit bitchy, thinking I need to be put in my place … I'm a bit worried about that, because I don't need to be put in my place … what would be worse than a reasonably articulate AIN?

In this section I have outlined the main barriers to mature-aged women obtaining work as AINs as expressed by the students. There were quite a few other issues raised by students which haven't been outlined here, including course-related aspects such as an excessive focus on the theoretical aspects of nursing in the course, too many assignments, and the problems some women in the group have with computers and educational technology generally.

Student needs and how the training meets those needs

On the basis of the issues and barriers identified above and other comments made in the interviews, the following characteristics of a training course are required in order to successfully meet the needs of mature-aged women seeking work as AINs:

Accredited, practice-based training leading directly to jobs

The head teacher of the Nursing section stated in her interview that from 2008 all AINs working in nursing homes will be required to be accredited with at least the Certificate III in Aged Care Work. The mature-aged women interviewed in this research, provided they pass their Certificate III course, are unlikely to experience difficulties in obtaining work in view of the demand for AINs. They all indicated in the interviews that what they needed and wanted from the course were the practical skills of an AIN, followed by employment, and this course appeared to directly offer both. Two particular aspects of the course contributed to these: the physical set up of the course and the work experience component of the course. Being a large section in a large TAFE college, the Nursing section has the facilities to model those of nursing institutions, that is, there are clinical rooms where students can be taught the practical skills of nursing in close to real life situations. Having a major hospital next to the college also provided opportunities for class visits.

The work experience component (at least 40 hours over two weeks) was seen as crucial for employment opportunities, especially the way it was structured at this college. Students were encouraged to obtain a placement locally where they lived. If they had difficulties, then the teachers would assist them. Very often students were offered work at the conclusion of the work experience. This structure is in contrast to other RTOs where work experience placements take place at set institutions and where job offers, if they occur, are less likely to be taken up by students who may live a long distance away. The downside for the teaching staff, however, is they have to travel extensively to visit individual students for assessment purposes, but the trade off with job opportunities are seen to be worth it.

An emotionally supportive learning environment

The vulnerability experienced by many mature-aged students as they return to formal study, often after an absence of many years, can be addressed to some extent by ensuring an emotionally supportive educational environment. Fears, tears and feelings of inadequacy on the part of mature-aged women have been revealed in this study, but these women stayed the course and enjoyed the learning experience due largely to the support they received. This support can be provided by teachers and fellow students and it is largely to do with developing social capital - relationships and the development of social networks that enable students to feel they belong.

For teachers it would appear to be not just how they taught (covered in a later section) but an attitude of mind, the extent to which they were open and understanding of the needs of these students. One such teacher said, "I think they need a lot more nurturing". This was the same teacher who comforted a distressed, tearful student mentioned earlier in this report. The teacher further stated, "I guess it is good because they obviously feel comfortable in having a cry and letting it out and letting you know". It was essential that teachers not treat students in a patronising or condescending manner and students recognised and appreciated this. All students were full of praise for the teachers, with one Iranian student going so far as to describe them as "angels". Interestingly, one teacher did not meet these expectations at the beginning of the course and a student complained ("I felt she was undermining not just me but the whole class by her attitude"). A three-way meeting was later convened involving the teacher, student and head teacher, and the teacher subsequently changed ("she was fantastic after that").

The bonding ties between students appeared equally important and in this course it started from the outset: "the second day we just all got together, close to each other, it's good". Students felt they were in this together, there was a good "we" feeling: "A lot of us, we sit in the morning before class or at morning tea and discuss our work and share each other's information …". Another students said, "we all pull each other up … it's not a competition, most of the group are pretty supportive of each other".

Diverse student groups

Linked very much to this last section on the bonding ties between students is the diversity in the student group. Initially it was proposed that the course be predominantly for mature-aged women, but with a reduced number of applicants meeting these criteria, the decision was made to combine these students with the regular Certificate III applicants. Surprisingly, not one of the mature-aged students interviewed felt comfortable with a mature-aged only class, and many of them suggested it would have been boring. They thrived on the diversity of the group seen in terms of ages, gender and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. One said, "the 20 year old is very laid back but a very nice man and fits beautiful in that group". Another said, "one of them is exactly the same age as my daughter … for me it's fantastic". With the age range from 20 years to over 50 years, one students said, "we are listening to all the different ideas … they see things differently". For most of these students sitting next to a NESB student with very poor spoken English was not a negative:

> No, I actually find, because that's part of the team work, so for me … they are really lovely ladies, they're just as smart as anybody else, it's only the language, so, actually having them there makes it a lot less boring 'cos I have to rethink again what it is I'm understanding to support them …

A flexible course structure, equity and an interactive pedagogy

It has already been noted that many of the mature-aged women in this group have busy, overstretched lives and the course needed to accommodate this to some degree. The course was structured flexibly in so far as attendance was required for three days per week with an optional 4th day for those who felt they needed it. For this optional day students were required to indicate they would be attending and made appointments with the teacher. Thus there was provision for some small group work which one student explained, gave her "a bit more security". Within the classroom there was flexibility too, as teachers suggested students could study privately in the library if they wished. This was particularly useful if the teacher needed to spend extra time with some students with language difficulties while the other students were getting bored: "we understand that you are keeping up, just go to the library, we don't mind, that's fine". One teacher was also reasonably flexible with times for handing in assignments: "if I give them an assignment date, there's a bit of flexibility on my part too, let me know and I'll just extend it". This teacher explained that it was about being realistic as all assessments had to be passed for students to complete the course and therefore "come and see me if you can't do it on time".

How teachers taught was also a crucial issue. These mature-aged students were not going to suffer overly didactic "chalk and talk". One of the students said she would have left within two weeks if that was the pedagogy employed. The students wanted to be treated as a group and to be encouraged to interact fully in the classroom: "we all interrelate, we all ask questions, she asks questions". The focus also had to be on equitable treatment. One of the students said, "and what I really do like is, they don't lift up any people who are maybe doing better … we are all equal".

One teacher talked about the need to be flexible, to mix up activities "so nothing is didactic for the whole day … or not doing that at all so when we come back after lunch we come down to the clinical room which everybody loves". This teacher wanted feedback from students and recognised that mature-aged women in particular are more likely to provide such feedback: "they'll often come up, they'll say that was really good … or they'll say I really find this way of learning good". Alternatively, if their needs aren't being met they are less likely to participate: "Like one of my students said, we had a guest speaker in, (she) said I can't stand this person because they are sarcastic and too critical blah, blah, blah, and she left" (the student left). Pedagogy for these students needs to allow for and encourage greater voice on the part of these students if it is to meet their needs, and this can best be achieved with highly interactive relations between teacher and student.

Support services

It has been suggested that some students need additional support with language, literacy and numeracy. Nearly all TAFE colleges provide tutorial support conducted by either ABE (Adult Basic Education) or ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) sections and the head teacher in this study said she regularly referred students to tutorial support. But support extends beyond pedagogy to other areas. Teachers and students spoke of the availability of free counselling services within the college to assist those students not coping with the course for a variety of reasons. The library, in this case conveniently located next to the Nursing section, was also heavily used by these students for references, texts, private study and the use of computers. And finally, there are other support services that should not be neglected in contributing to meeting the needs of students such as the college canteen that provided the meeting location for much of the important social networking that went on between students. The college association also subsidised car parking at the college which was cited by one or two students as significant from a budget perspective in enabling them to stay in the course.

Reduced financial costs

This final student need is largely self explanatory in view of the discussion earlier on the financial costs of this course. Some students needed financial support beyond course fee-exemptions in order to manage their transport and child care costs. In view of the enormous demand for AINs in the aged care sector it would appear folly to have potential AINs deterred through such costs.

Implications and conclusions

Course success factors

The previous section has demonstrated not only the needs of these mature-aged students, but how the Certificate III in Aged Care Work conducted at this TAFE college actually meets those needs. In so doing, this study has identified a number of factors that make for a successful program for unemployed, mature-aged women who wish to become assistants-in-nursing. In short then, these courses need to be accredited and practice-based leading to jobs, emotionally supportive of students, and involve a diversity of students. The courses should be conducted flexibly to take account of students' busy lives and their varying skill levels, treat students equally, and pedagogy needs to be varied and interactive. Support services are essential, including language, literacy and numeracy, and students should not be deterred from participating due to financial costs.

Much of the above should be of little surprise and they are largely in accord with previous work on the features of a good training program for aged care workers (e.g. Booth *et al* 2005:24). They are also in accord with much of literature on successful learning for older people (see Gelade *et al* 2003) and they involve social risk management in order to mitigate against the risks of participating in formal education (McIntyre 2005). This study has demonstrated in particular the risks associated with feelings of vulnerability, inadequacy and lack of self confidence on the part of these mature-aged women that were overcome with flexible and appropriate teaching. There were financial risks also for some students.

Towards training models

With a crisis in the recruitment and retention of aged care workers (DEST 2001) and with the situation due to worsen as the population ages in coming decades, it is important to know how best to address the training needs of new workers. There is already research on how best to train existing aged care workers, seen to involve partnerships between RTOs and aged care organisations, the recognition of prior learning (RPL), and on-site training (Booth *et al* 2005). But

this current research study focuses on the training and recruitment of *new* aged care staff, and mature-aged ones at that. It may often be the case that AINs can be employed in nursing homes initially as untrained personnel and they gain the training and the Certificate III qualifications on-the-job. But the alternative is to undertake the training first which was the preferred option for the mature-aged students in this study. As this study has indicated, the Certificate III in Aged Care Work currently appears to provide students with considerable work options, such is the demand for qualified aged care workers.

This project has demonstrated that formal VET institutions such as TAFE can and do provide flexible and appropriate training that meet the specific needs of unemployed, mature-aged people. Further, there is scope to improve the course. The head teacher mentioned she would like the course to become even more flexible with distance learning materials developed for some more theoretical aspects of the course and for the face-to-face teaching to focus mainly on the practical, clinical aspects of the AIN role. There was also scope for online learning but this could be problematic for some of the mature-aged women unfamiliar with computer technology. RPL was also considered very important by the head teacher and it was available to those who sought it. However, consistent with the research on RPL and mature-aged job seekers, it was sought mainly by those already established in the workforce (see Cameron 2004). Not one of the unemployed, mature-aged women in this study sought RPL or indicated it was relevant to them.

Formal organisational partnerships did not feature prominently in this study though such partnerships are seen as the way forward in aged care training (Booth *et al* 2005) and for the education and training of older people generally (McIntyre 2005). Nevertheless, there was evidence of informal partnerships. For example, there were strong links between the Nursing section and the local hospital for training purposes and employment, and also with local aged care organisations. One partnership that appeared to be lacking, however, was that between the Nursing section at this TAFE college and job agencies. However, it needs to be pointed out that this was the first course conducted by this Nursing section with specific funding to train mature-aged women in the Certificate III in Aged Care Work. Further, the course did not specifically target the unemployed but rather, existing AINs in the aged care sector. It was just that those who responded to the open advertising in the local press were mainly new recruits to the aged are sector and not existing aged care workers.

Lessons learnt

While this course was not conducted as a specific 'welfare-to-work' initiative, in effect, with nearly all of the students unemployed at the time of the course, it did mirror such an initiative, especially as it targeted a welfare-to-work target group, mature-aged people. Thus, lessons learnt in this study should be applicable to welfare-to-work initiatives for mature aged people generally, and women in particular, notwithstanding the fact that the students in this course chose to undertake the training. As a result, their motivation may well be greater than for some 'welfare' students who are 'obliged' to attend training courses.

In summary, this case study has demonstrated a successful course conducted by a formal VET institution in which 10 mainly unemployed, mature-aged women have been trained in the work of an AIN over an 18 week period. The case study has demonstrated important insights into the perspectives of these mature-aged students and their teachers. It has shown that these women often had competing priorities in their lives, especially involving their families, and that these had to be taken into account in providing a flexible, accredited course. These students sought directly relevant vocational skills that would lead to jobs. The research has shown that some of these women, despite their obvious skills and sometimes professional backgrounds, could suffer debilitating stress and feelings of inadequacy in a new and unfamiliar formal learning environment. They required understanding, even a degree of "nurturing" by teaching staff, especially in the early stages of the course before they gained confidence in their abilities. These women indicated their need not only

for an emotionally secure learning environment, but one where they were free to express their opinions and contribute. The classroom needed to be highly interactive.

Interestingly, while the above factors draw attention to the specific learning needs of these mature-aged women, not one of them wanted to be part of a 'mature-age-only' group of students. Almost without exception, they valued the diversity of the student groups. They preferred to be in a class that included also younger students, male students, and those from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It was the diversity that added interest and prevented boredom. The challenge for teaching staff was to address the specific needs of these mature-aged women within a regular classroom environment. This required a high degree of professional knowledge of nursing, a caring, understanding and open attitude and excellent class management skills.

The research also demonstrated the practical barriers of poor language and literacy skills and the need to provide support, especially for those students with non-English speaking backgrounds. And finally, but very importantly, issues of finance. Some students struggled to participate in the course with financial problems associated with transport, childcare and maintaining their home lives generally. It didn't help that the industry they were training for is generally poorly paid, and hence one of the main reasons there are jobs aplenty.

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Case 2: The role of vocational training in Welfare to Work reforms—Parents Returning to Work

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Introduction

As part of the Welfare to Work scheme, Centrelink and the various Job Search agencies refer their clients to providers of a mutual obligation Work for the Dole program. Two of these providers are Provider A and Provider B. I interviewed those people in charge of Provider A and the Provider B Work for the Dole programs, one consultant who works with Work for the Dole clients and twelve clients who are parents returning to work.

Context

Depending on their age and circumstance, all Work for the Dole participants are required to work in not- for- profit organizations for periods of 6, 12 or 15 hours per week over a continuous 26 week period. The very long term unemployed (those who have been on Centrelink payments for more than three years) are required to work 25 per week for ten months.

Provider B has always placed their clients into various work settings however until mid 2006, Provider A was the only provider in Western Australia allowed to place Work for the Dole clients into schools which they did exclusively. While still retaining this right, their renewed contract has broadened to allow them to place clients into other not- for profit work environments.

Before working in any school each client has to attain a Police clearance and this could take up to three months finalise. Until mid 2006, each Provider A client waiting for their Police clearance, participated in 15 hours of in- house training (two consecutive days of 7.5 hours) each week which counted towards their overall program hours.

The difficulty in providing VET to the Work for the Dole participants lay in how the Work for the Dole program functioned. There was a revolving door of clients coming into and out of the program —and therefore the courseroom—on any given day. Additionally as soon as their Police clearances came through clients left the courseroom (sometimes in the middle of the day) to take up work in their allocated school.

The Australian Quality Training Framework which governs the delivery of vocational education and training does not allow for this revolving door of Work for the Dole students from widely varying socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Therefore the Work for the Dole program which falls under Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) and the AQTF which falls under the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) are not compatible.

Because Provider A clients now have the choice of working for not- for- profit organizations in various industries only those few who choose to work in a school require a Police clearance. This means that the window of opportunity which previously saw each Provider A client receiving training while waiting for their Police clearance has all but vanished.

Provider B clients do not have the choice of working in a school and are placed into work as soon as possible. Consequently they do not have the option of receiving training, however unlike Provider A, Provider B clients have access to a wide range of support counselling (Finance, Migrant Services, Domestic Violence, Psychological to name a few).

Methodology

The methodology involved comparative research and design methodology supplemented by both qualitative and quantitative techniques for data analysis as appropriate in two sites. Ethnographic data collection techniques were used involving semi-structured questionnaires and interviews of a sample group of twelve clients and three provider representatives, two of which ran the Work for the Dole programs in these two sites. Additionally I called on my personal observations over an eight month period where I trained some 500 Work for the Dole participants. Comparison and analysis of the case study data used across the two sites occurred using thematic and discourse analytic techniques of the situations found and responses to the surveys and interviews.

Intervention case findings

Outcomes of programs

Outcomes related to providers

Providers focus on placing clients into unpaid work as quickly as possible after they enter the Work for the Dole program. When a client completes the program, they can be counted as an 'outcome' under the terms of their DEWR Service Contracts. Failure to meet the yearly targeted 'outcomes' places a provider at risk of losing their contracts. Because of the push to achieve outcomes, anything that keeps a client form being placed in work – including training- is seen by the providers as being a distraction for the main thrust of the program.

One provider explained that if a client obtained paid employment before completing their Work for the Dole placement, the only way that the they could count that person as an 'outcome' against their contract is if the client completed 13 continuous weeks of *paid* employment in that particular job. If the client did not complete the Work for the Dole program or failed to complete 13 continuous weeks of employment, then they could not count that person as an 'outcome' against their contract.

Each of the providers stated that because of the push to achieve their contractual outcomes and thus receive their payments, Work for the Dole is now less about helping people gaining skills and knowledge and more about ensuring that participants meet their Centrelink payment obligations.

To understand why training is not encouraged, the payment model used by DEWR for this program was explained by one provider as follows:

- "18 – 20 year old clients are expected to work 12 hours per week for 26 continuous weeks (in not- for- profit organisations).
- 21-40 year olds are expected to work 15 hours per week for 26 continuous weeks.
- 40+ year olds are expected to work 6 hours per week for 26 continuous weeks.
- The very long term unemployed (those who have been unemployed and receiving Centrelink payments for more than three years) are expected to work 25 hours per week for 10 continuous months rather than 26 weeks".

She went on to say that according to the current DEWR service Contract, the formlae for counting placements is as follows:

- "A 'Work for the Dole Place' is a 26 week period used to provide work experience under the Work for the Dole programme for: - 150, 310, 390 or 1100 hours (depending on age or client group for a Mutual Obligation Participant) or- 150 hours for a Voluntary Participant.

- ✧ The servicing of one Full-time Work for the Dole Participant (Very long term unemployed i.e. unemployed for over 3 years) for 1100 hours equates to 2.5 Work for the Dole Places.
- ✧ 'Completed Places' The number of Completed Places achieved is calculated in two steps- the number of hours a Participant has completed in their Work for the Dole Activity(s) divided by their Participation Requirement (for a VLT Work for the Dole Participant, this result is multiplied by 2.5) - the individual results established in step one for each Participant who has been, or is, referred to a provider in the Employment Service Area (ESA is a geographical region in which the work place is located), added together to calculate the total number of Completed Places for that ESA.

For the purposes of this calculation, the number of hours a Participant has completed in their Work for the Dole Activity(s) can be no more than their total Participation Requirement.

For example:

Participant A has attended for 50 hours of their 150 hour Participation Requirement.
Participant B has attended for 130 hours of their 390 hour Participation Requirement.
Participant C has attended for 550 hours of their 1100 hour Participation Requirement.

Step 1:
Participant A has achieved 50/150 = 0.33
Participant B has achieved 130/390 = 0.33
Participant C has achieved 550/1100 x 2.5 = 1.25

Step 2:
0.33 + 0.33 + 1.25 = 1.91 Completed Places

'***Utilisation Rate***' measures the proportion of Completed Places to Allocated Places which as at the start of the Service Period is benchmarked at 75 percent, but which may be varied by DEWR at its absolute discretion by written notice.

'***Available Places***' refers to the number of Work for the Dole Places that DEWR requires in an ESA. The number of Available Places per Performance Period per ESA is calculated in accordance with the Employment Services Contract, Clauses 9.3 to 9.6.

'***Allocated Places***' refers to the number of Work for the Dole Places allocated to the provider at the start of each Performance Period.

'***Additional Places***' means an additional number of Work for the Dole Places that may be allocated part way through a Performance Period when the requirements of the Employment Services Contract, Clause 9.18 are met".

Because of the conditions of their service contracts, each of the providers interviewed suggested that their main concern had to be about achieving their targeted 'outcomes' as previously defined or they risk losing their contract with DEWR.

Further they suggested that because so many clients fail to achieve an outcome status, they must focus on starting and keeping high volumes of clients in work situations to allow for attrition rates. They consider that there is very little available time, effort or available resources to engage in any form of training although each suggested that this would be highly beneficial to the success of the Work for the Dole program.

Outcomes related to clients

Most clients considered that a successful program outcome would be if they attained paid employment in a job that they liked and which did not cause them financial hardship.

Issues faced by clients

Barriers to the Program

Each of the interviewed parents who have young children suggested that the mandatory entry into Work for the Dole programs from July 1st this year 2006 would compound the stress in their lives. (Up until July 1st, entry into the Work for the Dole program was voluntary). Those with lower levels of education felt that they would be forced into menial work at less pay than they receive currently in welfare.

Each of them held grave concerns that they would be worse off in paid employment than they are currently on the dole. Their view was that once employed they would lose numerous benefits (including health and transport related benefits) and that any benefits associated with employment would be negated by the cost of child care, travel costs and having to buy appropriate work clothing. While most people interviewed saw the overall long-term advantages of being employed, they did not see how they could get to that stage if in the short-term they would not have enough money in the hand to feed and house their families

Those parents of young children despaired of the high cost of childcare which they would be forced to pay if indeed childcare places could be found.

Transport was another major issue for parents. Most of the people on the program do not own cars, or cannot afford to run them and so rely on public transport which is subsidised when on the dole but which they will have to pay full cost once employed.

One provider confided that they have a significant number of clients who belong to feuding families. They suggested that entering into the territory of another family for work could put some people at risk. Because of this, they had knowledge that a portion of their clients have fears about taking public transport out of their 'safe' areas. Some of the Muslim women that I interviewed also feared ridicule and physical abuse by others if they step out of their 'safe areas'.

One provider stated that it was common for some migrant family members to dissuade the client from participating in the Work for the Dole program. He suggested that a lot of their clients provide companionship and interpreting services for their older family members who cannot speak English.

A number of parents interviewed considered that because of their perception of the new IR laws, the potential for workplace harassment and bullying and working in dead- end jobs meant that there was no real chance of breaking out of their poverty cycle. In these cases their morale was low and more than one parent confided that they suffered from clinical depression.

Some of the single parents who were interviewed were extremely worried about being forced into paid employment or voluntary work when their youngest child turned 8 years of age. With little possibility of attaining child care places or being unable to afford child care, they thought that their only option would be to leave their children unsupervised before and after school. They considered that 8 years of age was far too young to be left unattended in their high-crime neighbourhoods. These parents were very concerned for their childrens' mental and physical safety.

While the pre-mentioned issues may not seem to directly relate to training, they were of great concern to the interviewees who considered that even if training was widely available to them, they would not be able to concentrate while these worries or the manifestations of these worries existed.

One provider commented that over the last two years there has been a marked increase in the number of Work for the Dole client referrals for domestic violence counselling and drug and alcohol related counselling. This provider speculated whether these and other crime related issues would hinder effective adult learning if training was available through the Work for the Dole program.

Research would indicate that the more educated parents who enter into the Work for the Dole program have a better chance of using the program as a stepping stone into paid work. For example one client who has a BA in Writing and Visual Arts picked up a lot of skills from both her training while at Provider A and from her work placement in schools. She was easily able to find paid work in schools once she received her ID number from the Education Department. This work fitted in nicely with her children's school hours and thus her transition into paid work was a smooth one.

It could be argued that parents who are less educated, those with mental or physical illnesses (which are not always disclosed to the Work for the Dole providers because of the Privacy Act or not identified by unskilled Job Capacity Assessors), migrants and others with literacy and numeracy issues or with low level education levels, find the lack of low level, available, meaningful training to help them attain and keep in paid work a real barrier to getting out of the repetitive Work for the Dole cycle.

The research seems to indicate that the direct barriers to training are that training opportunities do not exist for most Work for the Dole clients; many do not have the entry level skills and/or knowledge and certainly not the funds required to enter into formal VET courses; there is no lead in from meaningful structured, work related, non accredited training into accredited training and no pre AQF 1 (Certificate 1) courses which could provide meaningful training which would assist clients attain and keep work.

One provider suggested that the training credits that a client receives on successful completion of the Work for the Dole program are often used for training which does not really help the client to attain long-term work. The training credits are valued at about $800 and apparently this is not enough to pay for most formal VET courses. It was also suggested that the training credits can't be used for the type of literacy and numeracy courses that are often needed i.e. with access to interpreters or during certain hours when children are at school. One client indicated that they had been all but harassed by a Centrelink staff member about using their training credits for a fork lift license when the client had no interest in that type of work.

Needs of clients

The providers acknowledge that the Work for the Dole program is not a training program but it does however provide on-the-job training opportunities and on completion, participants may apply for training credits. In this sense it was suggested that it acts as a pre-employment and training preparation program. Several clients argued however that the quality and availability of on-the-job training varied greatly.

As previously stated Work for the Dole is a mutual obligation program where participants are required to work a certain number of hours in exchange for their Centrelink payments. Providers are expected to achieve targeted numbers of outcomes as previously identified and do not have the time, staff, money or freedom in their contracts to ensure that training is delivered or training outcomes are achieved.

Training is supposed to be delivered by the Job Network Providers but because of numerous problems, including the lack of skills within the Job Provider Networks meaningful training is rare. The training needs seem to fall into several categories.

1 For people who have a low level education

There is a sub- set of parents on the Work for the Dole program who are very young women (between 15 and 22) who have young children. Most face the probability of mandatory work in the next few years when their youngest child turns 8. As they cannot see a way in which they can find employment and look after their children, their solution at the moment is to keep having children and take the baby bonus while at the same time delay forced entry into paid employment.

Clients considered that there was a need for meaningful, structured courses to help handle immediate situations which might be a barrier to attaining or keeping employment. Literacy and numeracy training and computer skills were viewed the most sought after training needs. Courses which address things such as how to budget Centrelink payments, how to handle personal interactions at home and work, assertion, anger management and other communication skills were raised as training needs as was problem solving and learning how to deal with partners/parents who are opposed to their taking up employment.

Work related courses which stream into industries in which Work for the Dole placements exist were considered to be helpful. Any appropriate training which would allow clients to move into paid work, formal training in how to hold a job, time management, problem solving, what is expected of a person in a job and how to behave in the workplace and communication skills were also important skills which one provider thought should be made available to all clients regardless of what industry they would be entering.

2 For middle skilled clients

At the moment all Work for the Dole work experience has to be with not for profit organisations. Many parents and each of the providers suggested that if the rules were changed and they could also place people into for profit organisations then individuals might have a better chance of going on to apprenticeships or traineeships. At the moment many would not be able to jump straight into such work.

3 For clients who have completed year 12 or above

The need here was for meaningful training to help them to lead into either further education or the potential of attaining higher level work

4 For parents or other carers

A number of clients expressed a wish to receive training in how to either set up a small business from home which would allow them to look after their own small children or to know what options were available to them to be able to work from home.). Almost every parent interviewed stated that they wanted to work if it meant that their children would be safe and they could get ahead financially.

5 For those who will not find sustainable work

There is a small percentage of people who just do not want to work. This classification of people needs to be excluded from those with a mental or physical illness which precludes them from being able to work. However it was suggested that the Work for the Dole program was not the program for either of these groups of people. The providers considered that the Work for the Dole program should not be a mechanism used for tracking or documenting breeches so that Centrelink can suspend payments. Neither providers or clients could give me any idea about what really should be done to make these people employable.

Provider needs

Both providers suggested that there are several problems associated with the Work for the Dole program as it stands, although both agree that a mutual obligation program is needed and can be extremely valuable for some clients.

1 They (the providers) have no control over who enters their Program

As previously stated the Work for the Dole participants are sent to the providers by the Job Network providers and Centrelink and the providers do not choose who may and may not enter the program. Centrelink assessors provide capability assessments to determine a client's level of expertise; determine whether they are classified as being long-term unemployed; determine whether they have mental illnesses and so on. According to each of the providers, the Job Capability Assessors apparently are often themselves untrained. I have personal experience where three of my former Work for the Dole students have since been hired as Assessors by various Job Network Providers and received no real training in how to assess others.

The providers consider that some people should never be referred to the Work for the Dole program as they have little chance of ever being able to successfully completing the program as it stands. They argue that entry into the program disadvantages both the client and the Work for the Dole providers under the terms of the current DEWR contract when it is inevitable that an 'outcome' cannot or will not be achieved.

The research shows that Work for the Dole providers are not allowed to refuse anyone from entering the Work for the Dole program although they can exit them once the client is in breech of their obligation. However there are a lot of resources tied up in looking after a client to the point of them being in breeched. As far as the providers are concerned some of their clients have just been shuffled from one part of the system to another in order to get them off the Job Network/Centrelink books. There are a number of clients who keep going through the system and are undergoing the Work for the Dole program for the second and sometimes third time with no hope of a resolution being achieved according to the providers.

2 Contractual restrictions

Each of the providers that I spoke with has a genuine regard and care for the well being of their clients. However, their contracts with DEWR restricts them from being able to provide training services to their clients. They want to be set up in such a way that those who need it can have meaningful training and suggest that they be allowed to place people into streams whereby those who could cope with work are placed into work and those who need training undergo formal, structured training with set outcomes (which could be modularized with a work component) to get those who need it up to a level where they can advance to Work for the Dole work programs. It is their consideration that if DEWR allowed training outcomes to be counted in addition to current outcomes, then the focus could shift into providing a broader set of strategies that would assist people into paid employment.

3 Placement restrictions

As previously stated, placements are only into not for profit organisations which greatly inhibits the career prospects of many clients. The providers would like to see a change in their contracts to allow those who are suitable candidates to undergo work experience in for profit organisations with a view of the work experience leading into apprenticeships or traineeships or other full time paid employment.

They need their contracts to be changed to allow them to provide training to their clients. They want the hours used on training to count as hours against the program and actual training outcomes

to be counted in the same way that Work for the Dole completions and 13 continuous weeks in employment are counted as outcomes against their contracts with DEWR.

The providers consider that once these aspects have been changed that they could offer meaningful training that actually suits the needs of various groups of people and would result in improved morale, skill sets and possibility of attaining employment. At this stage they could not determine whether this was best done, directly or through partnering with training specialists.

Factors that contribute to success of the Work for the Dole program.

The research indicates that the main factors to successful completion are:

- ✧ The high level of caring, discipline, guidance and general support that the Work for the Dole providers give to their clients on an ongoing basis and most definitely their ability to build strong relationships with their clients.
- ✧ Meaningful, structured training which as was once available to all Provider A participants until last year and which provides people with the skills and knowledge to cope with work and the more common workplace situations.
- ✧ Participants who have a positive emotional and mental state and who have a strong educational background on which to build and/or the support from their families.
- ✧ The ability to place people into work which suits their emotional and work needs – that is matching the type of work with the client rather than 'plugging holes' as one provider suggested.
- ✧ Continuous on the job training by skilled people who take an interest in the clients.
- ✧ Support programs to help people in distress

Vignettes

The Work for the Dole program has experienced some spectacular successes.

When Provider A was providing training to all participants, there was a case where one parent had been on drugs and had up until just prior to beginning the program, she had lived on the streets. This client had very little education and came to the program with obvious low self-esteem. Most of her contributions to discussions were prefaced by apologies. She thoroughly enjoyed the company of others on the course and felt included rather than socially alienated. Over a couple of weeks she opened up and confided that she had a teenage daughter who had run away from home and that she did not know how to stop fighting with her or how to help her daughter. She found support in her Work for the Dole peers, her trainer and from the provider organisation, each of whom tried to be of assistance in their various ways. Over the weeks this client underwent training from Certificate III Teacher Assistant course. Her confidence grew and she learned communication skills and various strategies for working in a classroom situation and ways of helping both a teacher and the students. This client received about 120 hours of training before being placed into a school as a Teacher's Aide.

She was so effective as a Teacher's aide that the Principal offered her paid work in the school and the school offered to pay for her Certificate III in Teachers Assistant and then the local Lions Club said that they would sponsor her Dip Ed. if she wanted to continue. She also used her skills to handle problems with her daughter and brought her daughter home and made sure that she got a job.

This was definitely a team effort and a Work for the Dole success where the work of six people at Provider A and people in the school combined with the participant's desire to change her circumstance lead to a very positive outcome.

There are however many clients on the Work for the Dole program successfully completed their Work for the Dole programs through both Provider A and Centrecare found paid work and exited the program successfully and three clients went on to study a Dip. Ed at University.

Implications and conclusions

If the underlying intention of the Work for the Dole program is essentially to provide a supervised environment where participants work in exchange for Centrelink payments, then there is no room for VET training or any form of training other than that acquired on the job by socially minded individuals in the current contact.

If however the purpose of Work for the Dole includes using the program as a stepping stone or lead-in to paid employment then various changes should be made to the program which would also accommodate VET involvement. Suggested changes might include:

- Job Networks/Centrelink ensuring that their job Capacity Assessors are qualified/trained to assess Work for the Dole candidates accurately.
- The providers considered that the name of the program should be changed from Work for the Dole as that has negative connotations for both clients and in the wider community.
- Entry into the Work for the Dole program into one of three streams – either 1) Support to raise self –esteem and handle immediate problems which would inhibit successful progress, 2) work-related or life-skills skills such as communication, handling money, job readiness, how to handle work and so on or 3) Ability to be placed directly into work.
- DEWR contracts to determine and accept 'outcomes' for all three streams in their Service Provider Contracts.
- DEWR contracts to be expanded to allow work experience into for profit organisations as well as not for profit organisations.
- Training streams to lead into several various paid employment options, including work from home options or starting up small businesses
- VET to expand to include sub AQF 1 competencies and courses.
- A one off cash bonus incentive for participants who complete their various Work for the Dole programs and complete either one year consecutive employment, the completion of the first year of a traineeship or an apprenticeship or completion of first year in own business. This was considered by parent and providers as being far more valuable and motivating payment than the baby bonus.

On this basis there is a role for VET if it looks outside the AQTF and provides meaningful pre-employment and employment programs which can be run prior to, during and after employment. While some such programs are run by Centrelink and the Job-Search Networks, a national set of programs which could flow into the formal VET system could be highly successful for Work for the Dole clients and it remove some of the stigma associated with being unemployed.

There is an argument for VET courses to dip many levels below AQF 1 This would allow a seamless flow into mainstream education and skills attainment thus providing an education pathway to match a person's career path and a logical transition into traditional AQF levels of competency.

It could be argued that because unemployment affects all areas of a person's life the subject of Welfare to Work should be treated with a whole of Government approach. Currently various Departmental reforms and initiatives seemingly work against each other.

As previously stated the DEST's AQTF is at odds with the DEWR's Work for the Dole program. Another seemingly competing initiative is the Baby Bonus which, while perhaps not the intent, does in reality, encourage many young and often poorly educated people to have children.

It could be argued that this current baby Bonus will contribute to a greater burden on the public purse in years to come through increased welfare payments in the short –term and an increase of a wide range of social problems when these parents are forced back into work when their youngest child turns 8 years of age leaving a large number of children unattended. Other initiatives while perhaps not competing, could possibly add to parents not engaging in full-time work. Most sole parents of young children interviewed felt that under the new IR laws if employed they would lose their jobs should they be forced to stay home to tend to sick children. They considered that while the rights of the employer are protected under the IR Laws, their children's rights might not be protected and their own rights to parent their child would be endangered.

In conclusion, as long as the Work for the Dole program rides on the back of providers who care greatly about their clients, the program will always be successful to some degree. However if the purpose of the program is really to get people off the dole and into long-term paid employment, there must be whole of Government approach to ensure that there ceases to be clashing Departmental priorities/initiatives and the problem of long-term unemployment can be handled in the most effective manner possible.

Case 3: Case study of providers of services for disabled Welfare to Work Clients: Perspectives on employment and training services for unemployed people with disabilities

Jane Gunn
Protea Training South Australia

Introduction

This case study features perspectives of providers in the field of disability employment services and training organisations, which collaborate with those services.

Changes effected by the Welfare to Work legislation in July 2006 for people with disabilities included the significant move to put new applicants who would have previously been entitled to pension-level payments onto allowance level payments. As well there was a change to the compliance system for people on allowances. This includes a maximum eight week no payment penalty.

Some who were previously eligible for Disability Support Pension (DSP) are now put on Newstart Allowance or Austudy, which are paid at lower rates. Under this arrangement people with disabilities who are jobless will receive about $45 less a week, and those who are studying fulltime will receive $110 – 165 less a week.[1]

Roth[2] summarises forms of income support and employment support which the Federal government provides.

Context

Providers of employment services to disabled clients

As mentioned elsewhere in this research, there is a wide range of services available to people with disabilities who are either seeking or required to seek employment. These exceed the number of programs for parents returning to work and mature aged people.

These include DOES and DENS[3] and Supported Employment Services. Clients undergo a number of assessment procedures to determine their eligibility for allowances or pensions.

In addition to the services funded by the Federal government, state governments also provide services. As noted in Appendix 2 the number of services for people with disabilities is significantly higher than for the other two groups researched in this project.

[1] ACOSS Welfare to Work – effects and solutions (2005?)

[2] Roth L *Government Policy and Services to Support and Include People with Disabilities* Executive Summary p1

[3] Disability Open Employment Services and Disability Employment Network Services

Methodology

The methodology used in this study was qualitative, using the same semi- structured interview schedule which the other case studies employed.

The interview schedule was emailed to participants prior to the interview along with supporting documentation, outlining the Ethics Clearance from CDU and a brief document explaining the purpose of the research and the procedure to be followed.

The interviews were held over a three month period. Managers, recruitment officers, consultants, training officers and lecturers were interviewed from organisations. Only one organisation agreed to refer a client for interviewing, thus restricting the amount of data which could be collected reflecting the views of clients.

Gaining access to participants proved more difficult than originally expected. A number of organisations were approached and declined to participate. At the end of the period it became evident that some providers feel that sharing successful strategies may prove harmful to their business. In a climate in which competition for clients, funding and 'star rating' from DEWR is intense, there is reluctance to share information about long-standing successes which may be picked up and incorporated by less established organisations seeking a greater share of the market. As some interview questions focus on successful strategies the reluctance is understandable.

The interviews were taped and transcribed and participants given the opportunity to make minor corrections. In two cases the interviewee requested that the interview not be taped. Summaries of these discussions were written, and forwarded to the participants for changes to be made.

Participants had from 3 -20 years experience in the disability services field and were both men and women.

Three agencies are Job Networks, two of which deal solely with disabled clients and have DENS (Disability Employment Network Services) status, offering both a capped and an uncapped program. The third has two contracts with DEWR, one a general contract, the other for people who have disabilities or who are disadvantaged.

One agency was a Supported Employment Service which channels some of their clients to open employment and also takes people who are referred from Job Networks, under the Welfare to Work arrangements.

The remaining two organisations involved in the research are large RTOs which work with the previously mentioned agencies.

Intervention case findings

Outcomes

'Work First'

One interviewee from a Job Network summarised the position his organisation is in, as requiring the focus of 'Work First', which is the mantra of DEWR, the body which provides both funding and 'star ratings' to the agencies.

While this organisation had previously been able to refer clients to training which matched their identified interests, and to offer clients other support such as bus tickets to job interviews, these sources of funding had been severely restricted following the changes in July 2006.

This organisation indicated that participants who qualified for the program targeted at 'disabled' or 'disadvantaged' clients (used interchangeably by this interviewee) would be asked to identify what kind of work they could do now.

> We offer really the same services we offer to the general contract, with a 'few add ons'. When I say 'add ons' we tend to work more closely with the doctor, we tend to look more closely at referring for more Job Capacity Assessments, we do look at the need for training. But the bottom line for Job Networks is that Centrelink's policy is 'work first'
>
> So we focus very much on what the person can do now.
>
> For instance if someone comes to us and has had a physical injury or a physical illness we look at what they can do now, to start with, so we do an assessment with them and based on that we work up a service for them
>
> So when you say an assessment, is that the JCA? (Job Capacity Assessment)
>
> It can be, that can be part of it.
>
> We generally start off talking with people, fairly informally.
>
> 'Ok, you're looking for work, what have you done in the past?'
>
> And that usually flows into why they're not doing it now
>
> 'And what sort of work could you apply your skills to?'
>
> So we don't immediately start on training, we always look for some sort of work they can do now.

Part of their process is to ascertain what is a realistic employment setting for their clients. The interviewee indicated that many clients were able to discern between what they had done in the past (eg prior to an injury) and what it would be possible for them to manage now, and then vacancies for that kind of work would be sought. If an employer was willing to provide the new employee with training to improve their skills or assist them to achieve competence in a new area, that would be an added outcome for the client. Rather than asking their clients about employment they would like to develop skills in the emphasis has become finding a placement (outcome) and moving them off their books to make way for new clients.

This interviewee spoke in some detail about problems arising from inaccurate assessments of clients, for example with regard to English language proficiency. He noted that the process was often incomplete or inaccurate, and used a term which suggested the process was very superficial. When asked if any literacy assessment tools were used by the Job Capacity Assessors (JCAs) he seemed surprised and suggested that a client could either speak English or not.

This response suggested that in this organisation there was not a clear understanding of how literacy and English language proficiency can be measured on a continuum – it was perceived that a client either could or couldn't perform in English. In the example cited by this participant an individual had been assessed as being able to speak English, but on presenting to the Job Network he/she had indicated they needed (or felt the need for) an interpreter. The interviewee felt that instances such as this the Job Capacity Assessment was, to use his term, a 'drive-by', suggesting the JCA process can be inadequate and incomplete. It appeared that there was no opportunity to review this effectively. If this client was in fact incapable of speaking English their ability to participate safely and effectively in a workplace would be severely restricted.

While this interviewee indicated that his organisation had in the past been able to refer clients to training, he suggested that the new approach of 'work first' would be more acceptable to tax payers. He alluded to clients who might in the past have attended a series of training programs and after several years were still not in employment as being costly to the government.

New contracts

Lack of clarity about requirements

It was reported by one participant in a Supported Employment Service that Job Networks were referring their clients to the Supported Service and gaining outcomes. While it is unusual for clients of the Supported Service to seek Open Employment, in some cases this occurs. Generally, however, it would be expected that clients attending a Job Network with a Disability Employment Network Service would be placed in Open Employment. The participant from the Supported Employment Service indicated that there was some debate amongst providers about whether placement of a Job Network Client in a Supported Service represented an 'outcome'.

While there was variation between the capacity of the different Job Networks interviewed to provide training, the Supported Employment Service appeared to have much greater flexibility in this area. The organisation was taking initiatives to build a partnership with a local TAFE, and to provide Certificate I and II courses. This Supported Employment service was working with a second, larger Supported Employment Service based in the same city, which had

> *… secured for the (Supported Employment) sector….. quite a sum of money to offer training to all the other services as well. So we're a part of that system. We've got 40 people going through that next year which will get them a Certificate II, whether it be in furniture manufacturing or business administration….*

It could be seen that clients referred to such a Supported service would have better opportunities for training than if placed in Open Employment through a Job Network, given the apparent restrictions in many of the Job Networks' contracts with regard to training.

The Supported Employment Service provides ongoing training and goal setting, integrated with the employment, as part of their standard practice. The clients who are referred on to them from Job Networks therefore have a chance to develop a range of work and life skills in a supported setting which recognizes the needs and limitations which employees experience.

> *'Its employment and its training, because we never stop training – it's a cycle because a lot of our employees have a goal plan. … Sometimes an employee who has been here 40 year has done just about every job in the place and asks why they have to do another one – the system is that if you don't want one… We've modified that system to say if you don't want one you can sign to say that.*
>
> *In saying they're continually involved in training, new work is available, new machinery's involved. We're constantly running training sessions, every month we try to put every person in our organisation through a training session, whether it be safety, health and hygiene, forklift awareness, there's a whole range of them. That's really important to us.'*[4]

One of the options for people who have worked in the Supported Employment setting is to seek Open Employment, through a Job Network. It appeared however that this was an exception to the general pattern, in part because people's financial security would be less certain, and in part because of social connections and the 'family' atmosphere at the Supported service. The interviews gave some examples of clients who had sought Open Employment without success prior to being employed by the Supported Service and the disillusion they had felt in that process, or in the lack of ongoing support in the placements they had tried.

Networks

The role of 'natural networks' in finding work was emphasized by one provider who has run strengths-based programs for people with disabilities for about 15 years. Many clients attending this service are not only disabled but are also offenders. The provider commented on the difficulty his

[4] Respondent B1 from Supported Employment Service

organisation is facing in meeting the administrative requirements of the new contract. Difficulties were found in matching the time required to collect and submit data with the organisation's culture of developing their clients' confidence and skills. He noted that many of their clients do not have the kind of networks which enable other people to access education and employment opportunities.

Another provider gave the example of a client who had been employed as a free-lance worker and had a good working relationship with a firm which then employed her, gaining a payment under the welfare to work scheme. This is an instance of the welfare recipient providing the Job Network with the contact required for placement through her own network, rather than the Job Network making the match.

Strength based versus Compliance based approaches

Identifying and developing clients' existing strengths is a time consuming but, in the long term, effective way of supporting young people with disabilities (and possibly a police record) to move from welfare to work. According to the CEO, the administrative requirements of the Welfare to Work contract are reducing the opportunities for Organisation E to work effectively. The respondent commented on the negative results for his organisation if minor data collection errors are picked up in auditing process, and felt that while accountability is important, organisations which provide well designed, successful and test programs which are client focussed are not being recognised or rewarded.

According to this respondent, DEWR's approach is concerned with statistics, star ratings and is compliance based and the collection of information about individuals dominates this approach. The interviewee mentioned DEWR's EA 3000[5] system which is instrumental in collecting information. He commented that 'everything that's significant is recorded as a limitation'.

Effective marketing of opportunities for disabled employees

A respondent from a Disability Open Employment provider which had taken on additional staff and opened additional offices in preparation for the Welfare to Work changes commented that an improvement the federal government could implement would be a consistent approach to marketing the opportunities for employers to take on disabled employees.

> that's why they've put me in as a marketer, …. we can see that the government is very keen to help people move into to work and they're throwing money at us as the service to do it, but there's no sort of information, or clear information out there to the employers as to why they should take people in. So we've got to go out there and market individual clients, whereas if there was a marketing programme from the government side telling employers the reasons why –

She went on to comment that she *had* heard an advertisement on the radio just that day

> And it was the government saying there's more people looking for work than just your able-bodied people, and there are more people than can do the job. And that's the first time that I've heard a positive step where the government now is backing the program they're funding by advertising it.

This particular agency had not had the number of referrals they had expected to follow in their new uncapped program. There were other agencies who were also experiencing this problem.

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[5] See also ' Staying on the Job' David Braue 9/12/03 www.cio.com.au

Implications and conclusions

Success factors in providing services to disabled clients under Welfare to Work

On reviewing the interviews, it is apparent that the contracts different organisations are operating under are different enough to be affecting the results they are able to achieve.

Support and case management

Agency A respondents attributed their organisation's success to the one-to-one work they modelled their practice on. The staff supporting clients met regularly with the clients and supported them with goal setting and where necessary, behavioural change to achieve the kinds of skills needed to be a reliable and safe employee. They often send a support worker with the disabled client to work side by side assisting them to learn and remember the tasks.

This agency appeared to have greater availability of funding and greater flexibility in terms of providing clients with support, including training, either in their own facilities (for example computing) or through referrals to other agencies such as TAFE or organisations offering 'soft skills' such as short communication courses.

When asked about the success rate of clients finding employment after training the respondent qualified her answer:

> If you classify training as both formal and informal and experiential then I'd say that about 75% of the clients gained employment. The reason I say that is because we quite often instil work experience in the course of managing the case and we consider that to be training, but informal, you know get a certificate but it's not competency based training, it's experiential.

The importance of the case management model was emphasised by both of the respondents from this organisation

> Well, I think our slant on the Disability Employment Network Service is that we're very client focussed. We make an effort to get to know our clients extremely well and we carry out a lot of our own assessments. …. We have a one-to-one case management model from start to finish. So, in other words, at any point in time, at all points in time during the course of a person's service with us they have a dedicated case manager responsible for co-ordinating their programme. That's not the way all disability services operate but it's the way we choose to operate. We find it gives us a lot of strength and a lot of success.

Good-will of agencies

Agency A respondents both spoke about their organisation's ability and commitment to using funding for items such as transport assistance, lessons to get their drivers licence, helping clients to buy items such as suitable quality second hand clothes for interviews, and even paying half of the cost of a new pair of prescription glasses for a man whose work required attention to fine detail .

Agency D appeared to operating under quite different conditions, and restrictions. The respondent commented several times on the removal of funding even for bus tickets to support clients, and was using this example as an illustration of a continuum of funding reductions, from minor items to the larger costs of training programs.

Towards training models

Specialist services for groups with similar needs

The specialist deaf service (Organisation C) is an example of a model which takes into account the needs of people with a specific range of disabilities (deafness, combined deafness and blindness) and acknowledges the needs of these clients by modifying content and presentation methods.

In the interview with the two employees from this unit which sits within a large RTO, the cultural differences of the clients were referred to repeatedly. The importance of providing the material in ways which recognised these differences and also of working with staff in mainstream classes to expose them to these differences was emphasised. Students who complete their Certificate II in the Deaf Education unit are frequently channelled in to mainstream VET courses.

The two interviewees (C1 and C2) worked together, during the interview, one a hearing and speaking course coordinator/ lecturer, the other a deaf lecturer, for whom the first staff member interpreted, both using Auslan, while the interviewer used standard spoken Australian English, and all used the written interview schedule as a reference point.

This process in itself illustrated one of the main points that emerged from their interview, that to run effectively, their program requires more time, more staffing and more finances than standard mainstream courses.

Resources

Another element which restricts them is lack of resources, because many students cannot read standard texts. Developing literacy and numeracy ranked high in their concerns for preparing students for work readiness.

C1 and C2 talked about how being part of a large RTO was beneficial to both deaf students and the hearing students in wider programs, and the importance this played in reducing the isolation many deaf people experience. The RTO has responded in many positive ways and shown interest in supporting the program.

A restriction for the service is the speed at which students can complete their courses, which are Certificate II modules from a general education course. ESL methodology which has been adapted to the needs of the students is used. Technology which supports the students such as TTY, a telephone which has also a keyboard, is provided and training in the use of these technologies is central to the success of students.

> If the deaf person doesn't speak and lip-read, and the hearing person doesn't sign then they'll use English to write to one another. So, different to other ESL learners who can sit perhaps and more contemplate their English prior to presenting to a person, the deaf person needs to be very good at using spontaneous English, particularly in the workplace, engaging with work colleagues, getting written instructions from the supervisor, giving written instructions to other people that they're supervising, or whatever. Also deaf people, as I said before, need to be really good at using this technology as that's another way to link with their non-deaf workmates – writing E-mail, MSM, SMS and things. So really deaf students need pretty in-depth training in these areas – a lot more than hearing people would.

In this instance the two lecturers assessed the list of problems in the schedule of questions and were surprised to find that they each came up with the same ranking.C1: I've linked literacy and ESL together because I think for a deaf person they have to be linked, because print literacy is ESL for deafness so I can't separate those. So I'd say the top four are: literacy and ESL, numeracy, mental health problems, and cultural issues. They are mine.

> Interviewer: And C2's?

C1 I am surprised to find that C2's are the same.

C2 I believe that the four are literacy, numeracy, mental health (it impacts on so many hearing people and deaf people, both) and also cultural issues.

Other services were catering for much broader groups, clients who fitted into the very wide range of disabilities. It was mentioned in a number of interviews how having to adapt services to a wider group than the organisation traditionally worked with was demanding a great deal of all staff in terms of managing difficult clients' behaviours (eg psychotic episodes, substance abuse); supporting people with limited social skills and/or poor literacy skills; and in the case of managers, attempting to ensure staff had the time to not only deal with these issues but maintain extensive records. It was pointed out in one interview that many clients need assistance to fill in forms for Centrelink and to track the numerous appointments with agencies that are required to meet obligations. Interviewees at two different sites talked about providing support for form filling as part of an extended service if people did not have family members to do this.

Agency A which used a case management (i.e. one-to-one support) model, it was pointed out that there is an incredibly diverse range of disabilities which their clients experience. A1 commented that one person's acquired brain injury will affect that person differently from another's. The organisation's staff recruitment policy was to select people with broad experience who could relate to clients well, rather than specialists in fields related to education or rehabilitation. A1 had been employed in the financial services sector for many years prior to her employment in the Disability Employment industry.

Conclusions

Issues and questions related to this case study which warrant further investigation follow.

How can clients assess the best service for themselves, given the diversity of the services provided by the different agencies and the unannotated way in which lists of service providers are offered to clients by Centrelink? This point needs to be explored and clarified further. There are providers who offer a service designed for a particular group of clients. These services, such as the RTO which offers a dedicated service for deaf clients, are easily identifiable, whereas other services support people with a wide range of disabilities or disadvantages. In the case of one Job Network the terms 'disability' and 'disadvantage' were used interchangeably. There seems to be a 'hit and miss' approach to linking people to the best service, in particular when their disability is not easy to categorise.

Furthermore, the funding arrangements appear to be quite different between agencies and some agencies are providing diverse and responsive services while others are restricted and limited to activities which are less flexible and less responsive to meet the individual needs of a very broad group of clients.

There is a strong contrast between the organisation which manages a suite of services and the organisation which relies on external bodies for assessments. The former appears to be in control of the process and able to support clients effectively, while the staff of the latter appear to be grappling with processes and requirements outside their control. The staff of the former organisation spoke with confidence about their processes and successes while the staff of the latter appeared to feel the kinds of services their organisation expected to offer clients were now out of their reach.

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Case 4: The role of vocational training in Welfare to Work reforms for the mature aged

Jo Balatti

Introduction

From July 2006, the Australian federal government began the implementation of the Welfare to Work initiative. It entails new obligations for some clients including mature aged clients. It also provides funding for additional support services e.g., job capacity assessors and from January 2007, employer assistance to take on people for work experience placements. Additional funding has been allocated to training. There are extra places in vocational training and language, literacy and numeracy programs and a free Career Planning Program.

This case study primarily concerns how service providers, both of training and associated services, perceive the role of vocational training in the process of having mature aged unemployed people get into the workforce. Because the data for the study were collected very early in the implementation, it does not attempt to evaluate the impact of the Welfare to Work changes. The research took place in two regional cities in Queensland.

Context

Service providers and clients interviewed were from two cities in regional Queensland comprising a total population of approximately 150 000 living in an area of 3735.6 square kilometres. The region is considered to be prosperous and there is mounting concern about imminent skill and labour shortages. Despite the prosperity, the Queensland State Department of Housing is conducting Community Renewal projects in four suburbs. The Community Renewal program is designed to give immediate support to communities in areas such as community safety, education and skills, access to jobs, health and wellbeing, and community infrastructure.

The unemployment rate of the combined local government areas as at September 2006 was 5.4%. The latest available data on mature age unemployment for the two cities are from the 2001 Census. While labour market conditions are likely to have changed since the 2001 Census, in August 2001 the mature aged unemployment accounted for 19.6% of the total unemployment. There are six Job Network agencies operating in the area. The largest training provider by far is the TAFE institute. It has two campuses in one city and none in the other. Mature aged unemployed students are members of classes with other students - no specific courses are run for mature aged unemployed people. Some courses attract mature aged people less than others for example, higher level certificates in Information Technology. Information regarding age, education background, employment status, source of referral and aspirations is not known by the teachers unless they specifically ask or is volunteered by their students.

Other training providers that exist focus on small ranges of offerings. It is also not uncommon for Job Network agencies and employers to source training from other parts of the country. There are state funded training programs administered by the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations under its Skilling Queenslanders for Work Initiative that are run for mature aged unemployed in the region. One city council is currently running introduction to computers courses that are free of charge to people who are on government support.

Methodology

Because providers of services to mature aged unemployed people constituted this case, most of the people interviewed were either training providers or providers of other services in the Welfare to Work endeavour. In total 11 interviews were conducted with 16 participants (see table below). The Job Network officers were from two Job Network agencies and the trainers were from three training organisations. Trainers delivered courses in business, aged care, disability, community services, information technology, back to work programs and computers.

Table: Composition of Interviewee Group

	Males	Females	Total
Training providers	1	9	10
Job Network officers	1	3	4
Clients	1	1	2
	3	**13**	**16**

Semi-structured interviews of approximately 40 minute duration were conducted at the workplaces of the interviewees. Interview data were transcribed and analysed according to the prearranged themes that organise this report. The themes are: outcomes of programs for mature aged unemployed clients; issues faced by these clients; the needs of mature aged unemployed clients; the needs of service providers with a focus on training providers; the factors that contribute to successful outcomes for mature aged unemployed. Perceptions that were held by a number of interviewees are noted in the report. The report concludes with some implications of these findings.

Results

Outcomes of programs

While acknowledging government definitions of outcomes, providers, both of training and of associated services, defined success as a continuum rather than as an end point. Having recognised that a desired 'end' outcome is sustainable employment to the fullest capacity of which the client is capable, providers identified a range of outcomes as indicators of success. Course completion, further study, voluntary work and improved psychological wellbeing were as much successful outcomes as paid employment. Furthermore, rather than defining success relative to a desired end point, many defined it is as the positive change experienced by clients relative to their starting point.

Some providers considered as a positive outcome the ability to adapt to changed circumstances in which mature aged, unemployed people find themselves. For those who are now unexpectedly unemployed after having worked all their lives, a successful outcome may be coming to terms with the financial and psychological loss that losing the job entailed and to then be ready to move on. This may require acceptance that they can no longer do the job that they were in. It may require a revaluation of the skills they have acquired over a lifetime and a belief that they have something worthwhile to offer to an employer. Some Job Network agencies pay much attention to the psychological wellbeing of their clients by providing one on one consultations and training delivered by psychologists.

For the person who has never undertaken post school formal study, success may be enrolling in a TAFE course such as in the aged care field and attending most classes. For some of these, success is completing the course. This may lead to a job in the relevant industry, which the mature aged

person is able to hold down or it may lead only to short-term employment. It may also lead to further studies including university studies. All of these are regarded as successful outcomes.

For yet another person, the successful outcome of employment may have required only some job search training in writing application forms and dealing with job interviews. For many, the process of formally applying for jobs including writing to selection criteria is completely unfamiliar. In this instance, training in applying for jobs rather than retraining was sufficient for re-entry into the workforce.

In all cases where training, defined broadly, had been undertaken, skill acquisition and jobs were considered to be only two of several possible outcomes. Trainers almost always noted other outcomes that may be referred to as personal growth. Increased self-esteem and self-confidence were considered important outcomes of training. A provider tells of the change to self perception that success in training can produce:

> We have had women who have been alcoholics, who have come in with no self-esteem, who have been really down. But see them with that piece of paper. Not so much the gaining of employment but finishing that course. Thinking they're just housewives and now they have a piece of paper behind their name. That is very important for some of them, to their self-esteem. One lady said, 'I don't know whether I can do it' and I said, 'You can do it' and she is nearly finished. We aim for them to finish the course.

Issues faced by clients

According to the interviewees, issues faced by unemployed mature aged people are of three kinds. There are those that concern their own personal circumstances such as health, lifestyle issues and their ability to change. The second kind is those that they experience by virtue of engaging with elements of the welfare to work system such as quality of services. The third set of issues that mature aged unemployed clients face are community based issues such as facilities and community attitudes to the mature aged who are unemployed. Issues are often interrelated with one exacerbating the impact of another.

Health related issues

Health related issues that confront a number of mature aged people in unemployment relate to physical wellbeing and to mental wellbeing. Physical problems such as arthritis, back problems and general unfitness may have contributed to losing their previous job and may be impediments to securing jobs in areas for which they have experience, appropriate skills or a preference. One provider describes a common scenario:

> The number of people who have come through like brickies, people who have done hard jobs - their bodies are starting to fail them and they have low levels of literacy and numeracy. They are at a point where they don't know where to head from there. That is when they become long-term unemployed and they just go from one lot of work for the dole into the next one. It's like a downward spiral. They are good people with good life skills, people who have worked for years.

Mental problems range from undiagnosed conditions such as depression, anxiety and poor anger management to undiagnosed or unmanaged psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia. As well as these mental health issues impeding client engagement with the various elements of the welfare to work process, they can affect participation in training. Furthermore, they may also affect a mature aged person's capacity to retain a job if successful in gaining one.

Lifestyle issues

Some mature aged unemployed people have lifestyles that impede the pursuit of getting a job or doing the training that might increase the chance of getting a job. Alcoholism and drug abuse were

noted by both Job Network providers and training providers as being issues for some mature aged, unemployed people. For many, these problems can lead to clients becoming long-term unemployed.

The conditions produced by poverty and long-term unemployment can lead to little interest in engaging with the job seeking process. One provider observed:

> Nobody is going to be interested in looking at being skilled for work if they are homeless or domestic violence is happening in their home or they can't put food on their table. Their heads are not even thinking about work because work is not a high priority area and so you have to tackle the big picture rather than just looking at the small picture which is 'we want you to go back to work'.

Living arrangements impact on a mature aged person's capacity to maintain a training commitment. Some mature aged people in the region do not have fixed addresses and have unsettled lives that make job seeking and training low priority considerations for them.

For many, long-term financial hardship has led them to live in cheap accommodation. This often means living far away from facilities including training providers. The situation is made more difficult for them when they do not have a car because public transport is inadequate in parts of the region especially in the outer suburbs.

There are also some people especially in their late fifties and sixties who no longer wish to work full-time and prefer a state of semi-retirement in which they live satisfactorily with some government support and cash in hand work. Full-time work is no longer a priority as hobbies, family and other priorities have become more important. For many of these people, the motivation to retrain can therefore be very low. A Job Network officer explains:

> People will find a niche and they find that they can live on the money they are getting, the benefits aren't that great but if you are an older person and you don't have any commitments, you can live within those means and you don't need anything more. The idea of going back into a job becomes more daunting and you get to a stage where you don't want to look for a job anymore. People fall in a rut and if they are not socially active then their life slips by because they don't know any better. The more pressure you put on them to go and get a job, the more reluctant they are to do that especially with people in their 50s and 60s.

Dislocation and disconnectedness

Unemployed, mature aged people can experience to varying degrees what may be called a sense of dislocation relative to the culture of employment. This results from disconnecting from social networks in which paid work is important. While not necessarily leading to mental health issues, this disconnectedness can impact on outcomes. The longer they remain unemployed, the more at risk they are of 'being out of the loop' (provider). The longer they are unemployed, the smaller become their social networks, the less relevant become references from years gone by and the less confident they become in their ability to re-enter the workforce. One training provider summarised the situation for the long-term unemployed:

> The problem I feel with long-term unemployed is that they become so external as a group that it's very hard for them to infiltrate the normal run-of-the-mill working environment. It's very hard for them to make those connections because they have been so long disconnected from those kinds of relationships.

Regarding the same issue, a provider who works in an organisation that has Work for the Dole programs running, noted the importance of the first six months of unemployment:

> I think the first six months are the most crucial. After the first six months the emotional problems start as that is when they do start getting depressed. They feel as if they have lost their place in society. It's then very hard without that emotional support and that guidance.

> The Job Network members should be picking up on those initial six months as they are the only ones who have had contact with them at that stage. After that, everyone else comes into play.

Psychological capacity to change

An important issue that impacts on clients' chances for employment and which is strongly related to learning and therefore training is their capacity to change. Reluctance or inability to change beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles is one of the main reasons for unemployed people becoming long-term unemployed. Some are unwilling to give up the semi-retired status despite the general poverty that may come with it; some are unable to accept that they need reskilling; and some do not wish to comply with accepted codes of dress and behaviour in workplaces.

Capacity to change also involves the client's perception of himself as a learner, both in formal and informal settings. On the one hand, there are those who will sign up for IT courses for example, because they realise that they need some skills merely to engage with the job search process if not getting a job. There are those who will attend literacy and numeracy courses even if until now they had managed to secure work without them. Training providers see those unemployed mature aged who have taken the step to change that is, to learn. On the other hand, there are those who for any number of reasons do not wish or are able to learn or change. These are the mature aged unemployed people whom training providers do not see. One such client is described by a Job Network employee:

> He is intractable. He has already been with us for four years and it's going to come to the point where I'm going to walk in one day and say, 'Look, nothing is changing so if you keep doing the same thing, you are going to get the same result, you are not prepared to make a change.'

Accessibility

The physical requirements and knowledge required to pursue the business of seeking jobs including training can present difficulties to some mature aged job seekers.

The most common problem cited relates to transport. People who do not have a car or have lost their licence for reasons such as inability to pay fines, may find it difficult to access training or be successful in securing a job. In the words of a mature aged newcomer to the city who was unemployed but now holds a job in a Job Network agency:

> I feel sorry for people who don't have a licence or do not have vehicles. I feel sorry for the people who lose their licences because they are unable to get a job if they don't have their own transport. With employers here that is the first thing they ask, 'Do you have a licence, do you have a reliable vehicle?' and if you say no to either of those questions then they look at the next applicant.

The second most common problem reported concerns communication. In some cases, clients do not have a landline phone or a mobile phone and communication especially with service providers or potential employers is a constant difficulty. In certain circumstances, the government provides a phone. For others, lack of access to a computer or the inability to use the internet to search employment websites is an impediment.

Variable service from Job Network providers and trainers

Amongst the large number of Job Network agencies, clients can find a wide range of quality in the services provided. Some agencies experience a high turnover in staff. This can lead to poor communication and poor services with clients. One client for example, had been waiting for four months for the paperwork concerning payment to be completed in order to enrol in a course. The problem she believes is the changing staff. A service provider comments:

> And they are frustrated, these people are fragile at the best of times, let alone being referred to the wrong person. They suffer if they are continually referred to one person then off to another person and so on. The system needs to be far more streamlined.

Ageist attitudes

Yet another issue that clients may need to contend with is age biased attitudes – their own toward employers younger than themselves and vice versa. One service provider argued the need to explore such attitudes in prospective employees:

> Interviewee: They may be going into the workforce where their manager may be young so that brings up heaps of issues and how are they going to deal with that. I think it is really essential to give them the skills as it can be quite demoralising.
>
> Interviewer: There is a generation gap.
>
> Interviewee: Absolutely and the way things might be done …things like working in an open office environment, there are so many other things that can be quite hard.

There was also a perception that in some cases, mature aged job applicants have to contend with the employers' discriminatory attitudes toward older people.

Distribution of services and facilities

Not all areas in the region are equally well serviced by the public transport system. Training providers are also not evenly distributed across the region. For mature aged unemployed who do not have transport and live away from training facilities, accessing training is difficult.

Client needs

Need for work experience

Service providers and clients are aware of the value to prospective employers of relevant experience, especially recent experience. The value of the work experience is multi fold in terms of acquiring skills, establishing contacts in the field and becoming enculturated into the culture of that particular line of work. Work experience is often the entrée into a job for the prospective employee.

A course without work experience is of limited value in the job market. Although many VET courses do have some form of job placement, some do not. Courses in business and information technology are two examples where there is generally no job placement. Frustration is experienced by the unemployed person whose course produces no employment return because there was no work experience. Neither the Job Network agencies nor the training providers seemed to be able to rectify this problem.

Need for match between capability, training and job prospects

Clients' interests and skills need to be compatible with the vocational skill training they undertake, which in turn, needs to lead to jobs. One example of complete alignment was described by a Job Network provider. Before flying in a trainer to deliver a particular course for which students had been carefully selected, she had sought and gained assurance from employers that the graduates would find work in the industry.

Need for ongoing support

Interviewees who had worked with long-term unemployed people stressed the importance of long-term ongoing support for people at risk after they have obtained a job. Currently there is no such support. One explained:

> There is not that support through the long journey of dealing with lifestyle issues and so when it gets tough they just go back into that lifestyle because they don't know any other way. The support is not there for them.

They argued for the need of holistic support that encompassed all facets: the physical, psychological and spiritual. One service provider summarised the discussion exclaiming, 'You just don't train someone and send them out there. It doesn't work like that.'

Need for employer engagement

Successful outcomes for mature aged unemployed people depend on employers becoming partners in the endeavour to secure employment. Some interviewees believed that many employers did not provide opportunities for employment. This perceived current under-engagement was attributed to lack of policy knowledge, lack of knowledge regarding the mature aged or in some cases, even a bias against employing older people.

Although the government has a number of incentives, it was the view of one provider that the government needs to invest more in educating the employers about changes and work choices available. In his experience, he observed:

> Speaking to employers on a daily basis, there are so many of them who don't know or understand what the work choices are and how they can affect them and what the benefits are for them. And because of that, our job seekers are suffering.

Providers believed that more mature aged unemployed would be in the workforce if employers were more flexible about work conditions. Permanent part-time work is not a common practice amongst employers, yet it would suit a number of mature aged people who for any number of reasons do not want to work full-time.

Employer preparedness to offer on the job training would also increase the number of mature aged employees. One interviewee suggested that some employers in the region had not yet come to terms with the labour and skills shortages and with the changes in practice they needed to implement. He felt that some employers had not realised that the days in which supply of labour was more than demand were over. He explained:

> We don't have the cream of the crop, we have the people who have a problem or barriers or inexperience. Employers here don't want that, they want the cream of the crop. They have to get used to the idea that the cream of the crop doesn't exist anymore, and for them to get that standard, they then have to train people and take people on and spend time with them.

Provider needs

Although providers of services other than training were interviewed, this section is limited to the needs of training providers. Training providers comprise people who provided job search training, back to work programs and specific vocational skill training.

Communication between trainers and other service providers

Communication between training providers and Job Network agencies did not always include the actual on the ground trainers themselves. This led to a sense that some Job Network agencies had limited understanding of vocational skill training and its requirements.

From some trainers' perspective, there were issues concerning demands made on the students. One trainer, aware of the challenges of external studies, felt that one Job Network agency did not understand the demands of study in this mode:

> With external studies, there is a requirement which we would like to have is that students enrol in one subject at a time so it is more manageable for them. Sometimes, Job Network agencies insist they enrol in everything, and in doing so it frightens a lot of the candidates and they never complete.

It was also evident that despite there being periods in which the trainer and the Job Network agency have clients in common, there appeared to be no sharing of relevant knowledge to enhance the quality of the learning experience for the client. Communication between the Job Network agency and the on the ground trainer about a client could lead to a more streamlined system in which clients are referred to fewer experts than currently. For example, a trainer explained that if a student presents with psychological problems in the training, she refers the student to experts that her organisation has on its list. These may not be the same as those accessed by the Job Network agency to which the student also belongs.

Accurate client assessments

Concern was expressed about the accuracy of the client assessments conducted by Job Network agencies or Centrelink.

Trainers reported that some students enrolled in their courses but had no real interest in the training or the jobs for which the courses prepared them. Amongst this group, work, when submitted, was inferior, dress code was not complied with and non-attendance was high. They felt that clients were being sent into their courses without careful analysis of their interests and skills.

The frustration felt by a trainer in the aged care industry, an industry for which workers are in high demand, is evident below:

> I don't want people coming in and saying, 'Centrelink sent me'. What's important is that they want to be there. They want to do it. They have to have an attitude, they have to be caring. We are getting old ourselves and we want to know that there are quality people who care and not just there because Centrelink sent them, because it's a job. It's not a job, it's a profession. These are vulnerable people, you have your children and you have your aged and they are the most vulnerable besides the mental health people who are living out in the community. They are dependent on us to look after them.

Although employment prospects are good in the aged care industry, turnover of staff is high. Trainers in the aged care industry are well aware of this. As one trainer repeatedly stated, 'Most of them do get employed but whether they stay in it, that's another matter'.

Concern with assessments was also expressed by interviewees regarding the Work for the Dole program:

> I always have found it particularly frustrating that a lot of people who come through with the Work for the Dole are misreferred. They shouldn't be sent to Work for the Dole. Their numeracy and literacy needs should have been assessed by the Job Network members.

Effective networking and collaboration amongst training providers

Some interviewees complained that competition amongst training providers inhibited collaboration and led to inefficiencies caused by duplication and 'reinventing the wheel'. One small provider asked, 'Who is going to share information if it means their competition is going to do better?'

Factors that contribute to success

The factors listed below seem to contribute to success where success is defined in the ways described earlier. The list does not include factors that are in the personal domain of the client e.g., existing skills base, family support, personal resilience and strong networks although almost certainly they contribute to successful outcomes.

Recognition of participation in the workforce as a cultural and social practice

There was general acknowledgement that securing a job in a particular industry, and maintaining it, required more than a specific skill base on behalf of the client. Also required were successful enculturation and socialization into the world of work, and specifically into the area of work for which the training was designed. Job placement was recognized as one important way of contributing to those processes.

Trainers in sectors such as disability drew on as many opportunities as possible to help enculturate and socialize their students into the particular world of work that is working with people with disabilities. In addition to job placements, students experienced visiting tutors who were practitioners. An approach that one training provider was planning to use to improve retention, was a gradual enculturation approach that began with expanding the comfort zone of her students to include other students:

> I would like groups of 15 students from Centrelink coming through, learning as a group but then becoming part of a bigger group. Not being an isolated group which creates a 'them and us' attitude but breaking down those walls, bringing them in, including them in workshops with other students and out in the industry. Having the programs actually set up so that there are stepping stones. To then include them in a group of other service providers, staff and other industry members. We have a lot of tutors who work with our programs who are very much in the industry. They work during the day in the industry and tutor at night. We get lots of interesting opinions and comments from them so that broadens their understanding. We have started the cross faculty teaching so they get different teachers and different perspectives which are all very good things.

Accessibility to a diverse range of training options

Accessibility refers to physical accessibility but also to 'psychological' accessibility. Courses that are delivered in non-institutional premises were taken up by people who never may have entered a TAFE building. Informal promotion of courses by known and 'trusted' organisations on behalf of registered training providers has also been successful in encouraging people to undergo some learning.

Diversity refers to types of training, modes of delivery and range of courses. Successful outcomes for clients have resulted from engaging in skills training, job search training or personal development training. It has resulted from informal training organised by community organisations as well as from accredited training. Informal accessible community based training especially in the use of computers and the Internet was recognised as useful. Such training sometimes led to more formal training. A service provider in one community centre, explained how an IT club had attracted people 'off the street' to walk in to learn:

> I actually run a computer club training where we train with the Microsoft documents and power point. I have a couple of mature aged ladies who come to that who have never touched a computer before. At this point in time all of our guys are self referring.

Face to face teaching with online support seems to be a successful mode of delivery. The key is to tailor training as much as possible to the individual needs of the client.

Quality teaching

At the face to face level, quality teaching is essential to successful outcomes. Quality teaching requires relationship building between teacher and student and opportunities for the student to succeed. One client who now has part-time work and is about to enrol in a Community Welfare course recalls the positive experience she had with a Business training course several years earlier. Although it had been in an area that she did not pursue, its legacy of increased confidence and expectations of future success had resulted in ongoing interest in learning. Her reminiscence is a poignant reminder of how threatening first time training can be to a mature aged person, and how nurturing attention can pay dividends:

> I was terrified. That first time, I was absolutely terrified meeting new people, total strangers. I was actually very lucky as the group that I was with, we got on so well, and the teacher was so wonderful. She complimented us by saying that we were the best because we helped each other in every way we could. Even though we sat there in a class, it was small like 10 to 15 of us. The teacher was so lovely, so easy going. I think from doing the first course even though I struggled through it, I did get through it so I said, 'If I can do that one then I can do something else'. It gave me the confidence to go on. You learn that you have done that and you can get on and do something else even though it wasn't my thing. And I realised that sitting down in front of a computer all day - it's just not me.

Implications and conclusions

This small project suggests that the role of VET in getting people of a mature age who are unemployed into jobs may not be the same as it is for other sectors of the unemployed population. There are clearly age related issues, such as the stage one is at in the lifespan, that impact on how VET does support the process of getting a job. Furthermore, it is clear that the large diversity amongst mature aged, unemployed people makes the task of producing generalisations very difficult. Despite the diversity in individual circumstances and attributes, several generalisations can be made.

The role of training depends on the context in which the individual finds himself/herself. The study shows that there is diversity amongst the mature aged unemployed in terms of many factors: work history, skills, aspirations, health and personal attributes such as resilience and self-esteem. The long-term unemployed for example face issues, needs and therefore interventions that are very different from those who have been unemployed for several months. The unemployed who have rich stores of skills, knowledge and contacts that are valued by the employer market are in a different category from those who have limited or almost nonexistent stores.

Such a diversity would suggest individualised training requirements, drawing on formal and informal training. Yet there is little evidence that training interventions are custom designed for mature aged learners, even as a group. The fact they do not constitute a large enough cohort in any one course in this region may be a partial explanation. However, as one client noted with respect to job search training, mature aged people looking for jobs do not have the same world views as a 19 year old, or the same financial pressures as a 30 year old:

> It should be designed from 16 up to 25, from 25 to 35 then 35 above as each person in each of the age groups has a different understanding of what they are looking for in life, they have different commitments, they have different problems that they are dealing with as in children or mortgages. When you get older your mortgages seemed to be paid for, your children have grown up and you are looking for something else, it is not the same as when you are 19. The job search training should reflect that.

This study found that there were a number of unemployed mature aged people who refused to engage in vocational training. One of the biggest challenges for service providers therefore is to reach those mature aged unemployed people for whom training could improve their prospects in

the job market, but who as yet have not crossed the floor of a training venue. An insight into the issue was provided in a conversation with a mature aged unemployed man who presented as very articulate and very knowledgeable about the intricacies of the welfare system and of the world of the unemployed. He had been unemployed for 14 years after having worked in the same job for 22 years, a low skilled job that had never required formal training of any kind. When asked if he had done any courses at the TAFE during the 14 years, he laughed and said, 'Oh no! I'm not the study type'. Here the issues are those of how such people perceive themselves as learners, how they perceive the demands of vocational skill courses and what should service providers do about it.

The new services in the Welfare to Work initiative do address some of the issues identified in this study. Interviewees anticipated that the appointment of Job Capacity Assessors would result in better matches between client needs and interventions. The incentives for employers to introduce work experience placements may lead to more clients having an opportunity to show their ability. The work experience placements would certainly enrich the existing training options that currently have no job placements.

The change the government has introduced that is most directly relevant to this study is the increased funding allocated to training. This is intended to fund extra places. This study suggests that more resources are required to improve the *quality* of the learning experience. Changes such as smaller groups, multiple delivery modes, delivery of face to face courses in more locations, more individualised training and more collaboration between the on the ground trainers and Job Network officers require additional resources to implement.

Clearly, the role of vocational education in helping mature aged people enter the workforce is very dependent on context. Training is just one element of the Welfare to Work intervention. In the words of a once unemployed mature aged employee, the most important issue for him in the transition back into employment was 'trying to find the right fit' between the job and himself. By that he meant a fit between the demands of the job and the resources he brought to it for example, his knowledge and skills, his values and lifestyle choices. This was in marked contrast to the value that seemed to permeate the job search training he experienced in which he felt the stress was to 'find a job to survive …and to survive in the job'.

If this perception of the 'climate' in which mature aged clients find themselves is generally true, it may indicate the need to reconceptualise the framework in which the job seeking endeavour is undertaken. Such a framework would draw on, amongst other things, the notion of lifelong learning, the changing nature of work, lifespan theory and in particular, the theories of career and career development that now have currency. More recently, career development has been redefined as a process *over a lifetime* that involves *all aspects of life* (McMahon & Tatham, 2000). It is these broader notions of work and living that have underpinned for example, the development of *myfuture*, Australia's national online career exploration service (http://www.myfuture.edu.au/). Job Network officers and trainers both play an important role in the career development of mature aged unemployed people. If employment in one's fifties and sixties is seen as the continuation of one's career development, then 'finding the right fit' would therefore appear to be a reasonable aspiration for any Australian, regardless of age. The role of vocational training, as just one element of the Welfare to Work process, would be to help the client work toward that right fit.

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Case 5: The role of vocational training in 'welfare to work' reforms: Enterprise RTOs

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Introduction

Within the context of the research project it was decided to look at a part of the VET sector not normally included in studies of this type. Enterprise Registered Training Organisations (ERTOs) are businesses registered as RTOs whose core business is not training. There is a national association of these businesses called the Enterprise RTO Association (ERTOA - see www.ertoa.org.au) and members include Qantas, Insurance Australia Group, Commonwealth Bank, MacDonald's and the ABC. The essential criteria for ERTOA membership are;

- ✧ the business is a legal entity
- ✧ the business is registered as an RTO
- ✧ the RTO is embedded within the business organisation, and
- ✧ the core business is not education or training

ERTOs typically provide entry level training to new employees, based upon their requirements and leading to the issue of a nationally recognized qualification at Certificate II or III to staff completing the training program. ERTOA includes many large Australian and international businesses and the members provide employment for over one million people. They represent a major component of the Australian VET sector both in the number of students and the number of qualifications issued. Whilst it was expected that few ERTOs would have an explicit process in place to respond to the Welfare-to-Work initiative, the employment and training practices they use will have a substantial influence on moving the Welfare to Work target groups into long term fulltime work.

Context

Since it is clear that ERTOs do not specifically develop programs to meet the Welfare to Work agenda, but rather train their new starters in the specific skills needed to meet business needs, the focus of these interviews was on entry level training. Our purpose was to examine the recruitment processes to see if Welfare to Work target groups could be identified, and to then examine the type and effectiveness of entry level VET training provided to them by the ERTO.

Four business enterprises were selected for this case study. They represent a wide cross section of the Australian business sector and its employees and all are major, albeit largely hidden, players in the Australian VET sector. An overview of the characteristics of each is given in the following table.

Site	Characteristics
ERTO #1	✧ One of Australia' largest mining companies. The interviews were conducted in Dampier and at the mine site in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. ✧ The company employs around 4,000 staff and is the major employer of indigenous in the region. Indigenous staff make up 22% of current trainees and the company aims to lift this to 50% in 2007. ✧ The company has been registered as an RTO since 1996 ✧ It offers a range of VET entry level Cert II and Cert III programs in mining operations, engineering and business in conjunction with the local TAFE ✧ 574 employees have participated in the entry level training program over the last four years
ERTO #2	✧ A large government owned call centre operation with twenty seven call centres located around Australia. Interviews were conducted at the Canberra head office and at a call centre located in Melbourne ✧ The call centre operation employs around 5000 staff and provides significant employment opportunities in a number of country and regional areas across Australia. ✧ The company has been registered as an RTO since 2003 ✧ The VET training program provided to new entry level staff is the Cert III in Telecommunications (Customer Service). Often in conjunction with local TAFEs. ✧ Over the past five years more than 4,000 employees have participated in the entry level training program. A variety of selection and recruitment processes are used for new entry level staff including recruitment agencies.
ERTO #3	✧ Australia's largest fast food restaurant operation with 745 franchise sites around Australia. The interviews were conducted at the Sydney head office and a restaurant in the western suburbs of Melbourne. ✧ The company employs around 55,000 staff and is one of the major providers of entry level employment opportunities in Australia ✧ The company has been registered as an RTO since 2002 ✧ The VET entry level training program provided for new staff is the Cert II in Retail Operations. ✧ There are currently 400 staff undertaking the program and around 1,800 have participated over the past four years. An up-front on-line process is used for the recruitment of new entry level staff.
ERTO #4	✧ Currently Australia's biggest selling car manufacturer. The interviews were conducted at the Melbourne assembly plant ✧ The company employs 4,500 staff in its Melbourne operations ✧ The company has been registered as an RTO since 1993 ✧ Entry level staff undertake the Cert II in Automotive Manufacturing as the core of the companies fundamental skills training program ✧ There are currently 600 assembly team undertaking entry level training. Over the past five years approximately 1,200 staff have participated. All entry level staff are selected and recruited through an external recruitment agency

Methodology

The Enterprise RTOs surveyed for this case study play no explicit role in the pre-employment preparation of the Welfare to Work target groups. The standard survey questions supplied for this case study were modified to reflect this by changing or removing several items not relevant to ERTOs with a focus on entry level training. The changes were relatively minor and are indicated in the supporting interview transcripts that have been provided elsewhere.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and the transcriptions used as the basis of preparing this summary. Because of the wide spread of provider locations and the time constraints on the availability of some provider interviewees, two of the interviews were conducted via the telephone. These are identified where appropriate in the transcripts provided.

Findings

This case study has clearly identified several key findings in relation to the role played by enterprise RTOs in the government's welfare to work reforms. These are;

- ✧ The providers surveyed for this case study had virtually no knowledge of the Welfare to Work reforms. In fact almost all those interviewed had never heard of them.
- ✧ With the exception of some indigenous programs the providers surveyed do not identify Welfare to Work target groups amongst their new employees who participating in the entry level VET training programs they provide. There are no statistical records available at all for Welfare to Work target group participation.
- ✧ Anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that the clients of the surveyed providers (i.e. their newly recruited employees participating in entry level VET training programs) do include a significant proportion of Welfare to Work target groups. Especially long-term unemployed, some disabled sub groups and parents. There is clear evidence that these providers play a significant and effective role in moving Welfare to Work target groups into full-time employment.
- ✧ None of the providers surveyed require formal VET training as a pre-requisite to employment. All expressed a strong view that they prefer to provide the job-skill training required to meet their business needs after the employee has commenced in the job.

ERTO #1 has a major focus in its recruitment on local indigenous people. The focus is reflected in apprenticeship numbers with cumulative apprentice numbers of: 2003: 105, 2004: 107, 2005: 183, and 2006: 179. Currently 22% of Apprentices are indigenous and in 2007 the intake of 59 new apprentices will be 50% indigenous.

ERTO #2 does not recruit or train in order to meet Welfare to Work target groups; however it does have targets for indigenous employment and is concerned to represent the customer demographic in its work force. Some emphasis is placed on parents when recruiting into Call Centres but this is driven by a business need to have flexibility around shifts rather than to assist with the Welfare to Work agenda. Training in ERTO #2 is focussed on developing work skills and providing career pathways. Qualifications are seen as a product of the work training rather than a pre-requisite to employment.

Although ERTO #3 professes no explicit awareness of the Welfare to Work reforms, it is a major entry level employer of younger people and its flexible shift arrangements are particularly attractive to parents seeking to re-enter the workforce. Its on-line front end recruitment process is very popular with job seekers, especially those who may experience problem attending and performing at an up-front interview. This ERTO invests a relatively large percentage of its turnover in the training and development of its staff and in 2005 was named Employer of the year in the Victoria Training Awards. Every new starter undertakes a structured training program and receives on the job training in the various facets of the business. The training program is a process which

emphasises working shoulder to shoulder, coaching and verifying skills on the job. It appears to have a high degree of acceptance amongst those with less than enthusiastic memories of school or other classroom-based learning activities. The company prides itself on its employee 'rags to riches' success stories – for example the current CEO commenced work as a 15 year old and many employees who commenced with 'dubious' previous employment records have been able to get themselves stabilised and then moved on to supervisory or manager roles and established careers. The training program provided by this company is widely recognised within the business sector as developing vital transferable life skills that will serve anyone well in any career path. Each of the clients interviewed expressed a firm belief in the value of the training they were receiving.

ERTO #4 was unaware of the government's Welfare to Work reforms and keeps no record of target group membership amongst its staff. All of its entry level employees are selected and recruited by a large recruitment agency. The agency has developed in conjunction with the ERTO and extensive battery of tests to select suitable staff including basic motor skills, physical (e.g. colour blindness), and behavioural and attitudinal assessments. The company also ensure that staff are fully aware of what the job is about and what is expected of them. As a consequence the retention rate of staff entering full time employment and undertaking on the job training is very. The training program itself is well designed, supported by high quality materials and conducted in the workplace. The company provides a facility for staff to use if they need additional help and support with their training. This additional support takes the form of computer-based self-directed learning and appears to be very effective in assisting staff to complete their training and retain their full-time employment.

Outcomes of programs

In all providers surveyed the consistent outcome of their VET training programs was exceptionally high rates for retention of full time employment amongst entry level staff, and very high acceptance of the need for the training and willingness to undertake it even amongst employees with previous poor class room experiences.

ERTO #1 has a very high retention rate in their apprentice programs. 'We have only lost one person in the past 5 years during induction and we have about an 85% completion rate which is way better than State averages.'

In the current economic climate successful completion of either traineeship of apprentice programs results in real, ongoing and well paid work within ERTO #1.

ERTO #2 offers all new starters a nationally consistent induction program that meets the business needs. As other training is added, either to meet initiatives such as Welfare to Work, or to develop new skills, pathways to appropriate qualifications are matched to the training.

A good example was the Operational Leadership program where pathways developed skills at the same time as offering access to assessment and qualifications.

ERTO #3 provides an especially supportive learning and development environment, supported by excellent materials and trainers who relate well to the clients. The on-the-job and in-the-workplace approach is well liked by participants and produces very good outcomes in terms of job retention and future career development. There is much anecdotal evidence to support the conclusion that this company plays a major role in assisting young unemployed and alienated people to re-establish contact with the workforce and build long-term careers. The flexible shifts and willingness to acknowledge individual needs is very attractive to parents (especially women) seeking to re-enter the workforce.

ERTO #4 is a workplace of choice offering good pay and conditions rather than rapid career development. Competition for jobs is strong and this enables the company to use a comprehensive screening process for the selection of its staff. However, the repetitive and highly structured nature

of the work (and its lack of direct contact with customers and the public) suits many Welfare to Work target group member characteristics (some disabled (i.e. mental problems), poor language and communication skills), and there is strong anecdotal evidence that the company plays a key role in providing training and employment for them that would otherwise not be available in their region.

Issues faced by clients

To access these VET training programs clients must first pass through the selection and recruitment processes used by the providers. Whilst in some instances these involve extensive pre-assessment they do not necessarily preclude any particular Welfare to Work target group. VET training is not a pre-requisite for any of these jobs nor is any form of academic success; the following is typical of the information given to prospective clients;

> 'We are seeking applications from anyone who has a confident nature, is comfortable working to targets, who is able to pick up new concepts quickly!
> That's right, we don't mind if you haven't worked in a call centre before, what we are looking for is people with get up and go, with enthusiasm and personality!
> An excellent phone manner, clear speaking voice and excellent English language skills are essential.'

ERTO #1's indigenous trainees and apprentices face many difficulties common to their target group and common to the remote nature of their employment. These are detailed in the in-depth case study. In general the company addresses issues such as transport, peer support, accommodation, and drug use directly. Bus transport is provided to the workshops, local indigenous mentors are employed, where possible apprentices and trainees are encouraged to live at home, and a drug free work place is rigidly enforced with a 'three strikes and you are out' policy supported by counselling.

ERTO #2 argues that most prospective employees with literacy or numeracy problems are selected out during recruitment. There are some problems with working toward qualifications and the standard of written work that may be needed. This is overcome by offering flexible ways of conducting assessment such as check lists and interviews. ESL issues were mentioned in some IT recruitment and in-house programs are offered to assist.

The on-line recruitment process used by ERTO #3 uses some very basic literacy and numeracy checks. The principal determinants for selection are attitudinal and relate to suitability for a customer service role and willingness to work as part of the team. Once selected the clients seem to accept well the VET on-the job training provided and participate with enthusiasm. Success rates are high.

ERTO #4 uses an extensive pre-recruitment assessment process that can take up to three months to complete. Demand for these jobs is high and the company makes sure that prospective employees have a clear idea of what work on an assembly line is like and are strongly encouraged to judge their suitability for it. The process appears to work well with very high retention rates (well above 90%). The high quality and very specific on-the-job and in-the-workplace training is well accepted by clients and they appear to be keen participants. Their main focus is learning how to do the job properly and retaining their full-time employment. The issue of a formal qualification is seen as a very nice bonus. Lack of child care and public transport were specific significant issues for employees at this company

Needs of clients

It must be said that the principal focus of these provider VET training programs is the business needs of the company. There is little evidence of explicit allocation of resources to non-job skill and personal development programs although all provided clients with very supportive learning and working environments. The broad approach seem to be that well skilled employees will be happy

employees and that expenditure on training resources is only justified if business performance is maintained and preferably enhanced. Surprisingly none of the clients interviewed found this to be a problem. They felt they were getting all the support they needed through a supportive workplace although a couple had used the Employee Assistance Program for help with on-going personal (non-work) problems.

ERTO #1 offers a wide range of support processes for indigenous trainees and apprentices. These are listed in the in-depth case study. ERTO #2 addresses worker and learner needs with remedial programs such as ESL and literacy although the need is not great as a result of the filters used in the selection and recruitment process. Clients in ERTO #3 did not identify any significant common needs and were aware that the only explicit formal support provided was through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). They all stated that any support they needed was available through the informal networks they established with colleagues, team leaders and local trainers. None had used EAP to date and all stated that they would contact local TAFE college or other provider if they felt they needed some extra help.

Provider needs

All providers surveyed were wary of the potential workload associated with what they saw as the excessively bureaucratic processes imposed by government. The workloads associated with the maintenance of registration as an RTO are an issue of concern. However, all felt that the benefits outweighed to cost. Registration meant that they could customise training to meet their business needs within a nationally recognised quality framework whilst being seen as an employer of choice by being able to issue formal qualifications to staff. The providers are primarily interested in finding the right person for the job irrespective of their membership of government defined target groups. Although it must be said a common view was expressed that since they actually employ and train significant numbers of target group members some form of government funding would be reasonable.

In the case of ERTO #1 the provider needed to develop a robust and well supported indigenous employment strategy that had wide acceptance within the business and the wider community because of the difficulty in getting staff. There were a number of key reasons for developing and implementing the policy. These included the effects of the Taylor Report[6], the economic effect of the picketing of the Marandoo mine site, the need for a local workforce and a genuine belief that economic development should benefit the local communities.

Factors that contribute to success

Several key success factors have emerged from this case study and were consistent across the providers and clients interviewed. These include;

- ✧ The VET training programs are undertaken by clients as part of their employment rather than as a pre-employment activity that may lead to a job. A number of clients has had previous less than satisfactory experiences with traditional 'transition to work programs.
- ✧ Up front selection and recruitment processes ensure a good match between the applicant and the job. Providers ensure that clients fully understand what the job is about and what is expected of them – a de-facto self selection process with excellent outcomes. These processes do not explicitly exclude Welfare to Work target group members.

[6] Indigenous people and the Pilbara mining boom. A baseline for regional participation, Taylor J and Scambary B, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU, Canberra, 2005

- ✧ The training programs are provided on-the-job and in-the-workplace and bear little resemblance to the traditional classroom approach that had been experienced by many of the clients interviewed.
- ✧ The training programs are designed and built in house and customised to the specific knowledge and skills required for the job and the companies business needs. Even though the training is site specific the qualification obtained and the life skills developed are transferable and highly valued by clients and providers.
- ✧ All of the providers surveyed provide very supportive learning and working environments. Although the support is largely informal it appears to be very effective in helping clients make a success of the training and retaining employment. From the providers perspective they have invested in the development of the clients and it is the best interests of the business to ensure that they succeed.

ERTO #1 has a close relationship with Pilbara TAFE. The company's apprentices use Pilbara TAFE as their RTO. ERTO 2 sees this as a way of keeping a robust public provider presence in their towns to benefit their employees and their families. The senior manager of learning and development at the company is the Chair of the TAFE board.

The Parent company to ERTO #1, plus Woodside, BHP and Chevron are managing the establishment of the new Australian Technical College and anticipate it will have a major focus on indigenous school based apprenticeships.

Vignette

The first vignette is typical of much of the anecdotal evidence showing that ERTOs play a significant but largely hidden part in training Welfare to Work target groups find and keep full-time employment. This story involves a young woman (mid twenties) with a history of drug induced schizophrenia. She had been a heavy user of cannabis and had dropped out of school before completing year 10 despite being academically bright through primary school. She was virtually unemployable in her late teens and received various Centrelink payments and support (including disability). She developed a fear of being amongst groups of people, worrying about what they thought and were saying about her, and only left the house when it was unavoidable. She attended a variety of work-for-the dole, transition to work programs but could not handle the typical classroom situation and any focus on her. She commenced two traineeships but dropped out of both within a few weeks because she was bored and didn't like the classes or the teachers and felt that what she was being taught was of little use and only offered to her to keep her 'off the streets'. She gained access to a computer at home and soon became a self-taught internet user. This lead her to sites such as Seek.com where jobs were advertised and she started to make some on-line applications. This got her a job at Coles through the on-line selection and recruitment process (She did not have an upfront interview until she was well into the process – she said that she probably would not have applied if it needed a formal interview right at the start). She got the Coles job but found the people issue too confronting and the training provided too impersonal (e.g. being left in a room by herself with a pile of induction videos to watch) and left after a few months. However, the experience of actually getting a job improved her confidence and she soon found a call centre job via the internet. She applied on-line and got the job through a Job Network) recruitment agency. Her new work environment was very friendly and supportive with a sense of 'we are all in this together, the training was job specific and not seen a waste of her time and conducted in the workplace by trainers from the workplace. She has found her self-confidence growing because the training ensures that she is good at the job and others recognise that she is good at it, she now enjoys dealing with people over the phone and has now been in fill-time employment for over four months. More importantly she is now confident in her ability to win and keep a job and is now able to support herself and seems to have her life in order and a bright future.

Implications and conclusions

Companies with embedded RTOs are part of the VET sector. Through their recruitment and training policies they are able to make considerable contributions to the Welfare to Work agenda

- A significant proportion of the Australian VET training effort is provided by enterprise registered training organisations (ERTOs). An ERTO is defined as any RTO embedded within a business enterprise whose principal business in not education and training. Typical examples include Qantas, Commonwealth Bank, Insurance Australia Group and McDonalds Australia.
- ERTOs do not receive public funds to support their VET operations (some do participate in and receive provider funding under the Australian Apprenticeship/Traineeship program) and are not required to provide formal activity reports. As a consequence little data about these operations is publicly available.
- The ERTO group includes some of Australia's largest companies and employs large numbers of people (well in excess of one million). They represent a significant employment destination for welfare-to-work target group members, especially in regional areas.
- Within the ERTOs surveyed for this project there was little or no awareness of the welfare-to-work initiative and none keep any useful personnel data related to the participation of Welfare to Work target groups within the business.
- ERTOs do not develop programs to meet the Welfare to Work agenda. The entry level training provided for new starters is designed to develop the specific skills needed to meet business needs. Completion of VET training is not a pre-requisite for employment; the ERTOs surveyed clearly indicated that they prefer to conduct their own (customised) job skill training after the new started have commenced employment.
- The ERTOs surveyed reported high training completion and employee retention rates (all above 90%). This was attributed to the following factors:
- Training is job specific and its value is immediately relevant to participants
- Training is provided on the job and within work time
- Training is provided by trainers who really understand both the requirements of the job and who 'have been there themselves'. (i.e. the trainers are selected from amongst the workforce with very recent work experience)
- Participants find the 'on the job' training environment to be much better than the traditional classroom/teacher situation. The ERTOs seem very good at incorporating new employees into a supportive peer group – there is a real sense of pride developed through belonging to the group.
- Recruitment processes appear to concentrate on non-VET factors such as basic literacy, numeracy, keyboard and motor skills, awareness of what the job entails, general presentation and especially attitude. The ERTOs also work hard to ensure that the prospective recruits fully understand what the job entails and the qualities required to undertake it successfully. For example, the repetitive nature of the car assembly plant or the interaction with the public needed for the fast food operation. A large proportion of these factors are assessed/provided using an internet based initial recruitment process. This approach was well liked by participants who generally found the prospect of an up-front interview somewhat intimidating.

Case 6: Policy department perspectives

Introduction

Within the context of the research project, four interviews were conducted, three with Commonwealth policy Departments and one with the Commonwealth delivery Agency. The reason for seeking these views was to ascertain the Commonwealth expectation of the VET sector in implementing the Welfare to Work reforms.

Context

Interviews were conducted in Canberra at the Departmental head offices. Three of the interviews were with two staff representing Executive Level 2 (Director) or higher staff. SES band 1 were included in all four interviews, and one Department team consisted of a Deputy Secretary and SES Band 1.

Interviews were conducted in the Commonwealth Department of Educations Science and Training (DEST) the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) and Centrelink. The Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs was approached but referred the team to DEST and DEWR.

Methodology

A questionnaire was prepared and sent in advance to the interviewees. The questionnaire was used to guide the interview although interviews were allowed to explore areas of interest that arose.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and the transcriptions used as the basis of preparing this summary.

Findings

Key points from interviews:

Policy Department 1:

- ✧ do not see VET as main focus;
- ✧ do not engage directly with the VET sector;
- ✧ have an explicit work first policy;
- ✧ see work as first step, not training; and
- ✧ see enterprise RTOs and large employers with a role.

Policy Department 2:

- ✧ take a broader view of education and training, it is a continuum with Welfare to Work just a 'blip'; and
- ✧ have put most effort into creating new places in existing programs to meet Welfare to Work agenda.

The Commonwealth delivery agency:

- ✧ has general concern about conflicting emphasis from policy Departments;
- ✧ balances this conflict with a 'work first' focus as well as a 'pathway' to work focus; and
- ✧ has local high level of interaction with VET sector.

The two policy departments had clear views of the Welfare to Work (Welfare to Work) agenda.

It was clear from both discussions with Policy Department 1 that they are pursuing a 'work first' agenda. The view is that with the economic situation as it is, the opportunity to move the target groups to work should be a priority. In this context Policy Department 1 saw the VET sector providing some very basic skills but acknowledged that in many circumstances no training may be required. The VET sector was described as a 'tool to achieve the work first policy'. The Providers of Australian Government Education Services (PAGES), including private and public providers, Job Network providers and so on, were seen as the key players between the policy decisions and implementation.

There was no expressed expectation of the VET sector, and training needs discussed were often focussed on individual pre-employment capacity building rather than tradition longer term skill development. Moving into work and receiving on-the-job training was seen as a good outcome, and there is a need for the VET sector to see how it can add value to this scenario.

Significantly emphasis was placed on targeting those Welfare to Work target groups with multiple barriers to work, as other groups were likely to be drawn into employment in the current economic conditions. There was acknowledgement that this group would need pre-employment assistance.

The discussion with Policy Department 2 emphasised that their priority is to the broader and longer term skill development of Australia. Welfare to Work is seen as a response to the current part of the employment cycle. Under the Policy Department 2 response to Welfare to Work, additional places have been made available in many programs, 'it is more like an enhancement of our existing mechanisms rather than a whole set of new structures'. The emphasis is on short term remedial intervention (literacy, numeracy and ESL programs were mentioned) and Australian Apprenticeships.

There was a view expressed that the private component of the VET sector would rapidly 'lift' to meet the additional places created in programs.

The Commonwealth delivery agency will apply the changes in arrangements for parents, mature age job seekers, long term unemployed, those with a disability and indigenous Australians. The Commonwealth delivery agency provides the link between their customers and the PAGES. The Commonwealth delivery agency view, from the training point of view, was that for under 21s the emphasis was on capability development whilst for over 21 it was on work. There was a strong emphasis on 'pathways to work'.

Whilst discussion included Australian Apprentice opportunities, a substantial role of VET was seen to provide pre-employment and targeted training for 'a harder group of people.. to engage' as other job seekers with skills were able to move to work.

Although the Commonwealth delivery agency is committed to the work first agenda, they sited local variations in job markets and the need to have flexibility in policy application to meet these variations. At the local level they have well developed relationships with the VET sector, either through PAGES who are RTOs of direct with local RTOs. Often good local associations with VET are built on individual relationships not system wide approaches.

Nationally the Commonwealth delivery agency depended on the policy Departments to engage with the VET sector. There was also a view that the VET sector is complex, so diverse and so scattered', and as such is difficult to engage, other than locally.

The Commonwealth delivery agency had a view that the whole of Government agenda needed some tuning to fully align the policy Department's views in order to deliver consistent and unambiguous programs. '…unfortunately we have a bit of a fight where education is looking at the really, really long term and you've got work in the very short term and no one is looking at the middle term.'

A clear line of site from policy, through implementation, to a unified VET sector would mean better outcomes. The example of large numbers of parents with new obligations to work in 2007 was sited as an example. 'We have got all these parents coming next year and somebody should be telling us, or the parents, where the skill gaps are and telling them now what they should be training in...'

Implications and conclusions

From the discussion with the policy departments and The Commonwealth delivery agency there are several clear implications for the VET sector and the Welfare to Work agenda.

- ✧ Work first policies mean that the VET sector needs to consider its role in pre-employment training.
- ✧ There will be a demand for short, sharp skill development to cover basic pre-employment issues such as literacy and ESL
- ✧ Longer term pre-employment skills development programs need to be re-assessed.
- ✧ The VET sector will need to develop enterprise specific training if it is to maintain its current position
- ✧ The fractured and competitive nature of the VET sector is a disincentive for engagement on a national level with policy developers.
- ✧ Local partnerships are important for success.