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Learning, Work and Livelihood in Australia

UNESCO Research Project on Lifelong Learning and Employment
Prospects/Employability in the Asia and Pacific Region



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Preface

Learning, Work and Livelihood in Australia was the first case study report to be developed as part of an ongoing UNESCO research project on Lifelong Learning and Employment Prospects/Employability in the Asia-Pacific region, initiated by the Asia and Pacific Programme of Education for All (APPEAL), UNESCO Bangkok.

Lifelong Learning (LLL) is vital for individuals and nations. The skills developed through LLL are important not just for the well-being of young people and adults, but for employment and economic prosperity. Particularly, today's growing globalization, fast-paced global changes, and the continuous rollout of new technologies call for not only specific job-related skills and knowledge to be continuously updated, but general competencies to be developed and strengthened, which enable people to adapt to be successful in this ever-changing work environment. There is a strong need, particularly in Asian countries, to overcome the traditional divide between learning and employment. In this climate of rapid change, such a strict divide can no longer be sustained. The trend of lifetime employment is disappearing and being replaced by new management models that encourage expertise and work experience. Across the world, higher levels of skills are emerging as an increasingly important requirement for avoiding unemployment, low incomes and job insecurity. In this increasingly skills-based economy, there is a risk that many people might be left behind and marginalized by globalization and the digital revolution. In fact, in many developed countries, entering or re-entering labour markets with low skill levels, especially for youth and older workers with few qualifications, results in insecure employment and low wages.

LLL has a key role to play in building on diverse individual competences while meeting the differing needs of learners by ensuring equality and access, particularly for those of disadvantaged groups such as people with low literacy skill, early school-leavers, the unemployed, older people, migrants and people with disabilities. The need to embed the principles of LLL in education and broader development policies is becoming increasingly more urgent. Fairer and more efficient training systems in various settings, such as continuing education, vocational training and on-the-job training, is most needed to bridge skill gaps. A number of countries in Asia and the Pacific face an urgent need to review and reform policies in order to match education and training systems more closely to employment markets and are seeking a direction for effectively increasing and enhancing their citizen's employability.

In this context, UNESCO Research Project on Lifelong Learning and Employment Prospects/Employability in the Asia and Pacific Region aims to facilitate the formulation of LLL policies, strategies and programmes for enhancing employment prospects or employability of working-age citizens in Asia-Pacific region. Through insights gained through a comprehensive and comparative understanding of LLL, employability and their interactions in Asia and Pacific region, with particular focus on policy initiatives and their socio-economic contexts, we can consider concrete and applicable policy recommendations about how to design and implement effective LLL policy to enhance the employability of every citizen in Asia-Pacific countries.

Learning, Work and Livelihood in Australia presents one case for consideration. UNESCO Bangkok wishes to express its gratitude to Dr Allie Clemans and Ms Ann Newton of Monash University, Dr Jose Roberto Guevara of Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT University), and Ms Sally Thompson of Adult Learning Australia for their tremendous contribution to the development of this case study.



We hope that this case study will help spark ideas to review, affirm and strengthen policy, planning and implementation of lifelong learning education. We welcome queries, comments and suggestions that may be addressed to:

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Executive Summary

This document is the final report documenting the Australian Case for UNESCO Bangkok's Research Project on *Lifelong Learning and Employment Prospects/Employability*. This project analyses the relationships between lifelong learning (LLL) and employment prospects in policy and practice in the Asia-Pacific region. It is guided by the headline question, "In what ways can LLL continually enhance employment prospects?" This report offers a response to this question from an Australian perspective.

The Australian case study has been guided by two objectives:

1. Identify the relationship between LLL and employment prospects in policy and practice; and,
2. Document existing LLL policies, strategies and programmes that illuminate such policies and practices, which are offered at national, regional and local levels through formal, non-formal and informal channels, and which contribute to the enhancement of employment prospects or employability of working-age citizens in the target country.

Data collection for the project took place between July and August 2012. A range of policy and academic literature was consulted and reviewed and presented in the report. The report is presented in two parts. Part 1 presents a critical commentary in response to the slightly adapted headline question "In what ways does LLL continually enhance employment prospects in Australia?" It draws on data reviewed in part 2 of the report, which is itself comprised of four sections:

- **Section A:** presents a review of the economic, social, cultural and political profiles of lifelong learning and employability in Australia. This includes a description of industry, employment and educational attainment trends and discusses their relationship to employment patterns and challenges.
- **Section B:** describes the education and training system in Australia. It outlines the structure, financing and participants of the system and describes the programmes and approaches taken to lifelong learning and employability. It examines the roles of government, industry and education providers and the curriculum challenges and social issues faced in the system.
- **Section C:** outlines contemporary policies, incentives and initiatives that manifest lifelong learning and its relationship to employment prospects in Australia. It draws on the most current policy initiative on vocational education and training as an exemplar of the ethos and approach that underpins an Australia approach to lifelong learning.
- **Section D:** discusses participants of lifelong learning in Australia. It describes their motivations to participate in learning as well as the barriers that prevent this.

Analysis presented in the report finds the following:

- Lifelong learning is not an explicit component of contemporary education and training policy in Australia. More dominant is the notion that learning can enhance employment prospects but, for the most part, attention to learning is paid to its work-relatedness.
- Opportunities for lifelong learning and employment possibilities are most directly seen through vocational education and training (VET) and adult community education (ACE) and, for the most part, formal education and qualifications which focus on learning for the purpose of economic development, enterprise productivity and individual capacity building.



- While there is a strongly anticipated positive and direct link between qualification levels and employment opportunities, there are a number of features at play in Australia which prevent its realisation:
 - People with low levels of education and skills often experience multi-layers of social disadvantage which constrains employment prospects.
 - The link between education and employment opportunities for men and women differ significantly, exacerbated by the skills profile of men and women which play out in different ways.
 - Most workers do not move into a different occupational or skill level post-training in VET.
 - Perceptions of 'lack of experience' affect new graduates as well as more experienced workers such as migrants.
- The differences in industry demand, levels of economic activity, employment rates and varied patterns across Australia cut across a direct link between higher levels of educational achievement and employment opportunities.
- A dominant "education logic" in Australia has resulted in an education and training system with a narrow approach to lifelong learning which focuses more on the life span than on life-relatedness.
- The Australian experience shows that life-relatedness, which comprises one aspect of lifelong learning, is worthy of attention and that, well-being, together with skills building, strengthens employment prospects.
- Transitions between learning and employment (employment, underemployment, unemployment) are multiple. The directions in which these movements take individuals involve "stop and starts" rather than constant movement.
- The Australian case demonstrates that a policy framework does embed learning across the lifespan and does generate a variety of learning options that can, to some extent, accommodate the variety of learning motivations of Australians. However, more creative imagination and a forward-thinking could more effectively accommodate multiple transitions that are sensitive to individuals, their contexts and cultures and diverse motivations to engage in lifelong learning.



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PART ONE

Lifelong Learning and Employability – A Commentary on the Australian Case

This commentary considers the ways in which a focus on the relationship between Lifelong Learning and Employability is showcased in Australia. To identify the pertinent insights that are evident in an Australian case around lifelong learning, data has been reviewed that describes the particular conditions in this setting. These include the following aspects which are contained in relevant sections within Part Two:

- Population profiles and trends, industry profiles and employment patterns, trends in educational attainment and the challenges that confront a relationship between employment and learning in Australia (Section A);
- The Education and training system in Australia which includes descriptions of learners, programmes, qualifications, teaching and learning approaches and funding. It pays particular attention to the positioning of employability skills, literacy and skills utilisation and the ways in which these impact the education and training system to achieve its objectives of enhancing employability and increasing national productivity (Section B);
- Current policy directions which exemplify an Australian approach to deepening lifelong learning and employability (Section C); and
- Australian learners' engagement in education and training and the motivations and barriers that influence this (Section D).

This commentary draws on data discussed in these sections in order to consider the positioning and nature of a relationship between lifelong learning and employment opportunities in Australia. Addressing this relationship in the Australian contexts requires some 'interpretation' as lifelong learning is not a distinct and explicit policy objective in Australia and does not pervade the ethos of the Australian education and training system. Our consideration of lifelong learning and employment opportunity is then, a consideration of different data sources and literature in order to arrive at our position.

Do we have a lifelong learning policy in Australia?

Australia does not have a formal policy on lifelong learning. The question then is whether lifelong learning is part of the policy culture within Australia? Some commentators argue that it is, and that it is paradoxically evident in the absence of direct lifelong learning policy. For example, Karmel (2004) argues the following:



In a sense, Australia does not have a policy because it does not need one: our whole approach has encouraged lifelong learning (p. 14). ... Australia does not have a life-long learning policy as such. Nevertheless, the level of adult participation in education and training in Australia is very high, and Australia could claim to be at the forefront of lifelong learning, at least in terms of formal higher education and TVET (p. 18).

The existence of lifelong learning is justified on the basis of learning opportunities across one's lifespan, with the participation of adults in education and training and educational options for people at all stages of the life cycle – from school leavers, apprentices to older learners. This positive picture, argues Karmel, makes it understandable that the “policy push” for a lifelong policy has been weak (p. 18).

On the other hand, there are those who argue that the absence of a formal policy on lifelong learning can be viewed as less positive. This is based on the view that its absence signals the lack of attention paid to learning aspirations that go beyond enhancing employment opportunities. For example, Kearns (cited in Karmel, 2004, p. 17) argued:

To date [1999] the Commonwealth government has shown no interest in monitoring other types of educational outcomes such as personal satisfaction, increased self-esteem, community involvement or social skills. Yet these outcomes are important indicators of an inclusive education system and an individual's motivation to become a lifelong learner.

Lifelong learning as a concept overtook the idea of lifelong education in the 1980s onward. Prior to that, lifelong education, as promoted by UNESCO, emphasised education that contributed to cohesive societies. To this extent, education was concerned with its influence on society in economic, political, social and cultural terms (Crowther, 2004). Lifelong learning, as a policy discourse introduced from the 1980s, appealed to ideas of learning that necessarily went beyond schooling. In fact, it marked a shift “as significant a social and economic shift for the late 20th century as the introduction of compulsory schooling had been for the late 19th century” (McKenzie, 2001, p. 367). It also tended to convey learning as a process which was controlled by an individual through his or her own dedication and commitment to learn which would necessarily yield fruitful outcomes. This assumption, however, deflected attention from the ways in which social privilege intersected with, and determined, the extent and nature of the outcomes. (Crowther, 2004).

Despite limitations around lifelong learning, the policy intention was broad, and it flagged a strategy that embraced:

... a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individual to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding that they will require throughout their lifetimes and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances, and environments (Kearns, 1998, cited in McKenzie, 2001, p. 368).

We are of the view that the potential breadth posed by lifelong learning as a concept has not been realised in the Australian case. McKenzie (2001) noted that Australia was characterised by the OECD in the late 1990s as a country where a focus on *lifelong* learning tended to emphasise skills training, employability and economic competitiveness at the expense of a broader approach. We concur with this and suggest that such a focus has been entrenched over the years. While Australia does not have an explicit lifelong learning policy, it does have systems of education and training which encourage participation and which seek to provide learning options across the lifespan. This approach aligns with the ‘*life-long*’ aspect of the term. On that basis, Australia could be seen to have such a policy in place, even if not in name. However, the narrowness of the focus and its restriction to objectives around



employment has meant that it has adopted a focus which has attended less to 'life' than to 'life-long'. A lifelong policy framework that attended to 'life' would acknowledge multiple knowledge that comprise education and multiple responsibilities in fostering motivation and support for learning. It would also acknowledge diverse purposes of education that extend beyond employment. In this way, it would also position the idea of education as an investment in the social fabric and not a cost.

Attention to cost rather than investment has instilled an obvious policy nervousness around the concept of lifelong learning. The resourcing implications for a narrower approach to lifelong learning was estimated for OECD countries, as far back as 2001, to be at least 5 per cent of GDP and likely more for Australia (McKenzie, 2001). A broader approach taken to lifelong learning, for those positioning education as a cost, would find such costs too much to bear. On this basis, the relative silence around lifelong learning, with occasional policy flirtation with the concept, has meant that Australia has focussed more on the idea of developing a system that offers educational options for adults across their life-span for the purpose of employment. In the same way, learning and its relationship to employment opportunities has been converted to a notion of 'employability' which puts the onus on preparation for employment on the individual.

For these reasons, the Australian case conveyed in this report infers lifelong learning from various aspects in the current policy agenda and education and training system which is, as explained above, narrow in focus. This means that we look at lifelong learning and employment possibilities in an education system which includes vocational education and training (VET) and adult community education (ACE) and, for the most part, formal education and qualifications which focus on learning for the purpose of economic development, enterprise productivity and individual capacity building. If the Australian case on lifelong learning is so premised on a link between education and employment, what can we say about the link between educational attainment and employment in Australia?

Lifelong learning and its relationship to employment opportunities in Australia

Education and training policy in Australia rests on the assumption of a positive influence that growing levels of skill development have on creating employment opportunities across Australian industries. Data reviewed in Section A discuss the link between the levels of educational achievement achieved by individuals and their subsequent participation in the labour force in Australia. Clearly, those with qualifications progress better than those without. In 2008, 86 per cent of people with a post-school qualification (that is, with a qualification gained after completing compulsory schooling) were employed compared with 71 per cent of those without a post-school qualification aged between 25 and 64. At the same time, people without a post-school qualification made up 44 per cent of 25 to 64 year olds in the workforce (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 30). In 2012, 2.9 million Australians who completed Year 10 or below did not have a post-school qualification. Of these, 1.6 million are employed, 153,000 are unemployed but actively seeking employment and 1.1 million are not in the labour force (Australian Workforce Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 11).

Employability becomes a key feature in times of economic fluctuation. It is known that fluctuations in economic cycles affect unskilled workers more than skilled workers. In an economic downturn, they are more likely to be retrenched (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 11). This results in a higher change-over of jobs for low skilled workers and more job insecurity. Changing technology and globalisation require people to have skills to carry out work roles, to change work roles or to adapt to



change within job roles as they arise. These demands require adequate foundation skills of language, literacy and numeracy and the flexibility to change and adapt.

Learning, is then, linked to employability as it is deemed to be a way of improving peoples' capacities to gain and maintain work through the acquisition of knowledge, skills and confidence to enter, remain in or return to work (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). At a policy level, improving the educational levels of Australians is seen as vital for the nation's social and economic prosperity and to enable people to live fulfilling, productive and responsible lives (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7). An exemplar of such policy initiatives in the Australian case is outlined in Section C. Improving employability is deemed to benefit productive enterprises and reinforce inclusive communities, with such prosperity shared across the community (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 2).

However, just as there is a strongly anticipated positive and direct link between qualification levels and employment opportunities, there are a number of features at play in Australia which prevent its realisation.

1. The first relates to people with low levels of education and skills who often experience multi-layers of social disadvantage. A strong link has been established between intergenerational poverty and low educational attainment (Adult Learning Australia and the Australian Education Union, 2011, p. 7). Parents with low levels of education have children with low levels of education. Their location within Australia, that is, the more remotely they live from metropolitan cities, further entrenches disadvantage with fewer employment opportunities. While achieving higher levels of education and training may be an important pathway out of poverty, it may not ensure employment for all unless people are willing to relocate.
2. The second feature is gender where the link between education and employment opportunities for men and women differ significantly. This is further exacerbated by the skills profile of men and women which play out in different ways. "The effect of low skills is more marked for men in terms of the relationship between educational attainment and workforce participation" (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, p. 11). There are rising rates of unemployment for men who have left school early and have no post-school qualifications (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 30). These men are often older male blue collar workers from manufacturing industries who have lost jobs due to structural adjustment and are without current skills that can be used in other roles (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 12).

By contrast, women with no post-school qualifications have increased in number from under 50 per cent of the total workforce in 1981 to nearly 70 per cent in 2006. The lack of post-school qualifications is less of a barrier to employment for women than for men. A possible explanation lies with the rise in number of jobs in service industries such as retail, hospitality and community care which do not require post-school qualifications and which are highly feminised labour markets (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 13).

Overall, women's participation in the workforce is increasing but remains lower than male participation. For example, 72 per cent of males are employed while 58.7 per cent of women are employed (ABS, 2012 cited in Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 13). Using OECD comparisons, the participation rate of women in the workforce in 2008 was lower than comparable countries such as New Zealand (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 24). Women have jobs that tend to be less knowledge-based than men. Knowledge intensity is declining for part-time jobs which, with more women in part-time employment, affects them negatively (Watson, 2011, p. 44). Their participation, therefore, must be considered with the type of employment and remuneration levels that accompany their jobs.

3. Most workers do not move into a different occupational or skill level post training in VET. Over “two-thirds of VET graduates from lower-paid occupations do not move into a different occupational skill level after training. A similar proportion does not receive a higher income after graduation. After graduation, individuals, from lower-paid occupations are more likely to work part-time, regardless of age or gender, and women graduates are especially likely to be part-time and to be casual” (Pocock et al., 2011, pp. 13-14). Analysis of motivations for participation in VET indicate that studying to satisfy job requirements or to maintain job security are more likely motivations than participation for higher earnings or job advancement.
4. A fourth factor limiting a strong connection between education and employment is what is deemed ‘relevant’ experience. This affects new graduates as well as more experienced workers such as migrants. Entry level jobs for novice workers who lack experience can be a significant factor in reducing employment opportunities. Employers have strong preferences for experienced workers. Research by Cully (cited in Watson, 2011, p. 40) found that experience was a stipulated requirement in 75 per cent of job advertisements reviewed in 2005. Qualifications were only specified in 34 per cent of cases. Where qualifications were requested, it was usually a degree level qualification or higher or a high level vocational certificate. Cully notes that 4 per cent of advertisements for advanced clerical and service workers required qualifications but 82 per cent specified experience.

Paradoxically, however, around 85 per cent of students in VET study part-time and around 57 per cent work full time or part-time. These novice workers, then, do approach employment with experience or rely on the employment they undertook as students to gain jobs. This factor increases skills mismatch and skills under-utilisation, for which rates vary across high and lower skill jobs (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 24; Watson, 2008b, pp. 10–11).

Migrants, who are sometimes deemed to be lacking in “Australian” experience, also experience fewer employment opportunities and lower levels of skills utilisation compared to their Australian born counterparts once they enter the workforce. There is widespread “overqualification” or skills mismatch in OECD countries (such as Australia, Canada and Sweden) (OECD, 2011). On average, 30 per cent of migrants holding a university degree are working in intermediate or low-skilled jobs compared with 21 per cent for their native-born counterparts.

5. A fifth factor relates to industry demand across Australia in which differences cut across a direct link between higher levels of educational achievement and the existence of employment opportunities. For example the Northern Territory and Western Australia have low levels of educational achievement but, nevertheless, have high levels of employment outcomes due to the nature of industry demand. Both Western Australia and the Northern Territory are home to mining industries that require large numbers of employees and not necessarily those with post-school qualifications. By contrast, two states with the lowest levels of educational achievement, South Australia and Tasmania, have agricultural and modest manufacturing industries which require fewer employees with subsequent higher rates of unemployment.
6. Australia has been depicted as a “three-speed economy” (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 20). The mining industry is the top level of a high profit-high speed section, while manufacturing, tourism and agriculture are the bottom level of a low profit-low speed section and the remaining industries are in the middle section. The flows of labour that conform to these levels differ. Research by Buchanan, Baldwin and Wright (2011) indicate that workers move in distinct occupational streams. Although they hypothesise about these streams and advocate further examination, these indicate the following: that skilled and semi-skilled manual workers move within and



between related sectors; that those undertaking less skilled manual work flow between low-skill and low pay sectors; and that those undertaking the more undervalued “care work” move between low-pay services work, e.g. between care and cleaning work (Buchanan Baldwin and Wright, 2011). They argue:

Our assessment is that much of the current literature has not grappled with the changing nature of today's job-to-job mobility. A lack of understanding here is partly the legacy of a policy regime which has not acknowledged the dynamics of labour mobility as something which is complex and in need of careful attention (Buchanan Baldwin and Wright, 2011, p. 26)

As a result of the factors discussed above, there are uneven levels of economic activity and employment rates across the country. These shape the outcome of participation in education and training with effects that are not uniform. The system of education and training in Australia offers varied opportunities to engage in up-skilling or re-skilling but, participation within it and its impact on enhancing employment opportunities is not straightforward. This does not necessarily mean that participation in education and training does not influence actual or potential work performance. As Watson (2011) reminds us:

None of this means that educated workers are not an asset to the economy, nor that their performance in the workforce is not enhanced by their education. Rather it suggests, as Marginson has argued (1993, pp. 13ff), that credentialism – credentials inflation – is a characteristic of Australian post-school education and that an oversupply of qualifications has led to a relative decline in their earning power (Watson, 2011, p. 36).

Skill shortages, skills oversupply and unemployment co-exist. All are seen to need responses through education and skill development for enhanced adaptability (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 20). At the time of completion of this report, the Australian government released *The Australian in the Asian Century* White Paper in October, 2012. This paper acknowledges Australia's relationship with Asia as critical and guides government, industry and other key stakeholders toward reform in five key areas – skills and education, innovation, infrastructure, tax and regulatory reform. A strong focus on investment in skill development is planned to drive Australia's productivity. Noted is the need for Australia to build stronger social, political, cultural and economic relationships across the Asian region.

The Australian case on lifelong learning and employment prospects presents a set of conditions that are unique to Australia and reflect the heritage of its own history and its place more globally among developed nations. Our review suggests that the education and training system in Australia has taken a particular approach to lifelong learning from which has evolved an education and training system that has not always responded effectively to the set of economic and social conditions presented within it. These aspects are brought to the surface below and are positioned as insights which may be considered by other countries seeking to strengthen links between learning and employment through particular policies and programmes.



Rethinking lifelong learning and employment prospects – Insights from the Australian case

The system in Australia has been characterized by Wheelahan, Moodie and Buchanan (2012) as having a dominant educational logic (p. 17). This means that there is a weaker link between education and work, with stronger connections to tertiary education and less distinct to vocational education. Drawing on Iannelli and Raffe (2007), they argue that the effects on vocational education are that it "... is defined more by its lower status than its stronger orientation to employment. Employers select applicants with the greatest potential rather than those with vocational skills ..." (Iannelli and Raffe, cited in Wheelahan, Moodie and Buchanan, 2012, p. 17). This approach, they argue, is common in liberal market economies within Anglophone countries that tend to construct vocational education curriculum as narrower in focus compared to the broader curriculum traditions that are more common in those known as the "corporatist" economies within Northern European countries. However, even within Australian traditions characterised by a dominant educational logic, this coexists with pockets of greater regulation within industries (for example, some of the more specific knowledge and skills required in some skilled trades and professions) in which a more dominant employment logic is apparent.

Notwithstanding the exception, the dominant education logic in Australia has resulted in an education and training system with a narrow approach to lifelong learning which focuses more on life span than on life-relatedness. Such a system has not always accommodated these conditions in Australia and yet lifelong learning is seen as a way to address it:

The economy is still characterised by structural unemployment, under-employment and a large pool of working-age people completely outside the labour force. Together with wage inequality and job insecurity, this polarisation in Australian society undermines social solidarity and violates the social inclusion agenda. Efforts to deal with these problems, within the framework of VET policy, point towards a role for lifelong learning and for stronger linkages between educational institutions and local labour markets (Watson, 2011, p. 60).

Suggestions for creating a stronger employment logic include a need to rethink the role of lifelong learning. This review has shown that the dominant view that underpins an approach to learning in Australia is the assumption of a direct and linear relationship between education, skills building and employment. However, evidence presented and discussed in Sections A to D demonstrate that such a direct relationship is not consistently realized and, importantly, that its patterns are not linear in orientation. This presents a need to rethink a continuum of lifelong learning that can accommodate more than a learner's motivation to acquire a qualification in order to realize its benefits through employment. This is because data tell us that such a link between the attainment of qualifications and its realization is not straightforward or always attainable. Data also tell us that motivation to undertake a qualification is not always driven by aspirations for employment or higher wages. Learners are indicating that their motivation to engage in learning embraces securing their social and personal well-being - motivation for which a continuum, with its key points restricted to education, skill building and employment alone, does not adequately capture.

Thus the Australian case reinforces that the *life*-relatedness, which comprises one aspect of lifelong learning, could well be introduced on a continuum which recognizes a stronger relationship between a set of key points which include education, well-being, skills building and the relationship of all to employment.



Well-being, as a multidimensional concept, has been explored in Australia, particular with regard to youth. Stanwick and Liu (2012) in a longitudinal survey of Australian youth, measure findings related to youth in Australia against Fraillon's (2004) framework of well-being dimensions which include intrapersonal (psychological) and interpersonal (social) aspects. Wyn (2008) argues that issues of identity and well-being are two which have become significant issues in learning and need to be addressed in order to promote educational approaches that reach "hard to reach" learners. "Descriptions of young people's education transitions tend to focus almost exclusively on the school-work nexus and to ignore important aspects of young people's lives, such as their health and well-being" (p. 5).

Wyn's reference to the narrowness of the school-work nexus is applicable to the Australian case of lifelong learning and employment opportunities, such that these two points are the only ones paid attention in policy and funding terms. To the extent that well-being has been acknowledged, this has most often been translated into support for literacy, language and numeracy development (LLN) at a foundational level. This has meant that LLN has been interpreted often as foundational competencies required for engagement in work. A more holistic view of well-being might, for example, resource programmes around intergenerational literacy or support for mothers to help their children with homework. In this way, there would be acknowledgement for the roles that such programmes play in building social cohesion and in fostering community connectedness.

Learning programmes that have sought to increase participation among those learners less likely to participate, have been funded through short term programmes based on one-off grants, and have often fallen between the cracks of welfare and skill building services and have remained siloed. They have also been oriented toward addressing the "deficits" that affect employment as they have not been considered "mainstream". For all these reasons, the unsustainability of these approaches have been assured, segregating this work as "equity" work rather than accommodating more engaging approaches in mainstream education.

An approach to lifelong learning that draws in and recognizes well-being could do much to encourage a stronger intersection between well-being and work. This approach may smoothly bridge the welfare and employment dimensions of this work and position them more strongly to contribute toward individual and social well-being in a way that includes employment but is not restricted to it. In a narrow approach taken to lifelong learning, this work is sidelined and relegated to work that "supports" VET. In a more expansive approach to lifelong learning, this work is brought into the centre and accommodated as the "core" work of education and training.

What we have argued for at this point, is that the Australian case demonstrates a need to broaden the notion of lifelong learning that has been restricted to depiction on a continuum which advocates a direct relationship between education, skills building and employment. This has had two interrelated effects. It has focused mostly on the provision of education and training across one's lifespan and only for the purpose of employment – entering it, maintaining it or retraining for it. We argue that inserting a position for well-being along this continuum legitimates a place for learning that does not always relate to employment or which, however much it tries, does not always equate with gains made around employment conditions, entry to work or progression within it. It does recognize a purpose for education and training that goes beyond human capital development and supports individual and social development to the extent that such purposes impact health and personal well-being and community cohesiveness, with returns made to enhancing human capital potential too.



We now suggest that the Australian case presents an additional insight into lifelong learning. This relates to the notion of transitions and the ways in which this type of movement cuts across the linear model of lifelong learning in Australia that presupposes a progressively incremental and unswerving relationship between education and employment. There are two aspects associated with this. The first is with transitions – that is, an understanding that people move in and around positions of employment, underemployment and unemployment. That is, these transitions are multiple. Second, the directions in which these movements take individuals, involve “stop and starts” rather than constant movement toward one state (see Wheelahan, Moodie and Buchanan, 2012, Buchanan and Liu, 2012, Wyn, Lantz and Harris, 2012). Analysis of Wyn, Lantz and Harris (2012) around youth transitions identify that “[a]lthough there is a sense of transition, it is characterized by more complex interdependences” that involve cycles of movement rather than forward movement alone (p. 19). Similarly, research by Buchanan et al. (2009) identifies transitional labour markets which see working lives as more complex than transitions from youth to adulthood and from education/ school to work. ‘[T]he defining assumption of this model is that not only does the nature of work continually change, but so too do workers’ preferences and working life choices’ (p. 12).

This calls on commitment to lifelong learning to enable people to make multiple transitions in their lifetime and to support periods of transition. This could construct participation in education and training as “learning episodes” (Billett et al., 2012) which may encompass purposes for learning and programmes of learning that are broader than engagement with work but which, ultimately, contribute to people transitioning toward it.

Containing this type of movement and type of learning within a notion of employability skills does not do justice to the breadth of learning required. The contextual reference points for this type of learning will necessarily alter from context to context. At present, employability skills are linked to workers’ capacities to perform and advance within an organization (Sheldon and Thornwaite, 2005). Attempts to improve them are attending to the enabling factors that support these – in the workplace, around individuals such as culture, and the local context shaping individuals. Attempts to address local context is a way of embedding employment-related skill building. For example, what would be considered well-being and employability for a mining community would be different to an agricultural community. Individuals need to adapt and so the nature of work and well-being needs to adapt to the context of learning. Initiatives that recognize the ways in which locality plays out for learning and employment – skills ecosystems within industries and places, the nature of skills required for particular places and occupations, pose a challenge to a more homogenous approach that has been the dominant approach taken to build a relationship between lifelong learning and employment prospects in Australia.

In conclusion, the Australian case on lifelong learning and employment prospects demonstrate a country that has grown an elaborate system that is committed to creating opportunities for learning across the lifespan. Like other nations of its type, it has invested rhetorically and materially to support this based on assumptions that potential arises from participation in education and training (lifelong learning in a narrow sense) which ultimately enhances human capital in the nation. The Australian case has shown that this is not always realized and that there is a complex relationship between economic, industrial and educational development. The relationship is not always one directional and is not experienced with the same momentum by all. There is a need to address different rhythms that characterize our lives and the different purposes for which we learn. There is also a need to develop more contextually sensitive forms of education and knowledge development to address our multiple forms of engagement with work.



The Australian case demonstrates that a policy framework does embed learning across the lifespan and does generate a variety of learning options that can, to some extent, accommodate the variety of learning motivations of Australians. However, greater imagination and a forward-thinking approach that addresses the multiple realities and nuances of life chances and life changes, demands a set of principles on which systems are built. These principles must embrace more than the market. They must see lifelong learning as rights-based, driven by a need to overcome disadvantage and engender sustainability. They need to visualize lifelong learning for its contribution to life and work. They need to accommodate transitions that go beyond initial entry into employment and build systems that accommodate “stop and start” rhythms and cycles of movement that are sensitive to individuals, their contexts and cultures and diverse motivations to learn. In this way, lifelong learning may assume significance for its relation to life as well as life span, to different life contexts and to the many ways productive livelihoods are crafted – for young and old.



PART TWO

An Australian case

Section A

Economic, social, cultural and political profiles of lifelong learning and employability

Introduction

A direct link between education and employment is an assumption that permeates educational policy discourse in Australia at all levels of industry, government and education (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Specifically, education and training is seen as providing skills to learners who then move as graduates into employment which supplies an income for them and productive benefits to their employer. Employees and employers contribute to the wider economy of the nation. By linking employment to productivity, there is a direct pathway to the national standard of living and individual financial well-being. This link can be seen in statements by Australian leaders. The Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, in 2011, encouraged Australians to increase their skills for employment so they could experience the dignity of work. She reminded her audience that “absence from the labour force is not only a social tragedy but an economic risk” (Speech to the Committee for Economic Development of Australia Luncheon, 2011).

Workers also contribute to the nation’s economy via taxation and by not needing a social wage from the government. (The Australian Government does, however, offer a safety net to all its citizens.) Consequently, Australian governments are keen to ensure people are able to access education and training to enable them to maintain their employability and productivity throughout their working lives, regardless of changing industry demands (Billet et al., 2012, p. 14). Policy has entrenched this in its ‘Learn or Earn’ policy approach to ensure employment, especially for young people.

Australia aligns with a neo-liberal economic philosophy (Watson, 2011, p. 1) towards education and employment. It envisions that market mechanisms can be used to optimise economic efficiency and that the supply of skilled people for employment matches the demand by employers for people with particular skills. While a link between education and training with employment marks the edifice of education and training policy in Australia, evidence that this is borne out in practice is tenuous.

This section provides some background to explain the context of lifelong learning and employment in Australia.



A brief picture of Australia

Australia is a federation of six states and two territories, each with their own level of government. Australia has one overarching Federal Government. One level of government exists in each of the states and territories (State governments, plus the two Territories having independent government but with lesser autonomy than the States) and another overall Federal Government. Responsibility for education and training and employment falls across both of these levels of government.

The education system, in brief, has the following layers of provision. Early childhood education is available to young children but it is not compulsory and access to it depends on the location of the children. Of all Australian children, 30 per cent attend early childhood education centres. However, 37 per cent of Indigenous Australian children do not have access to these services (Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations, 2012, p. 1).

The age of compulsory education varies slightly between the different states and territories which have responsibility for school education within their boundaries. Uniformly compulsory schooling starts at the age of 6 years and continues to 15 years of age in most states, although it is being raised to 17 years in some states. Compulsory school education is completed in Year 10. Following this, there are two additional years of school education.

The Australian education system is an open one. It does not stream people of school age to one particular sector of education. When school education finishes at Year 12 individuals then move into tertiary studies at vocational education and training organisations or universities before entering their chosen occupation, or alternatively, directly into employment. Of note is that Australia's Year 12 completion rate is low compared to other OECD countries (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

Many people choose to begin or re-enter post-school studies later in life. Some may choose to study part-time while they are employed or study full time while employed part-time. Movement between the tertiary systems of vocational education and training and university (higher education) is encouraged in order to optimise the skills and qualifications that suit an individual's situation.

A separate compensatory or 'second chance' education system, called adult and community education provides another education path for those who may need to re-engage people with basic education particularly to improve language, literacy and numeracy skills for employment or social reasons.

Overall, the post-school education system is primarily driven by the view that education equips individuals to engage in employment. Education is seen as contributing to the national economic system. Learners are primarily educated with the expectation that they will undertake work roles (Mlcek, 2011, p. 819). The social benefits of education are acknowledged as contributing to each person's civic participation and social inclusion (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 28). However, much less emphasis is placed on this aspect of education in Australia.

Profiles of Australia

Population trends

The total Australian population of 22,485,300 in 2011 was dispersed across the states and territories as shown in Table 1. This represented an annual population growth rate of 1.4 per cent which was made up of 55 per cent net overseas migration and 45 per cent natural increase (births exceeding deaths).

The Australian population is an ageing one as a result of fewer children being born, decreasing rates of infant and maternal mortality and increasing life expectancy (Karmel, 2011, p. 18). Between 30 June 1990 and 30 June 2010, the proportion of Australia's population aged 15–64 years remained relatively stable, increasing from 66.9 per cent to 67.5 per cent of the total population. The proportion of people aged 65 years and over increased from 11.1 per cent to 13.6 per cent. During the same period, the proportion of the population aged 85 years and over has more than doubled from 0.9 per cent of the population at 30 June 1990 to 1.8 per cent of the total population at 30 June 2010. The proportion aged less than 15 years decreased from 22.0 per cent to 18.9 per cent. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

During the next 10 years, it is expected that more people will retire from the workforce than will enter it as young adults. By 2025, people over 65 are expected to be greater in number than those under 15 years of age. This is a demographic characteristic typical of developed countries and will have significant implications for national employment and productivity according to the Inquiry into the Economic Contribution of Older Australians (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 23).

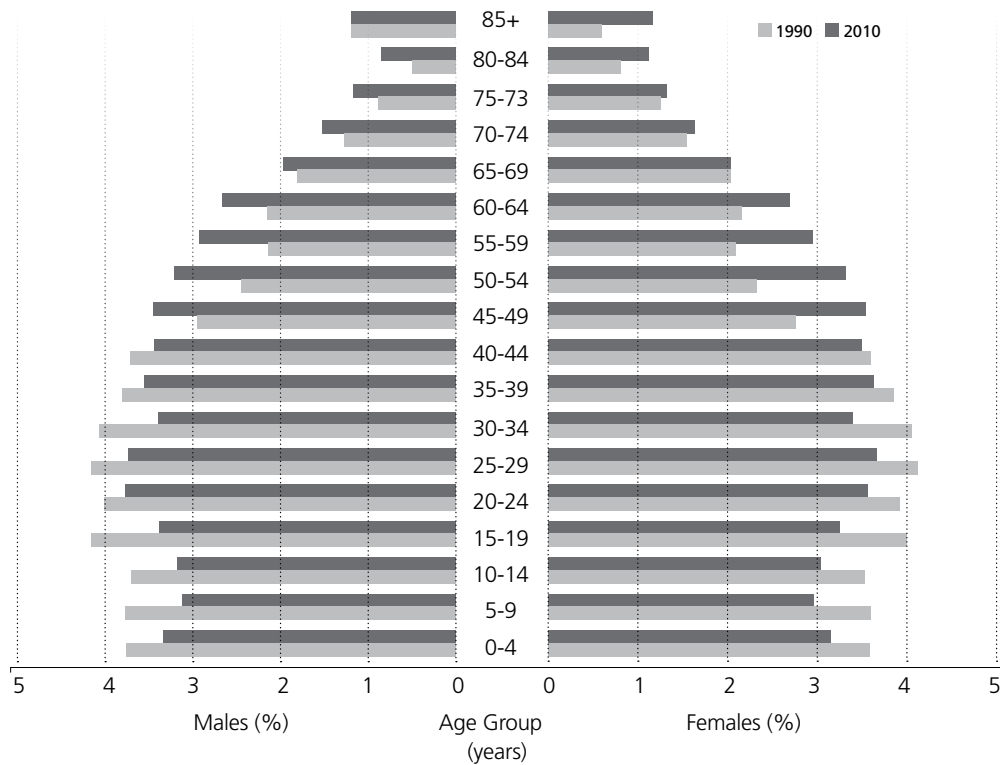
Gender differences also distinguish population trends in Australia as indicated in Table 2. In the past 20 years, the number of people over 85 years of age has increased by 170.6 per cent, with almost twice as many females as males in this group. Even though there were 105 males born for each 100 females in 2010, throughout the total Australian population there were 99.2 males per 100 females. Women are living longer than men. However, there were more male migrants of working age who arrived in Australia than women in this same category.

Table 1: Population by State and Territory

State	Population at the end of 2011 '000
New South Wales	7,247.7
Victoria	5,574.5
Queensland	4,513.0
South Australia	1,645.0
Western Australia	2,387.2
Tasmania	511.7
Northern Territory	232.4
Australian Capital Territory	370.7
Australia	22,485.3

Source: Adapted from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011).

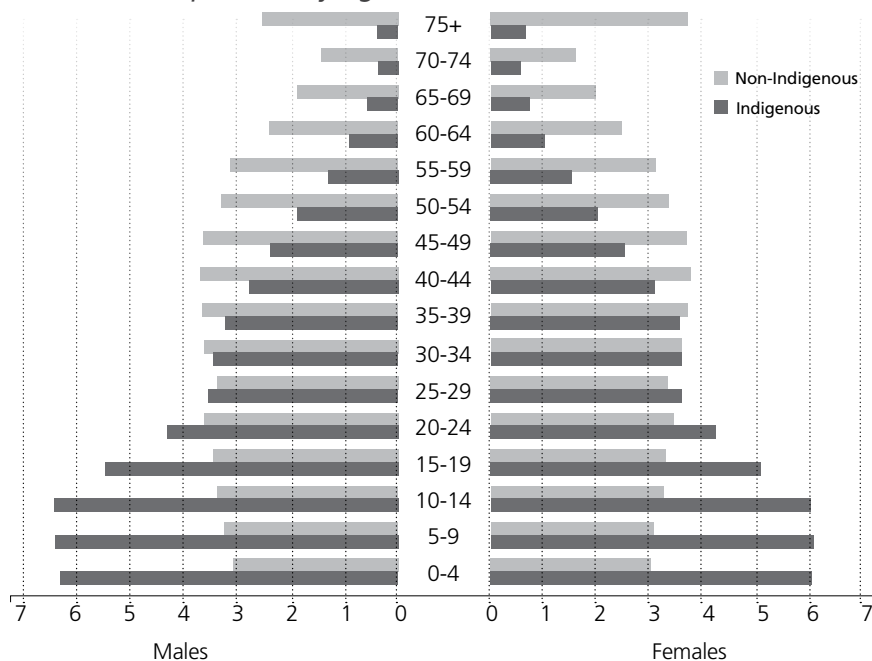
Table 2: Population by Age and Gender in Australia, 1990-2010



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (June 2010).

By contrast, the Indigenous Australian population has a much younger age structure than the overall population. In 2006, children under 15 years comprised 38 per cent of the total Indigenous population compared with 19 per cent for the non-Indigenous population. In the older age group of those over 65 years, 3 per cent of the Indigenous population were in this age group while 13 per cent of the total population were in this group. These contrasting characteristics of population are highlighted in Table 3.

Table 3: Estimated Resident Population by Age



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006).

The impact of migration on population trends

Migration in Australia has a significant influence on both population and employment and has been a very important contributor to the Australian labour force. In 2011, it was calculated that 27 per cent of the population was born overseas. This represents six million people. In 2001, a lower percentage of people were born overseas at 23.1 per cent of the population which was 4.5 million people at that time. The main countries in which migrants were born are listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Australian Residents Born Overseas, as Percentage of Population

Country of birth	Percentage of the total population in 2011
United Kingdom	5.3 per cent
New Zealand	2.5 per cent
China	1.8 per cent
India	1.5 per cent
Viet Nam	0.9 per cent
Italy	0.9 per cent

Source: Adapted from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010-2011).

In 2011, a total of 184,000 migrants arrived in Australia. These population statistics are based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010.

In 2011-12 the number of places reserved for skilled migrants within the total migrant intake was 125,850. They gained entry on the basis of their skills and qualifications (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 28). The median age of new arrivals in Australia is 26-28 years of age (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010-11, p. 8).

Migration provides an alternative source of skilled labour to meet changes in the skills demands of industry due to economic change and, an additional source of demand for businesses' goods and services. Migrants are both workers and consumers. As most permanent migrants are young adults, they assist in offsetting the ageing domestic population (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 27). Temporary migration provides short term solutions to skill shortages.

Since the mid-1990s there has been a policy shift toward independent skilled migration so that the stream of skilled workers has increased from 32 per cent to 68 per cent of migrants (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 28). In the 2011-2012 Migration Programme, 125,850 places were reserved for skilled migrants (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 28). In fact, the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency continues "permanent migrants who enter via the skill stream have positive employment outcomes and higher qualifications than the rest of the population" (2012, p. 28).

An Employer Nominated Scheme visas exist whereby temporary visas are issued to migrants in areas of temporary skill shortage, the majority of these have been in the agriculture, manufacturing and construction industries in the last five years (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 28).

Australian industry

The main Australian industries are listed in Table 5 with the income for each in Australian dollars. The operating income is provided as an indication of the comparative size of the industry within the wider economy. Operating income is an indication of the profitability (gross earnings less operating expenses and depreciation). Industries, such as retail, are more labour intensive and less capital intensive but mining is the opposite. Operating income per employee is generally higher for industries that are capital intensive:

Table 5: Australian Industry Employment and Operating Income 2000-01

Industry	Employment 2000-01 '000	Operating Income 2000-01 \$Am
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	n/a	n/a
Mining	72	57,354
Manufacturing	982	258,088
Electricity, gas and water supply	49	38,557
Construction	358	76,408
Wholesale trade	474	237,484
Retail trade	1,097	211,649
Accommodation, cafes and restaurants	446	32,217
Transport and storage	331	69,227
Communication services	119	36,820
Finance and insurance	305	162,041
Property and business services	1,054	134,841
Private community services	752	45,332
Cultural and recreational services	176	27,004
Personal and other services	192	15,090
All industries (excluding agriculture, forestry and fishing)	6,409	1,402,113

Source: Adapted from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001-01).

The industry size and the productivity of the labour force have an influence on overall national productivity. The Australian annual gross domestic product grew by 2.1 per cent in the year 2010-11 and the population increased by 1.4 per cent in the same year. Employment levels across all industries increased by 175,000 people or 3 per cent between 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 (Australian Bureau of Statistics).

Business size

Table 6 shows that the majority of businesses in Australia are small to medium size. A total of 89.5 per cent of businesses employ up to 20 people and the number of large businesses is less than 1 per cent. Education and training policy has then been focussed on addressing employment and training needs of employers in the micro and small business sectors who employ the largest number of staff.

Table 6: Business Size by Number of Employees (June 2011)

Size of business by employees	Number of businesses
Micro businesses employ 1-4 people	508,674
Small business employ 5-20 people	230,638
Medium size businesses employ 21-199	81,006
Large businesses employ more than 200	6,071
Total number of businesses	826,389

Source: Adapted from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011).

Employment in Australia

The economic growth rate in Australia is 1.7 per cent which shows a slowing of growth in the economy (Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations, 2012, p. 1). A strong link between employment and the economy is sought to withstand future trends. These were reinforced by Prime Minister Gillard in her February 2011 Speech to the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) luncheon "By 2050... [r]eal per capita GDP growth will slow to an average of 1.5 per cent a year – compared with 1.9 per cent during the past 40 years". While Australia's annual GDP growth rate has exceeded other developed economies, Australia's productivity growth does not fare well with international comparisons (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 8). Australia's productivity growth has slowed over the past decade, averaging only 1.4 per cent compared to 2.1 per cent in the 1990s. It is vital we unlock all the potential of our labour market" (Speech to the CEDA Luncheon, February 2011).

Employment participation rate

Participation in the labour market is uneven. The Prime Minister pointed to some 800,000 people working part-time who would like to increase their time at work. There are another 800,000 people who are outside the labour force. She stated that these people are to be encouraged to up-skill for employment (Speech to the CEDA Luncheon, February 2011). At the same time, Australia also has the fourth highest percentage of employees working more than 50 hours per week and the fifth lowest amount of time devoted to leisure and personal care (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 8). So while many remain under-employed, there are others who are working very long hours.

A review of the overall participation of those in and out of employment in Australia shows that males exceed females in all states and territories, with the least gender difference in the Australian Capital Territory which houses Canberra, the nation's capital and home to a large workforce of government employees. Female part-time employment heavily exceeds male part-time employment in all states and territories. The rates of participation in employment vary widely within the country according to location. For

example, the towns of De Grey and Lakes in Western Australia have an overall employment participation rate of over 80 per cent while at the other extreme the town of Lismore in New South Wales has an overall employment participation rate of 57 per cent (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 27). Participation rates are particularly important to the Australian Government which is always focused on raising the employment participation rate by all people in all locations.

Table 7 shows the labour composition of the Australian workforce. The population of each Australian state and territory is listed and the employment and unemployment figures for each by gender.

Table 7: Australian Employment Rate by State 2000-01 (people aged 15-64 years)

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	Total
Population	'000	'000	'000	'000	'000	'000	'000	'000	'000
Males	2,946.2	2,290.7	1,840.2	672.7	981.9	202.9	87.7	146.0	9 168.4
Females	3,060.0	2,375.3	1,881.2	700.4	959.5	212.6	85.9	152.3	9 427.1
Total	6,006.2	4,666.0	3,721.4	1,373.1	1,941.4	415.6	173.5	298.3	18 595.5
Employment full time									
Males	1,609.5	1,285.0	1,071.8	353.2	628.0	96.1	57.1	90.5	5,191.2
Females	905.6	689.0	590.0	175.9	303.0	49.4	39.7	64.0	2,816.6
Total	2,515.1	1,974.0	1,661.7	529.0	930.9	145.5	96.9	154.5	8,007.8
Employment part-time									
Males	346.1	277.4	196.5	85.3	99.1	26.1	7.0	16.0	1,053.5
Females	740.0	646.3	475.3	198.8	256.8	60.3	16.4	37.6	2,431.4
Total	1,086.1	923.8	671.7	284.1	355.9	86.3	23.4	53.6	3,486.9
Employed- total									
Males	1,955.6	1,562.4	1,268.2	438.5	727.1	122.2	64.2	106.5	6,244.6
Females	1,645.6	1,335.4	1,065.2	374.6	559.8	109.7	56.1	101.6	5,248.0
Total	3,610.2	2,897.8	2,333.4	813.1	1,286.9	231.9	120.2	208.1	11,492.7
Rate of participation in employment									
Males	70.0	71.7	72.4	69.4	76.0	65.5	76.6	75.9	71.5
Females	56.7	59.7	59.9	56.8	61.3	54.8	67.9	69.3	58.8
Total	63.2	65.6	66.0	63.0	68.7	60.0	72.3	72.6	65.1
Unemployment									
Males	105.9	79.4	63.5	28.1	19.5	10.7	3.0	4.3	314.4
Females	88.0	82.9	60.9	23.2	27.9	6.8	2.2	4.0	296.1
Total	193.9	162.3	124.4	51.4	47.4	17.5	5.2	8.3	610.4
Unemployment rates									
Males	5.1	4.8	4.8	6.0	2.6	8.0	4.5	3.9	4.8
Females	5.1	5.8	5.4	5.8	4.8	5.9	3.8	3.8	5.3
Total	5.1	5.3	5.1	5.9	3.6	7.0	4.2	3.8	5.0

Notes: NSW = New South Wales, VIC = Victoria, QLD = Queensland, SA = South Australia, WA = Western Australia, TAS = Tasmania, NT = Northern Territory, ACT = Australian Capital Territory

Source: Adapted from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012).

The table indicates that in all states and territories, male unemployment is exceeding female unemployment.

The Australian unemployment rate was 5.0 per cent in the middle of 2012, according to the Monthly Leading Indicator of Employment dated June 2012 from the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). The unemployment rate for young people aged 15 to 24 years of age was 12.1 per cent in June 2012 (DEEWR website, 2012).

Overall, the participation rate for all Australian men in the prime working age group has been falling, probably due to the “hanging occupational composition of the workforce” (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 28). Over several decades, Australia has experienced substantial growth in skilled professional and managerial jobs but there has been a fall in the number of ‘blue-collar’ jobs, typically filled by men, over the same period.

The unemployment rate for Indigenous Australians is higher than for the general population. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2011 it was 13 per cent in major cities, 19 per cent in regional areas and 15 per cent in remote areas. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011) also notes that remote areas “have an underdeveloped labour market where people often do not actively look for work and therefore are not classified as unemployed, even though they are not working and might indeed prefer to work if the labour market were different” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Given this, the following statistics in Table 8 on unemployment within the Indigenous population should be read with caution.

Table 8: Labour Force Characteristics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2011 (people aged 15 years and older)

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT
Population	'000	'000	'000	'000	'000	'000	'000	'000
Total Indigenous Population	109.3	24.9	105.2	20.4	51.6	13.7	46.7	3.2
Population living in remote areas	3.7%	0.0%	22.8%	16%	44.2%	4.1%	80.2%	0.0%
Total Employed	50.1	12.0	53.4	9.1	22.1	7.6	17.7	1.8
Total Unemployed	8.5	2.8	12.9	1.6	3.9	1.0	2.8	0.2
Unemployment rate	14.6%	18.9%	19.5%	15.2%	15.0%	12.1%	13.5%	8.7%

Source: Adapted from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011).

Indigenous Australians experience the lowest levels of employment of all groups in Australia at 48 per cent employed compared with 72 per cent of non-Indigenous Australians (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 30). Employment prospects for Indigenous Australians certainly differ from the prospects for non-Indigenous Australians. Indigenous people with a “diploma or higher level qualification experience employment levels 4.5 percentage points below that of the general population who have equivalent qualifications” (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 15).

Another group whose employment participation prospects fare less positively are those who experience health problems and disabilities. In 2010, there were 417,900 Australian men who were experiencing long-term health or disability problems and who were receiving government support through the Disability Support Pension. Another 40,200 men had short term illness or injury preventing them working. Women with health problems or disabilities made up another 373,250 or 35.8 per cent of the people receiving the Disability Support Pension (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 13). The Federal Government policy views people on the Disability Support Pension as having the potential to be supported into the workforce into a job suited to their level of health.

Future employment growth

Consideration of the learning required to strengthen individuals' capacities for economic participation must also account for future trends in employment growth. Government planners have identified the following growth industries and occupations in Table 9 which will require increasing numbers of employees in coming years.

Table 9: Predictions of High Growth Industries and Occupations by 2025

Industry	Per cent growth per annum	Occupation	Per cent growth per annum
Storage	6.5	Welfare associate professionals	2.8
Community services	4.0	Carers and aides	2.6
Services to finance and insurance	3.7	University and vocational teachers	2.3
Water transport	3.0	Computing professionals	2.0
Scientific research, technical and computer services	2.7	Process workers and elementary clerks	1.9

Source: Adapted from Skills Australia (2010) citing Access Economics 2009, Economic modelling p. 22.

There has been a change in the nature of employment since the 1990s. Over the past 20 years only 25 per cent of new jobs have been full time and 75 per cent have been casual jobs (Watson, 2011, p. 49). Casual positions have been termed precarious by some but the level of insecurity continues to be a matter of debate (Watson, 2011, p. 49; See Note 2 at end of Section). This is especially relevant for those who participate in workplace training because casual employees are less likely to receive employer funded training than permanent employees. In fact, nearly 60 per cent of casual workers did not participate in formal learning in the previous year (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 59).

Educational attainment in Australia

In 2011, there were 14.8 million Australians aged between 15-64 years and 323,600 people aged between 65-74 years in the labour force. Of those aged 15-64, 20 per cent were enrolled in a course of study or formal learning. A total of 27 per cent of this group were studying at school, 21 per cent were learning at a vocational education and training organisation, 39 per cent at a university and the remaining 14 per cent at other educational organisations such as adult and community education providers. The overall number of people in this age group enrolled in formal learning had increased by 2 per cent from 2001. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

In 2011, approximately 30 per cent of people 15-64 years of age had their highest level of educational achievement at Year 11 or below, so they had no formal Australian educational qualification. Those people aged 15-64 who had their highest level of attainment, Year 12 at school, made up 21 per cent of the Australian population and another 17 per cent of the population had completed a Certificate III or IV. Those completing a university qualification made up 24 per cent of the population. The remaining people (8 per cent) did not specify their highest level of education in these statistics gathered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011).

The proportion of Australians with a post-school qualification increased from 47 per cent in 2001 to 57 per cent in 2011. The largest increase of 5 per cent was for those who had a university qualification –the rise being from 17 per cent to 24 per cent in this period. From 2001-2011, the proportion of people whose highest post-school qualification was a Certificate, Diploma or Advanced Diploma increased by 2 per cent, from 29 per cent to 31 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics).

The impact of the attainment of formal qualifications is meant to increase the likelihood of (full time) employment and prospects of employability. Table 10 below, demonstrates this link between the highest level of educational qualification and employment status. It shows that unemployment of those with a post-school qualification is lower than for those without a post-school qualification. It also highlights the pronounced clustering of qualifications from Certificate III/IV to Bachelor Degree level.

Table 10: Level of Highest Non-school Qualification by Labour Force Status (people aged 15-64 years)

Level of highest post-school qualification '000	Employed full time '000	Employed part-time '000	Total employed '000	Unemployed '000
Postgraduate Degree	500.5	93.3	593.9	16.0
Graduate Diploma/ Graduate Certificate	188.4	80.1	268.5	7.4
Bachelor Degree	1,642.5	499.5	2,142.0	65.2
Advanced Diploma/ Diploma	764.4	316.4	1,080.7	45.0
Certificate III-IV	1,696.8	470.3	2,167.0	92.0
Certificate I-II	232.0	150.6	382.6	39.1
Certificate (not specified)	100.3	44.9	145.1	11.2
Total with a post-school qualification	5,261.2	1,693.4	6,954.6	282.4
Total without a post-school qualification	2,559.1	1,567.7	4,126.8	317.4
Total	7,820.4	3,261.1	11,081.5	599.9

Source: Adapted from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011).

The next table (following page) looks at qualifications by age and gender according to the industry area in which people were qualified:

Table 11: Level and Field of Educational Qualifications for Male and Female Australians by Age (people aged 15-64 for highest level of post-school qualification)

	Age group							Total '000	Total per cent
	15-19 '000	20-24 '000	25-34 '000	35-44 '000	45-54 '000	55-64 '000			
Males									
Level of highest non-school qualification									
Postgraduate Degree	0.0	7.4	103.2	109.9	85.7	66.6	372.8	8.8	
Graduate Diploma / Graduate Certificate	0.0	1.1	21.3	27.0	33.0	26.3	108.7	2.6	
Bachelor Degree	0.0	89.5	355.5	289.8	212.5	160.4	1,107.8	26.1	
Advanced Diploma / Diploma	3.8	46.7	136.8	131.0	149.6	98.6	566.6	13.3	
Certificate III-IV	21.5	164.7	382.5	399.9	375.7	308.0	1,652.3	38.9	
Certificate I-II	28.8	26.3	35.8	47.3	45.4	45.8	229.3	5.4	
Certificate (not specified)	5.5	13.3	32.6	17.9	10.0	6.4	85.7	2.0	
Main field of highest non-school qualification									
Natural and physical sciences	0.4	12.3	33.1	37.9	34.4	33.8	151.9	3.6	
Information technology	7.8	27.8	101.9	59.3	33.0	13.0	242.8	5.7	
Engineering and related technologies	13.9	89.8	301.7	314.1	326.8	282.6	1,328.9	31.3	
Architecture and building	9.1	49.2	114.6	124.7	111.1	76.4	485.1	11.4	
Agriculture, environmen- tal and related studies	1.7	16.6	39.6	40.5	33.6	23.0	154.9	3.6	
Health	2.0	15.6	45.1	45.2	47.7	29.6	185.2	4.4	
Education	0.9	3.0	22.8	33.3	31.3	33.3	124.3	2.9	
Management and commerce	9.3	57.8	224.6	203.0	170.5	136.6	801.8	18.9	
Society and culture	5.3	36.6	81.7	95.9	77.6	71.9	368.9	8.7	
Creative arts	3.3	23.8	57.3	42.0	23.2	15.5	165.1	3.9	
Food, hospitality and personal services	6.4	19.9	53.5	42.0	37.6	16.9	176.3	4.1	
Total males	62.2	357.7	1,093.4	1,050.8	940.9	743.8	4,248.8	100.0	

	Age group							Total '000	Total per cent
	15-19 '000	20-24 '000	25-34 '000	35-44 '000	45-54 '000	55-64 '000			
Females									
Level of highest non-school qualification									
Postgraduate Degree	0.0	5.8	101.7	83.7	71.6	46.2	309.0	7.5	
Graduate Diploma / Graduate Certificate	0.0	3.0	39.4	49.6	60.8	49.3	202.1	4.9	
Bachelor Degree	0.0	142.4	505.4	372.0	235.4	161.2	1,416.4	34.2	
Advanced Diploma / Diploma	2.5	77.2	171.8	214.5	197.9	122.7	786.7	19.0	
Certificate III-IV	34.9	106.4	229.2	230.6	199.0	134.2	934.3	22.5	
Certificate I-II	26.0	29.2	49.9	74.9	70.4	64.7	315.0	7.6	
Certificate (not specified)	7.3	16.4	27.7	17.4	17.5	8.4	94.7	2.3	
Main field of highest non-school qualification									
Natural and physical sciences	0.0	16.4	50.8	36.4	24.7	21.9	150.2	3.6	
Information technology	0.9	4.7	28.7	21.3	11.8	9.0	76.4	1.8	
Engineering and related technologies	0.5	6.9	30.0	23.7	22.2	16.5	99.8	2.4	
Architecture and building	0.7	4.7	14.3	7.4	8.2	3.2	38.5	0.9	
Agriculture, environmen- tal and related studies	0.6	7.7	22.3	22.7	11.7	3.9	69.0	1.7	
Health	4.7	45.2	158.0	163.7	174.4	110.3	656.4	15.8	
Education	0.5	22.4	99.1	116.1	112.7	110.7	461.5	11.1	
Management and commerce	24.7	125.1	345.9	318.1	240.9	148.2	1,202.9	29.0	
Society and culture	12.6	70.0	213.6	199.2	166.8	119.7	781.9	18.9	
Creative arts	3.2	28.6	72.9	58.3	37.0	22.2	222.3	5.4	
Food, hospitality and personal services	22.2	52.7	86.5	81.9	45.6	34.5	323.4	7.8	
Total females	71.8	388.1	1,138.2	1,064.6	872.8	609.1	4,144.7	100.0	

Source: Adapted from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011).

The largest group of males by qualification is concentrated at Certificate III and Certificate IV level (38.9 per cent) while the largest percentage of females is concentrated at the Bachelor Degree qualification level (34.2 per cent). This is noteworthy when compared with the employment rate for males and females. Males experience higher levels of employment overall but females outnumber males at this higher level of qualification. Females also tend to have lower earnings than males (which will be noted in a later section). These statistics challenge the assumption that higher educational qualification yields greater assurance of employment and personal income.

Table 12 shows the number of people completing education in 2011 in each state and territory by age and gender. Noticeably, Australians are undertaking and completing educational qualifications across all age groups in all states and territories. It is also noteworthy that females were completing qualifications in greater numbers than males during 2011 across all locations.

Table 12: Australians Completing Education in 2011 by Age and Gender

	Age group				Males '000	Females '000	Total '000
	15-19 '000	20-24 '000	25-44 '000	45-64 '000			
New South Wales	20.0	87.0	156.4	58.2	143.3	178.2	321.6
Victoria	19.6	79.3	122.9	58.4	126.9	153.3	280.2
Queensland	27.0	57.5	88.7	41.7	96.1	118.8	214.9
South Australia	4.9	20.5	34.9	12.5	33.6	39.2	72.8
Western Australia	9.8	30.0	48.1	15.2	50.5	52.6	103.1
Tasmania	1.7	7.2	8.3	5.4	8.4	14.3	22.7
Northern Territory	0.6	1.4	4.5	2.7	4.4	4.9	9.3
Australian Capital Territory	1.2	6.8	9.2	2.9	9.7	10.4	20.1

Source: Adapted from Australian Bureau of Statistics (May 2011).

The significant number of education completions in the 25-44 year age group indicates that Australians are educationally up-skilling beyond their initial post-school years. The table's division of the post-school years into five year blocks, however, do not allow direct comparison with the twenty year age blocks for the ages 25 to 64. The completions for 15-24 year olds, however, indicate totals which are lower than for 25-44 year olds, with the only exception being Tasmania.

Given the close connection in Australia between education and training policy and economic development, there is also an anticipated positive influence that growing levels of re-skilling have on creating employment opportunities across Australian industries into the future. The relationship between educational achievement and employment opportunity is discussed below.

Challenges to employment and learning in Australia

The challenges facing employment in Australia are closely related to workforce development, being so closely associated with national economic well-being and productivity. These challenges can be divided into the factors that are external to the country and those that come from within. The external challenges are described as follows:

The need to enhance innovation

Australian planners and policy makers acknowledge the expanding global economy and its ongoing reshaping, especially through the growth of trade in the Asian region. As a result of this trade environment, the Prime Minister (2011) asserts that Australian industry is compelled to adapt and innovate (CEDA, 2011). This is reinforced by the assertion by Skills Australia (2010, p. 44) that economic growth requires business sophistication and innovation capacity. Despite this, only 37 per cent of Australian firms undertake any innovation each year compared with 60 per cent of enterprises in Europe. Policy-makers link innovation and productivity with skill and knowledge levels within the workforce. Consequently, policy efforts to support skill and knowledge acquisition across the workforce are hoped to impact positively on innovation and subsequent productivity. This means that higher education and vocational education and training have key roles to play in supporting innovation in industry.

Currency flows

The changes in the currency exchange rate in the years following the global financial crisis have resulted in a rise in the value of the Australian dollar which has benefited some industries over others (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 3). There are currently historically high commodity prices (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 1) because there has been a rise in international demand for Australian mineral products, especially from Asian nations. But the high value of the dollar is putting intense pressure on the tourism, retail and manufacturing industries (Watson, 2011, p. 49). The resources boom has brought an increasing demand for workers with skills suited to the mining industry (Skills Australia, 2011, p. iii) while the shrinking the demand for labour in other industries is resulting in unemployment for many.

Employment patterns

In addition to changes brought by currency movements, there has been a gradual shift from manufacturing industries to service industries over the last forty years so that by 2010 service industries accounted for 77 per cent of gross domestic product (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 14). Employment demand in this labour intensive sector will continue to be significant. Leaders are drawing attention to the need for re-skilling to address these changing employment situations (Prime Minister, 2011). Significantly, service industries tend to employ people on a casual or part-time basis so there has been a decrease in stable employment, especially among young people and the "working poor" who rely on these low wages and lack employment security (Watson, 2011, p. 49)

Technology

Technological change worldwide has been extensive and is placing continuing demands on the labour force as it makes increasing contributions to work processes and is itself up-graded with new developments. Skilling in the use of technology is placing increasing demands on education and skill development (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 4) both for those entering the workforce and those already employed. Computerisation and electronic communication have transformed the nature of work and learning (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 14).

Sustainability

Environmental challenges include new government environmental regulations that demand new green skills from the workforce to adapt to new sustainability practices and emissions trading schemes (Skills Australia, 2012, p. 26). These are entirely new ways of working and present a challenge to employers as well as workers.

Skills shortages

Skills shortages are hailed as one of Australia's most pressing problems resulting from these changes and challenges. This is depicted by the Prime Minister who stated:

we now face shortages of labour – a problem unmatched anywhere in the industrialised world ... for example, the resources sector will face a potential shortfall of 36,000 tradespersons by 2015 (CEEDA luncheon, February 2011).

The extent of the shortfall is debated (Watson, 2011, p. 45) but acknowledged as a problem for at least 15 per cent of all employers and especially by 34 per cent of employers in the mining industry. A Government Skills Shortage list has been established. Examples of highly sought after occupations are bricklayers, refrigeration mechanics, child care workers, engineers and health professionals (Watson, 2011, p. 27). Strategies to address this shortfall have included re-skilling those currently outside the workforce, offering employment to international students and encouraging temporary and permanent skilled migration. In 2011, 125,850 migration places were allotted to skilled migrants.

Internal challenges include:

An ageing demographic profile

The ageing profile of the Australian population is a challenge to maintain productivity among the workforce. Skills Australia (2011, p. 23) cites the 2010 Intergenerational Report that estimates the proportion of people over 65 years will rise from its present 17 per cent (of people over 15 years) to more than 20 per cent by 2020 and to 24 per cent by 2030. Skills Australia refers to this as a "looming demographic crunch" (2011, p. 1) because the age dependency ratio (the number of people of working age as a ratio of the number of people 65 and over) will decrease from the current 4.11 workers to each dependent older person to only 3.04. An alternative way to look at this is via the projected decline in the working age population. It will decrease from 65.1 per cent to 63.9 per cent in 2025 (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 145). Predictions envisage that 9.3 million jobs will become available by 2015, with close to half due to the need to replace older people exiting the workforce (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 2; see Note 1 at the end of the Section).

Politicians and planners have been voicing their concerns in response to these demographic statistics for numerous years. However their concerns may be moderated by recent workforce statistics showing that more than half of the 60-64 year old age group participates in the workforce (Skills Australia, 2012, p. 14) compared with 33 per cent in 1991. Of people over the age of 65, 12 per cent contributed to the workforce in 2011 compared to just 7 per cent in 1991. By continuing to work into their old age, existing workers are contributing to national productivity and government revenues through income tax.

The 2012 Federal Government Budget acknowledged the opportunities presented by older Australians living longer and being healthier and better educated than previous generations. It allocated AUD\$41

million to assist people to participate longer in “all aspects of the community and economy” (Australian Government Budget, 2012), in particular facilities to support them to remain in, or return to, work. Part of this support will take the form of promoting lifelong learning through a programme called “Productive Ageing Through Community Education” to support re-skilling as well as careers advice for those outside the workforce and the appointment of an Age Discrimination Commissioner to address any instances of age related discrimination in the workforce.

Productivity performance

The level of productivity of the labour force is cause for concern by policy makers. Australia’s productivity performance has been described as “sluggish” by Skills Australia (2011, p. 2) compared with other nations. Productivity is explained as the measure of increase in output for the employer per employee (Skills Australia, 2012, p. 5). Productivity growth declined in the 2000s to its lowest level since the early 1970s (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 3). This has occurred despite Australia having the fourth highest percentage of employees working more than 50 hours per week and the fifth lowest amount of time devoted to leisure and personal care in the OECD nations (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 8).

Decreasing productivity has been attributed to the poor utilisation of employee skills by employers and the inability of employees to adapt to the changing nature of workplaces. Skills Australia highlighted the need for employers to make more effective use of employees’ skills (2010, p. iv); and policy makers are calling for greater flexibility and resilience in the workforce. They claim this will be achieved across all occupations by increasing employee training and education towards the achievement of higher level qualifications. Increasing qualification levels is referred to as skill “deepening” (Karmel, 2004, p. 11, MCTEE, 2011 p. 3, Skills Australia, 2010, p. 2).

Widening participation

While the unemployment rate in Australia is comparatively low, there are significant numbers of individuals within the population who are excluded from employment. The proportion of people on government unemployment benefits for more than five years rose from 1 person in 10 unemployed people in 1999 to nearly 1 in 4 in 2008 (Davidson cited in Watson, 2011, p. 50). The remaining people who were unemployed are so for short periods between jobs. Over the same time period the number of working age people on the Disability Support Pension grew to approximately 818,850 (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 13).

In 2009, 54.3 per cent of people with disabilities participated in the workforce at a level that suited their disability. Statistics show that a lower proportion of disabled people than able-bodied people have achieved a Year 12 level of schooling and many have no academic qualifications at all (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 16). Employers are being encouraged to employ people with a disability by the government agency Disability Employment Services and training is provided for work colleagues in order to acculturate them to working with co-workers with disabilities.

In 2006 the unemployment rate for Indigenous Australians was 16 per cent and is now 18.2 per cent (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 15). This high rate of unemployment for Indigenous people is partially explained by many living in remote locations where employment opportunities are limited, but this is not the sole cause of these statistics. The National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Economic Participation has been established by the Federal Government to improve opportunities for employment for Indigenous people (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 15).

A survey of unemployed people in 2007 found that unemployment was closely associated with leaving school early and not having post-school qualifications (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 31).

The employment participation rate is an alternative view of the numbers of employed, unemployed and those no longer seeking work. In 2008, the Australian participation rate was lower than that of comparable countries such as Canada and New Zealand (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 24) despite the fact that more women and older Australians are working than ever before. Australia's overall participation rate was 65.5 per cent in 2012 which was a slight improvement on the 2010 figure of 65.1 per cent. The government's goal is 69 per cent participation by 2025. Policy makers want more people contributing to the economy and fewer people needing financial assistance.

Strengthening literacy

Increases in education and training to provide the skills to people for employment will be essential in achieving this optimistic increase in participation because nearly half of Australia's working age population has low literacy skills (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 2). The 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey showed that the scores for these respondents did not meet the minimum "to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work in the emerging knowledge-based economy" (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 113). Poverty is allied to low literacy and poor employment prospects. Literacy is essential as a pathway out of poverty because education in the foundation skills of (English) language, literacy and numeracy is critical for gaining and keeping employment at any age. An additional level of concern lies with workplace health and safety. People without adequate language, literacy and numeracy skills are more likely to experience workplace accidents (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 36).

Strengthening skills utilisation

An area of growing concern in the Australian workforce is the under-utilisation of skills. A significant level of under-employment, or under-utilisation, has been identified (Watson, 2011, p. 37) over the past 20 years. Under-utilisation refers to those who have more skills and abilities than their jobs require (Watson, 2011, p. 45). The rate of under-utilisation for those employees with vocational education and training qualifications is estimated to be between 10 per cent and 15 per cent. Of vocational education and training qualification holders, Certificate III and IV graduates have the lowest level of under-utilisation at 10 per cent while Certificate I graduates experience rates of skill under-utilisation at 19 per cent and Certificate II graduates at 36 per cent (Watson, 2011, p. 46).

Skills Australia's *Australian Workforce Futures* report found that 42 per cent of employers in 2009 believed that the skill level of their employees was higher than their organisation required. This was an increase from 2005 when employers reported a 37 per cent skill level excess (2010, p. 44) while longitudinal surveys of workers found significant numbers who did not feel they were able to apply their skills and knowledge in their current jobs.

The danger of under-utilisation occurs when new graduates look for their first jobs and often have difficulty gaining employment. The Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (2012, p. 63) has investigated employer attitudes and reluctance in recruiting new graduates. Employer concerns centre on having the right skills and experience for the job. These concerns have been further refined and recognised as graduates needing employability skills. Employers want "novice workers to come with ready-made employability skills" (2012, p. 64).

The OECD recognises skills development and skills utilisation as “two sides of the same coin” (Skills Australia, 2012, p. 7) acknowledging that the ways skills are deployed in a workplace is as important as how they were developed initially. Where some skills are not being used in a job role, there is a mismatch, and those skills not in use may diminish or even be lost over time. This is especially true for newly acquired skills that benefit from regular use and reinforcement.

Under-utilisation represents inefficiency and a significant loss of potential productivity. It suggests that the education and training completed by individuals was to a level not actually required. Apart from the loss of productive potential, individuals with under-utilised skills tend to experience frustration and lack motivation at work. Under-utilisation of skills challenges the link between education and employment performance.

Graduate Destination Survey data from 2007-2009 indicates that approximately 40 per cent of vocational education and training graduates were working in the six months following their graduation in a broad occupation group for which they were trained (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 41). Furthermore, 40 per cent of the entire workforce changes their employer every three years. Many in the labour force completely change their industry and occupation periodically. This information places further doubt on the strength of the link between people’s first post-school qualification and their later career, though many have re-trained and up-skilled during the course of their career enabling this level of job flexibility.

Summary

- There is a view that education and training will enhance employment prospects within Australia, with a growing emphasis on people accessing continuing education and training to ensure employment.
- The population is ageing and has a slow rate of natural increase. This situation is being supplemented by migrants of working age.
- The composition of industry is currently changing from manufacturing and agriculture towards service based industries. However, there is a significant mining boom which is bringing wealth and employment opportunities in mining regions.
- The current level of employment presents a concern to government because of the comparatively low participation rate, under-utilisation of skills and lack of increase in worker productivity.
- Education and training levels are increasing but language, literacy and numeracy remain at a low level within the workforce.
- Employment and education level statistics for Indigenous Australians are lower than those for the overall population.
- Predictions for the future demand for employment indicate a growing skills shortage and the need for a more highly skilled workforce.
- Continuing economic development and prosperity are dependent on improved industry innovation and flexibility in response to globalisation. These, in turn, are seen as reliant on individual workers undertaking initial and continuing education and training.



Note 1

There is no compulsory retirement age so Australians can choose to engage in paid work until any age. Contributions to superannuation schemes have been compulsory for all employers on behalf of their employees since 1980s and many employees choose to make additional contributes to their scheme to increase their resulting retirement benefits. The payments from these schemes become available to individuals at different ages depending on the scheme. For those who need government financial support when they finish their working lives, the age at which this becomes available is 65 years for men and 63 for women. Factors influencing the decision to retire are often access to superannuation scheme funds or funds from the government pension or both.

Note 2

Current figures from the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (2012, p. 59) indicate that 40 per cent of the workforce is in a non-permanent form of employment and 25 per cent of employees have no entitlement to sick leave or paid recreation leave.

Section B

The Education and Training System in Australia

Overview of the education and training system

This section focuses on the formal education and training system in Australia which delivers and assesses training and offers credentials to successful learners. Non-formal and informal learning also occur in Australian workplaces and in community settings and make a significant contribution to skill formation and knowledge development. However, the scope of this review is on the formal aspect of education and training which comprises lifelong learning in Australia.

The vocational education and training sector is considered to be the most adaptive sector in Australian education because it directly connects learning with the labour market and because it is aimed to be immediately integrated into the workplace and the community (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 2). It aims to connect with individual learner aspirations and employer workforce needs. These are often noted as the two client groups which the sector services.

Overall, the Australian vocational education and training sector and the adult and community education sectors are diverse and complex (Ithica Group, 2012, p. 5; Skills Australia, 2011, p. 8; SCOTese, 2011, p. 5). This is summarised in Table 13:

Table 13: The Education and Training System in Brief

<p>5000 Registered Training Organisations ranging from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • large government-owned Technical and Further Education institutes catering to many thousands of learners via hundreds of qualifications; • very small private colleges focused on niche industry and student needs; • community colleges catering to local needs; • enterprise training arms delivering training to employees in that enterprise.
<p>3 million students made up of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a million publicly funded students; • an estimated 1.2 million privately funded students.
<p>Approximately 5,000 nationally recognised qualifications.</p>
<p>11 Industry Skill Councils.</p>
<p>9 different funding bodies.</p>
<p>1 national and 3 state regulators involved in the registration and quality audits of Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).</p>

Source: Adapted from the NSSC, 2012, p. 8.

In order to conduct vocational education and training, an organisation must meet specific government requirements and be recognised as a Registered Training Organisation (RTO). Many educational organisations other than VET specific ones choose to become RTOs. These include schools delivering vocational courses and universities delivering pre-undergraduate degree courses. RTOs may be public, community and government based not-for-profit organisations or private commercial for-profit enterprises. Many are the training arms of large enterprises that serve their business interests. Others are industry organisations serving businesses within an industry more generally. More information about RTOs follows in upcoming sections.

The Industry Skill Councils (ISCs) are a group of 11 industry representative groups that “provide advice to Australian, state and territory governments on the training that is required by industry” (NCVER, 2012). The industries they represent are:

Table 14: Industry Representation by ISC

Agriculture	Government Services
Business	Manufacturing
Community and Health	Mining and Infrastructure
Construction and Property	Services such as retail, hospitality, hairdressing
Electricity and Energy Utilities	Transport and Logistics
Forestry	

Source: Adapted from the NCVER, 2012, online Glossary.

ISCs advise government on the training needs of each industry and develop the curriculum for the VET sector. This is to ensure that what is taught by RTOs meets the required skill needs of employers.

Role of the Government in the education system

The Federal and State Governments of Australia have regulatory oversight of formal training in the vocational education and training system and are jointly responsible for providing public funding to individuals and some enterprises. More detail on funding is discussed below. The government vision for the sector has been expressed by the government Standing Council on Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment (SCOTESE) administrative body as promoting a quality VET system which is “nationally consistent, based on industry standards, (is) outcomes focused, including proper assessment and recognition of existing skills as well as excellence in teaching and learning” (SCOTESE, 2011, p. 4).

The performance of the sector is judged by the qualification completion rates and data on student satisfaction with the delivery and assessment experience and employer satisfaction with the skills of their graduate recruits. SCOTESE notes that current advice from industry representatives recommends that evaluation of the sector be expanded to include a measure of skilled worker contribution to business needs and productivity (2011, p. 4). Industry is also pressing for increased regulation around the rigour of assessment and the oversight of the culture of continuous improvement in RTOs. The opinions of industry representatives are widely reported in government documents.

Workforce planning requires sophisticated data for government to develop policy in the vocational education and training sector. Necessary data is compiled from employment statistics from the Australian

Bureau of Statistics and survey data from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) about employment and household consumption and social interactions. A Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, in operation since 1995, provides insights into education and work outcomes of young people. This and other information on skill shortages and labour market information are publicly available on websites (<http://www.skillsinfo.gov.au> and <http://www.deewr.gov.au/lmp/>).

Training provision data is required to be sent to the government agency, the National Centre on Vocational Educational Research (NCVER) by RTOs about all government funded training (<http://www.ncver.edu.au/statistic/>). This information, coupled with the employment data described above, provide significant sources of evidence to underpin the development of policy. Unfortunately, data on training that is not funded by government is not consistently compiled which has left a gap in training information that is needed.

Historical evolution of the education and training sector

Vocational education and training has existed in Australia since the late nineteenth century when it was established on a local level to provide initial training for work roles in local industries. Changes began to occur by the 1970s when Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges were established to provide opportunities for lifelong learning and vocational learning (Rushbrook, 1995; Clemans and Rushbrook, 2011). Its premise was “recognition that life demanded continuous learning and adaption. Completing one’s initial education was seen as a starting point rather than an educational endpoint” (Kangan, Byrne and Kirby, cited in Billett, 2004, p. 15). TAFE was to encompass the broad educational goals of providing skills and knowledge for people at whatever stage of educational development they had reached once their schooling was complete. Despite the rhetoric of meeting adult education needs at all stages of one’s life, the majority of the participants in the 1970s and early 1980s were young people. During this time industry representatives demonstrated little interest in the sector, speculated by Billett (2004) to be because competition for jobs was less intense than contemporary times and employers were less selective in recruitment. This made space for vocational education and training to more fully embrace learning of a lifelong nature.

In the mid-1980s, the formal VET system underwent significant change (Billett, 2004; Clemans and Rushbrook, 2011; Sheldon and Thornthwaite, 2005) when Australian trade become more export oriented. The manufacturing industry in particular was under pressure by global competition. The Australian education system was seen as the reason for the inability of the nation to compete and the solution to this was seen to lie in reviving it:

Federal and state reforms to the training system were given national expression through the competency-based [training CBT] curriculum model used to deliver human capital’s promise of increased productivity through human capital investment in vocationally relevant skills training. All states and territories were committed to develop a CBT system (Clemans and Rushbrook, 2011, p. 242).

With government and employers now more attentive to vocational education, the stronger industry voices and union representatives were heard in policy contexts. This resulted in a:

VET system (that) featured industry based competency standards, a national qualifications framework, greater flexibility in traineeship and apprenticeship systems, and increasing competition among public and private providers in an emerging ‘training market’ (Sheldon and Thornthwaite, 2005, p. 407).

By the 1990s, the Federal and State Governments supported industry leadership of the VET system by funding the Industry Skills Councils to develop curriculum and provide advice at a national level. Uniform processes implemented across all the states ensured training supported the portability of qualifications

and thus the mobility of the labour force (Billett, 2004). The centralised system of governance regulated the system. Relatively more silent in education and training were the voices of educators and, while rhetorically acknowledged as 'clients' of the system, learners assumed a more marginal position than employers attained in the system. At a 'class room' level, curriculum became the responsibility of industry representatives and developing skilled labour was seen as an input to the industrial production process (Karmel, 2012). In this way, educators have been drawn in as contributors to production and national economic productivity.

The rising attention given to business interests was carried into the arena of publicly owned colleges and institutes which were encouraged to become competitive, both with each other and with private training providers. These historical conditions have shaped the education and training system in Australia and contributed to its complexity.

Providers of training – Registered training providers

There is currently a wide variety of training providers in the vocational education and training sector. In addition to public and private providers, there are dual-sector organisations offering both VET and higher education in one organisation, mixed sector institutions that predominantly operate in one sector but offer VET and single sector institutions (NCVER, 2010, p. 4). Increasing specialisation by higher education and VET institutions in particular educational areas has "assisted the development of a more diverse tertiary sector with institutions pursuing different strategic intents and distinct and individualised business interests" (Australian Qualification Framework Council, 2009, p. 15). The intent of this diversity is to build bridges between educational sectors and to cater effectively to a variety of educational needs.

The variety of RTOs encompass TAFE institutes, skills institutes, polytechnics, universities, secondary schools, industry organisations, private enterprises, agricultural colleges, community providers and other government providers. VET providers are located widely across the country in metropolitan, regional and remote areas. In 2009, one in every nine people aged between 15 to 64 years was enrolled at a public TAFE (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 114). VET courses delivered in secondary schools also provide a valuable pathway into further vocational education or employment for young people. In 2009, 33.8 per cent of 16 to 18 year olds in school participated in VET programmes (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 132).

Community-based learning

The Adult and Community Education (ACE) providers concentrate on pre-accredited or introductory education and non-formal learning, although there are increasing numbers of larger ACE providers (sometimes named Community Colleges) which offer high level vocational qualifications. This is evident in the increasing numbers of ACE learners undertaking vocational courses from 25 per cent in 2002 to 47.4 per cent in 2009 (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 75). ACE is the most closely aligned sector to lifelong learning of all the education sectors, offering flexible pathways into further learning, community participation and work.

ACE makes a "significant contribution to re-engaging disengaged learners across all cohorts through access to lifelong learning" (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 75). The local setting and informal setting provided by many ACE providers assists people who have been marginalised from formal education settings to (re) engage with learning and to then participate actively.

In addition to its community based adult education sector, Australia has a relatively strong community services, arts and volunteer sector. While this sector does not have lifelong learning as its primary

purpose, it nonetheless provides a range of non-formal and informal learning opportunities for adults. For example one-third of the Australian population accessed a free public library in 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Libraries increasingly offer access to and instructions for using the internet to adults with low incomes. (Halliday-Wynes and Beddie, 2009). Hayes and others have identified volunteer fire brigades and emergency services organisations as significant providers of adult lifelong learning, particularly for men with minimal education (Hayes, Golding and Harvey, 2004).

There are over 1,000 neighbourhood houses in Australia. While many explicitly offer non-formal lifelong learning courses and classes, all of them offer a range of informal learning opportunities through volunteering, participating in community based Boards of Management or through running social support and childcare groups (ANCHA, 2009). There are also over 800 community-based Men's Sheds. Men's Sheds are a relatively new and largely Australian phenomenon (although there are now Men's Sheds in Ireland and New Zealand.) They are popular sites of group learning for men who have retired from paid work in trades and other labouring work which also provide learning opportunities for men with low skills who have been forced into unemployment due to changes in the labour market (Golding, 2011). Such community-based programmes are rhetorically valued for their contribution to well-being and, depending on the employment context and level of employer awareness, they may be acknowledged as adding to evidence of the employability of an individual.

Learners in the education and training system

VET caters for a substantial number of learners. In 2007, there were some 1.67 million students enrolled in the public VET system. The majority are enrolled part-time and approximately 55 per cent are aged 25 years and over (Karmel, 2009, p. 7). The profile of learners who participate in VET is extremely diverse as is their purpose in participating. Learners may undertake vocational education for initial training as young people or retrain as adults. They may also be people who have already completed a higher education qualification but who need some specific vocational skills for their chosen employment. In this way, VET presents itself as a doorway to employment opportunity. It draws in:

those requiring foundation skills, undertaking VET in schools and other full time learners in preparatory programs, apprentices and trainees, new entrants to [the] workforce and those returning, existing workers – with gaps in foundation skills, who need training related to work, wishing to change careers, facing unemployment or change in work structure, casual and part-time workers who have limited access to work-based learning, those working intermittently; students wishing to articulate to higher education, higher education students moving to VET and international students both onshore in Australia and offshore (National Quality Council and COAG, 2009, pp. 12-13).

The range of learners in VET is broad. They include people in a wide range of circumstances. School students may choose vocational education courses within their school setting as an adjunct to their general school education and receive credit for their vocational subject results towards a final education score at the end of Year 12. School based apprenticeships are available for those who have certainty about continuing with an apprenticeship beyond Year 12.

People in transition, from one life stage to another, turn to vocational education for re-skilling to re-enter the workforce. Examples include those who have been childrearing or caring for others at home, those experiencing job redundancy and the unemployed. Many people in transition experience vulnerabilities when confronting job seeking and need support in forming a new self concept (Cameron and Miller, 2004). Vocational education and adult community education address this through supportive approaches adult learning and programme design.

Mature people engage with vocational education to up-grade their skills to remain competent in a changing world or for promotion within their occupation (Billett, 2012). Socially disadvantaged people who may experience health, social and economic difficulties can be supported into education and employment through adequately funded innovative and supportive programmes (Adult Learning Australia and EE-Oz submissions to Skills Australia, 2011). Approximately one third of full time VET students receive government social welfare support (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 44).

Migrants arrive in Australia with job skills but often lack knowledge of the Australian work culture and conventions. Their English language skills may be of varying levels too. Preliminary training in a vocational programme assists the transition across international boundaries and provides familiarisation to the Australian context in order to obtain employment. Job seekers may come to vocational education through government agencies such as Job Search Australia (further information available on <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Employment/>) and Local Employment Coordinators.

Programmes in the education and training system

The range of programme options is as varied as the needs of learners who participate in VET. For example, the Certificate I in Work Education is designed to supportively train people with an intellectual disability into work through training and structured work placement. The teacher organises the work placement experiences and attends with the learner until confidence is established. By contrast, a higher level programme such as the Vocational Graduate Diploma of Aquaculture Hatchery Management is a post university course in a skills niche area. (2012, <http://www.training.gov.au>). Because Vocational Graduate Diplomas are usually undertaken by people who are already in the industry who are choosing to up-skill, the programmes encourage project work in the workplace.

For those people who are undecided about their future careers, specialist taster-programmes have been developed. These introduce learners to a number of vocational areas in order to encourage them to make more informed decisions about their future study. An even more focused programme approach is through pre-apprenticeship programmes that similarly provide initial training for a limited period. Pre-apprenticeships are conducted solely within an RTO and, unlike apprenticeships, do not require the learner to commit to an employer. Should they confirm that they want to continue in this vocation, they later contract with an employer for an apprenticeship and possibly gain credit for the training already undertaken in the pre-apprenticeship programme (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 58).

Apprenticeship programmes have a long history in Australia and their arrangements are regulated by state governments. To become an apprentice, the person signs with an employer and undertakes to work for that enterprise for a particular time. The employer agrees to train that person and to release them from the workplace duties to attend formal training and assessment. The release may be one day a week or through block-release during which the apprentice will attend training for a clustered number of days. The apprentice is paid a training wage for the duration of the apprenticeship (Billett et al., 2012). Apprenticeships are available to anyone of working age and may be undertaken full time or part-time.

School-based apprenticeships which have already been mentioned are undertaken part-time in conjunction with regular school subjects (<http://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au>). The apprentice attends their workplace for a set time each week and has formal training as well. Many school-based apprentices finally complete their apprenticeships when they leave school. Like full time apprentices, school-based apprentices receive a training wage and government incentive payments. Traditional apprenticeships usually take three to four years to complete but there are variations around duration.

Traineeships have now been established for industries that have not traditionally offered apprenticeships. They are similar to apprenticeships in that the learner signs up to work for an employer to learn the job role and to attend formal training and may be the same duration as apprenticeships and are subject to different government regulations. However, the principle of a learner being employed while gaining skills, knowledge, experience and a training wage is the same as an apprenticeship.

Despite promotional programmes to encourage women into these programmes, there is a gender bias among people undertaking apprenticeships and traineeships. In 2011 there were 226,500 apprentices and trainees in Australia of whom 79 per cent were male (Australian Bureau of Statistics quoted by Skills Australia, 2011, p. 61).

Qualifications and competency standards

While the curriculum is written by the Industry Skills Councils, the delivery and assessment programmes for qualifications are designed by teaching staff to meet the needs of groups of learners or their employer/s. The potential for flexibility and customisation are considered to be the strengths of the VET system. In the same spirit as the flexibility of the programme design, the qualifications and competency standards also exhibit significant flexibility in how they can be configured to meet skills and knowledge objectives for learners or employers within the overarching framework. One of the pillars of this framework is the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) which “provides a comprehensive, nationally consistent, yet flexible, framework for all accredited qualifications in education and training” (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2009, p.16; see Appendix 1).

The AQF describes the key characteristics of all the qualifications and provides a common approach to qualifications across all of the education and training sectors. By having the one structure encompassing schools, higher education and vocational education and training, the Framework links all qualifications in order to facilitate pathways from one qualification to another. Theoretically, the aim is to break down boundaries between education sectors (Stanwick, 2003). This is considered to be a major asset in promoting lifelong learning. Other established factors supporting lifelong learning are the recognition of prior learning, credit transfer arrangements, articulated pathways and dual credentialing (Stanwick, 2003, p. 21).

A competency-based approach is the hallmark of the Australian training system. Under this system work tasks are described in competency standards or units of competency which when combined together make up qualifications. The qualifications and units of competency are presented in training packages which are developed by the Industry Skills Councils as previously explained. In turn, these qualifications and units of competency are formally endorsed by government and form the curriculum for use by the training system. The majority of qualifications are made up of a combination of core and elective units of competency which allow users to select the units of competency to be delivered and assessed for learners. The qualification rules for the selection of electives and importing units of competency from other training packages or curriculum allow for considerable flexibility. Public access to the training packages and their units of competency is available at <http://www.training.gov.au>.

It is possible for a learner to undertake only one unit of competency or a cluster of units according to the skills needed for a job role. This is termed a skill-set and is part of the formal certification system. Skill-sets are useful for up-skilling in enterprises and creating pathways to further learning (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 120).

The training package development and endorsement process can take a year or more for new units of competency or qualifications to become available, or amendments made to existing ones. There are occasions when time constraints require a more speedy process to occur or even organisations other than Industry Skills Councils may require qualifications and units of competency. To allow for this, the individual states have state-based processes for curricula to be developed and accredited. To ensure that this meets the National Framework, each state conforms to agreed accrediting requirements with the result that the state developed curriculum is recognised nationally. (further information available on <http://www.training.gov.au>).

A particular feature of accredited curriculum is that, unlike training package qualifications, it can respond to a community need for training, not only to industry needs. For example, the Course in Peer Support for Breastfeeding in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Communities is an accredited curriculum that does not involve employment.

Training packages, and competency based training in particular, is a contested area between those who feel it addresses underpinning theory and those who feel it cannot achieve. Stanwick (2003), for example, is particularly critical of the “prescriptive nature and narrow focus on performance without considering underpinning knowledge, values and attitudes” (p. 17).

Despite some reservations training packages are continuing to be developed. The National Skills Standards Council (NSSC), an agency of the Federal Government, has conducted a review of the Standards for Training Package Development in 2012. While some refinements have been made, training packages have remained essentially unchanged (NSSC, 2012). A notable addition is the development of new companion volumes written by Industry Skills Councils which will provide recommendations about learning strategies, knowledge guidance, assessment strategies and general RTO implementation advice to teachers.

Teaching and learning approaches

Strong links between on- and off-the-job experience have been identified as valuable in supporting learning (Billett et al., 2012, p. 17). These learner experiences are enhanced through planning between employers and teachers so that optimal relationships between theory and practice can be presented to learners. Skills Australia (2010, p. 63) calculated that in 2006 only 6.8 per cent of delivery (using public funding) was conducted in the workplace, while 75.2 per cent was campus based, 5.3 per cent was online or other off campus modes. The remaining 12.7 per cent was not specified. These statistics show that workplace delivery is still not widely implemented though it is acknowledged as valuable.

The use of technology in teaching is a growth area. In Australia a Vocational Education Broadband Network is being established to expand the use of the internet as a learning tool (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 110). It is envisaged that the internet will provide greater access to and participation in learning for people who live in regional and remote areas of the country. However, Adult Learning Australia (2011) cautions that learners with very low skill levels benefit from stand-alone, face-to-face delivery methods. This is especially true for adults who are not currently working or actively job seeking.

Teaching and learning approaches may be as individual as the teachers and students involved in the learning. An array of possible approaches is outlined in Table 15 and may be used in workplace or campus settings:

Table 15: Forms of VET Pedagogy

Learners	Engage with:	Activities
Learning individually.	Programme project or assignment.	Working alone on research or a project. Gaining information from other people, texts, electronic media especially resource banks. An e-portfolio may be a valuable record of the process.
Learning in pairs.	A more experienced practitioner.	Working with peers in the workplace, undertaking a joint project, sharing perspectives and joint problem solving.
Group learning.	Work with peers on an agreed task.	Working with others to develop learning through sharing, discussion, reconciliation and evaluation. Use of reflection to achieve understanding. Opportunities to network with others addressing similar tasks in other locations and internationally is valuable.
Facilitated group learning.	The group works with a more experienced or qualified person to address an issue.	The experienced person encourages interaction, discussion and reconciliation while guiding the learning process. The process may involve action learning or evaluation of existing processes. Social networking may be useful in this environment.
Learning through integrated work experiences.	Undertaking work experience in a number of different, but related work places to address an issue.	Engaging in a variety of experiences allows for active engagement and learning through reflection, sharing and reconciling.
Facilitated joint learning across different disciplines within one work environment.	Working with the facilitator and others from different disciplines within the one workplace. Billet et al. gave the example of a hospital work environment with learners coming from medicine, nursing and physiotherapy working together.	Undertake a joint project to investigate an issue or process and learning together allows for interdisciplinary learning and work team development.
Face-to-face learning in small groups in an educational setting.	Educator structured environment with other learners present.	The learners engage in experiences they then consider and discuss with the tutor about the topics in the course. Technology may be used to access other learners or experts.
Educator instruction.	Educator using real world examples.	This traditional method of instruction is useful when large amounts of information need to be explained to learners.

Completion outcomes for learners

The completion rates for vocational education and training courses is low. While there are various estimates of the actual statistics across the sector, according to Skills Australia (2011, p. 6) it is between 20 per cent and 35 per cent depending on the qualification. The government views these statistics as “significant wastage in the system and lost opportunities to develop skills in critical areas” (SCOTESE, 2011, p. 5). However, policy documents do not interrogate the statistics very closely and there may be justifications for these figures. For example, in order to gain government funding for training in the sector, a learner must enrol in a qualification. Quite often the learner does not require the full qualification but only a number of the units of competency. In this case the learner may leave the course when they have achieved the skills and knowledge they want, but by not having completed the full qualification, they appear in the statistics as non-completers.

Again, many learners are offered jobs in the area in which they are training before they complete their qualification. This is especially true for apprentices and trainees who will take up a job offer at full pay, even though they have not completed their apprenticeship or traineeship. In both of these cases the learner has achieved the skills they require.

Alternatively, if the reason for non-completion is because of dashed expectations about the course outcomes, the relevance of the training or the quality of the experience, these are matters for concern. In order to address the expectations, efforts are being made to improve information about courses and job roles before learners enrol. The relevance and quality of the training are addressed through the Australian Quality Training Framework process. Nevertheless, there are no guarantees that the learner will be completely satisfied with their training.

An overview of Australian VET can confidently point to a strong increase in the attainment of qualifications over time (i.e. credentialism), but it may blur the pockets of disadvantage reproduced by the VET system. In part this is due to the greater symbolic value given to university qualifications and the hierarchy within the labour market of lower and higher level vocational qualification attainment with related levels of advantage, pay and opportunity. This is taken up below.

Social equity through education and training

In comparison with the higher education sector, the VET sector has almost double the proportion of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, triple the proportion of students from non-English speaking homes, and five times the proportion of Indigenous students (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 11).

Equity groups, relative to all VET students, show little improvement in their participation over time. North, Ferrier and Long (2010) show evidence of disadvantage in VET. Disadvantage is most commonly recognised by:

- Under-representation in student populations compared with Australian population share.
- Over-representation in certain types of programmes (e.g. lower level)
- Poorer completion rates than other students.
- Poorer outcomes than other students.

Youth disengagement remains an issue to which VET has to continue to respond. The Australian Industry Group (2010) sketches a bleak picture – 13.8 per cent of teenagers were not in full time learning or work and this pattern has persisted since the 1990s. A total of 22 per cent of young adults were not fully engaged in work or study and, by 2009, unemployment had increased to 18.5 per cent for this group, with a quarter of 20-24 year olds not in full time work or employment.

A social inclusion agenda has emerged from the Australian government which recognizes disadvantage and its association with poorer labour market experiences and non-participation in the labour force. The primary aim is to improve labour market opportunities and labour force participation especially by those experiencing poverty and other forms of disadvantage. (Council of Australian Governments, 2009, p. 5). The low levels of skills and education attainment highlighted earlier in this paper are an obvious concern of this agenda:

The adoption of the social inclusion agenda thus has implications for all ... However, with its strong focus on work and related skills, the agenda has particular resonance for VET. Participation and attainment in education and training must be viewed and approached within a social context – recognising that they are influenced by a very broad range of interconnected factors, many of which are outside the boundaries of the VET system – including geographic location, housing, income, family structure, health, cultural and language background and labour market experience. A ‘whole of life’ approach is thus promoted – one which takes a multi-pronged action through integrated government and community services (North, Ferrier and Long, 2010, p. 21).

Education and training feature strongly within government policy which endeavours to encourage socially disadvantaged people to engage in education and training. The primary aim is to gain employment either through initial training or re-training. Skills Australia (2011, p. 125) also states that “(s)eamless movement from VET to higher education courses is an important mechanism for the promotion of lifelong learning, particularly for the social groups who are traditionally under-represented” who are the socially disadvantaged. Despite this intention, even though “VET attracts a significant proportion of low socioeconomic and disadvantaged students, the evidence shows that progression into higher-level qualifications is low” (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 107). The goal of full socioeconomic mobility through education is still an aspiration.

Education and training is also strongly linked to government unemployment assistance for job seekers. There tends to be a push from government agencies for the unemployed to undertake training and education to become employed.

Funding benefits

Funding for education and training comes primarily from the Federal and the State and Territory Governments. The total funding of the system for 2009 was estimated (MCTEEa, 2011, p. 5) to be AUD\$5.67 billion. This represents funding for tuition and does not include incentives or other benefits paid to individuals or employers. This is to be compared with the estimated funding to the sector by industry of AUD\$4 billion in 1999 (no more recent data being available).

Government funding is allocated through measures of the volume of training in dollars per student contact hour to an RTO. The alternative is to fund on outcomes or qualification completions but while this is a matter of debate it is not currently the case (MCTEEa, 2011, p. 8).

MCTEE reports there has been a decline in government funding to the sector of “13 per cent while real recurrent funding per student in government schools has slightly increased” (MCTEEa, 2011; MCTEEb, 2011, p. 5) although there is funding variation between the states because of differing state government contributions. Other sources of funds to the sector come from international student fees and domestic student fees, though both of these sources are relatively small. Given the policy rhetoric about increasing the “number of skilled workers and the depth of skills and qualifications in the workforce” there is a need to “assess current approaches to public investment in VET” (MCTEEa, 2011, p. 5). Skills Australia (2010, p. 57) expresses concern that funding has been decreasing despite the Council of Australian Governments agreement that VET places should be expanded.

Adult and Community Education organisations are “haphazardly funded” (Adult Learning Australia and the Australian Education Union, 2011, p. 13) leading to heightened levels of uncertainty for learners and educators about whether entry-level, prevocational and foundation skills programmes can be maintained into the future. The programmes for the most vulnerable learners are themselves financially most vulnerable. Adult and Community Education VET courses are funded in the same way as other RTOs.

Funding strategy

There is a move to fund education and training based on industry and individual people’s demand for skills rather than the supply approach of allocating funding to training providers in particular qualification areas (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 3). Victoria and South Australia are currently moving towards such a demand funding model. While funding the education supply side is falling from favour, the Federal Government still continues to take responsibility for supporting training in foundation skills and skill areas of “market failure” (MCTEEa, 2011, p. 5).

User pays funding

As will be described in the Section below, there are moves to make learners pay for their education and training. Income contingent loans are being made available by the Federal Government for learners undertaking higher level qualifications. However publically funded places will be available for learners in vocational skills up to and including Certificate III. In Victoria the majority of students over 25 years will receive public funding for their vocational training provided they are enrolling at a level above that of their existing qualifications. There are some exceptions where learners may receive public funding for a qualification in a different vocation at the same level such as when re-training is needed to gain employment (Skills Australia, 2011, pp. 36, 37). South Australia is moving to implement a similar model.

The introduction of the Unique Student Identifier number for each school age person, which will stay with them throughout their life, will provide a means of tracking learners with existing qualifications and confirming whether new enrolments are at a higher level than those already achieved. At present a person enrolling in vocational education and training fills out a form stating their past educational achievements, there is no centralised repository of this data.

Karmel (2012, p. 21) observed that up-grading training does not necessarily pay-off through increased wages for all workers. Child care workers, for example, are within industries with a high degree of casualisation which result in reduced worker incentives to up-skill unless there is the benefit of greater job security. The neo-liberal approach to training expenditure does not necessarily apply to all workers.

Despite enterprises being users of skilled labour in their workforce they do not exhibit enthusiasm to commit to the ongoing funding of training.

Employability Skills and employment prospects

Employability skills is a term and concept used to describe the range of skills that are job unspecific but which apply to individuals' capacities to be prepared for, and to engage in, the world of work. These are meant to apply to stages of employment – preparing for and seeking work, working and then progressing one's skill development and career possibilities while in the workplace. Skills related to employability were first identified in the early 1990s which was the time when national training systems underwent radical reform in Australia. Generic competencies, named initially in Australia as the Mayer Key Competencies in 1992 and later as Employability Skills (around 2002), have stood in for life skills in an Australian context. They have undergone changes in the names by which they were referred to, and the components of skills they comprised have also changed. These have happened at key points – in the early 1990s, in the early 2000s and in 2012 when work started on a new framework to capture more effective ways to express and develop employability skills.

These skills are similar to other lists of employability skills that have been developed across the English speaking world (see Business Council of Australia, 2002, p. 4) which serves to demonstrate how the same policy agendas appear to be operating across a number of countries regardless of regional and individual nation's needs (Cornford, 2006, p. 3).

Over these key periods, employability skills in Australia have moved from being slightly more widely defined (that is, to incorporate capacities to support individuals' to engage in the wider societies and communities of which they are a part and to strengthen their employment capacities) to those which now are now more directly attuned to work.

There are different ways in which skills such as these are addressed in the various education sectors in Australia. In the broader vocational education and training sector which is the sector most directly charged with building productive capacities among existing and potential workers, an employability skills framework is one which identifies these capacities and attempts to embed this framework into the training packages which comprise the qualifications produced in this sector. At the time of writing, there were eight employability skills that relate to this sector, namely (i) communication, (ii) teamwork, (iii) problem solving, (iv) initiative and enterprise, (v) planning and organising, (vi) self-management, (vii) learning, and (viii) technology.

The need for employability skills to be a constant focus in vocational learning and to be incorporated as competencies within its 'curriculum' is justified by what is seen as an urgent need in the country to "develop the foundation and employability skills that will enable ...people who are currently marginalised from the labour market to participate in the workforce and [to] create the basis for lifelong learning" (SCOTESE, 2011, p. 9). This comment demonstrates the tension around employability skills, such that while their connection to workplace productivity is clear and dominant in policies and commentaries, there remains some vacillation around their applicability and the need to connect these capacities to the social spaces beyond employment. Certain about their work-relatedness and link to Australia's economic health is the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (2011) who sees employability skills as applicable beyond VET to the tertiary sector at large:

The tertiary sector of the future needs to ensure that it is preparing students and employees for the challenges of rapidly changing workplaces, so that they can contribute to a firm's productivity, make good use of their skills and manage their own ongoing learning, including use of information and communication technologies ... (p. 60). For those who are employed, the world of work provides countless learning opportunities and workplaces are dynamic places of skills transfer (p. 65).

Employers' engagement in debates around employability skills is based on their views of particular gaps in employees' capacities which they see as placing limitations on enterprise productivity. Sheldon and Thornthwaite's (2005) research into business associations' views on employability skills identified gaps in three areas – their immediate needs; their concern about the quality or appropriateness of job applicants' skills; and longer term skill gaps (p. 408). Gaps related to what have been commonly referred to as generic skills, such as communication and teamwork, to personal attributes and values that employers perceive to be appropriate to conventional workplace behaviour and attitudes. This mix, according to Sheldon and Thornthwaite, was justified by employers on the basis of the changing nature of work influenced by technologies, changing markets and production processes. Cognisance of this continues with the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (2012) identifying "the transition to a knowledge based economy creates greater demands for theoretical knowledge and transferable skills beyond practical application and specific competencies for particular jobs" (p. 75). In addition:

There is a growing requirement for cognitive and interactive skills in addition to specialised or manual skills due to the changing technological and social nature of the workplace ... [and] green skills for sustainability and emissions trading schemes (p. 24, 26).

The need to redevelop an employability skills framework stems from difficulties that have been encountered in the definition of employability skills, their development through teaching and learning and their demonstration and consequent impact in workplaces. A report commissioned by DEEWR (2012) identifies some of the complexities that account for insufficient impact around the development of employability skills. In particular, these include the context-dependent nature of employability skills and impact of context upon these skills, insufficient confidence and competence among trainers to develop them and the difficulties of assessment, measuring and reporting of them (p. 5). A recent report by the World Bank confirms that "[e]ducators need to better understand how to prepare students and learners with soft skills" (Wang, 2012, p. 48). This echoes long held cautions around employability skills:

The focus of the Employability Skills, as the name suggests, is upon employability. But what is substantially missing is any really serious indication of how these desired qualities may be realistically taught. ...What we are left with is a serious educational issue, namely that the business community, and those developing VET policy, have no real understanding of what generic skills really are or how they may be attained in any form. (Cornford, 2006, p. 3-4).

A new employability skills framework seeks to "to make more clear and explicit the nontechnical skills and knowledge that underpin successful participation in work" (Ithaca Group, 2012, p. 14). A developmental approach is envisaged which will identify individuals' capacities to work with increasing autonomy, cope with complexity and uncertainty and adapt to contexts (p. 16). Three categories of enabling factors (Ithaca Group, 2012, p. 16) have been identified:

1. Workplace support: This category includes the formal and informal processes that support individuals to understand the requirements of their workplace and role and to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for effective performance in that context. This includes processes such as inductions, supervision, mentoring, peer support, performance discussions, and provision of opportunities for experience, reflection and learning.
2. Culture and values: This category refers to the culture and values of both the individual and the workplace, both of which affect the ability of an individual to demonstrate and develop the behaviours required for success in work.

- Workplace culture and values underpin the types of attitudes and attributes valued in the workplace, such as enthusiasm, motivation, initiative and commitment. They can also support or inhibit the creation of an environment that fosters learning, collaboration, creativity and innovation. Workplace culture and values can be explicit, such as those promoted in codes of conduct or workplace policies, or implicit in the accepted behaviour, reward systems and power structures of the workplace.
 - Individuals' values and cultural background affect the attitudes they bring with them to work, as well as their ability to understand and operate within the culture of a workplace. Both of these factors have a significant impact on an individual's behaviour at work.
3. External factors: This category includes factors that impact on an individual's ability to gain and maintain employment, such as health, transport, housing arrangements, family responsibilities, social networks and other personal circumstances.

Literacy and employment prospects

The arguments extolling the benefits of improved literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) are compelling. International research shows that a 1 per cent increase in a country's literacy score leads to a 2.5 per cent increase in labour productivity (Skills Australia, 2010). There is also evidence that LLN training results in reduced downtime, maintenance costs and productivity increases. People with higher LLN skills are more likely to be employed, engage in their community, experience better health and participate in further training. There are significant benefits in terms of social inclusion and improved ability to contribute as active citizens since LLN skills are "skills for life, not just for work" (p. 37). The flow-on effects of LLN are extensive, too, insofar as it increases the involvement of parents in their children's education and adults' capacity to engage confidently in social networks. Significantly, employment returns to Indigenous people from LLN training are even higher than those for Non Indigenous people (pp. 3-4).

Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) skills are now recognised as fundamental to improved workforce participation, productivity and social inclusion (Skills Australia, 2012, p. 42). More recently, there has been greater awareness of the need for foundation skills to be developed in conjunction with work-based experience through the whole spectrum of learning, not just at preparatory levels. As people move through their working lives they may experience varying and challenging communication pressures. They will need the adaptability to deal with changing workplaces, new technology, environmental sustainability and career transitions (p. 25).

New levels of awareness around the influence of literacy skills and employment prospects were sparked by results of the 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey in Australia. These were a wake-up call because results indicated that 40 per cent of employed Australians and 60 per cent of unemployed Australians have a level of literacy below the accepted standard needed to work in the emerging knowledge-based economy (Pocock, 2009; Skills Australia, 2010; Tout, 2008). The 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS) measured four domains of literacy: prose and document literacy, numeracy and problem solving ability. Adult Australians with below-adequate literacy skills outnumbered those with adequate (or higher) literacy skills in two of the four domains of literacy across the whole sample population. In the remaining two domains, five out of ten adults had below minimum literacy proficiency (Pocock, 2009). This equates to nearly six million people (Skills Australia, 2011).

However compelling the arguments to pay attention to life skills in vocational education, the impact of Life Skills programmes has not made significant inroads into improving literacy levels. There has been a lack of improvement in adult literacy scores in Australia since the inception in 1997 of training packages which integrated language, literacy and numeracy, indicating that there has not been a return in terms of improved LLN outcomes (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 38). This is despite the dedicated programmes and funding efforts to support literacy development (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 39).

The Australian Government runs two recognised best-practice adult language, literacy and numeracy programmes targeted at specific sections of the workforce. For those in employment, the Workplace English Language and Literacy Programme (WELL) provides employer-initiated language, literacy and numeracy training where needs are identified in the workplace. The WELL programme was funded to service 16,500 workers in 2009-10 (p. 39). The effort is somewhat larger for the unemployed section of the workforce, where the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programme (LLNP) is funded to service 19,900 of at least 390,000 unemployed people who are estimated to have language, literacy and numeracy skills below the level required in the workplace (p. 40). Overall, state and territory governments make a significant contribution to adult language, literacy and numeracy training, particularly through TAFE institutes. However, it is difficult to assess the overall investment (Skills Australia, 2010).

Workers with poor literacy are more than twice as likely to be employed in low-paid occupations (Pocock, 2009, p. 8). However, there were larger differences for women than men: women with poor literacy had about twice the likelihood of below-average weekly earnings than men with the same literacy skills. Pocock's findings suggest that for many low paid workers, educational interventions around basic literacy are relevant to improving work outcomes, especially for women. However, Skills Australia (2010) indicates that current LLN programmes service a small proportion (less than 1 per cent of the workforce whose LLN skills are inadequate). Further, international comparisons show that the UK and New Zealand spend significantly more per capita than Australia. The adult literacy and numeracy practitioner workforce is deemed insufficient to meet current needs.

LLN scores indicate gaps in the way students at secondary schools are prepared for the workforce, the capacity of an ageing workforce to be retrained, for health and well-being, for gender parity and equal opportunity (Tout, 2008). Easing disadvantage related to insufficient levels of foundation skills is closely related to the social mandate of VET. Studies show that effective interventions can have positive outcomes for individuals, communities and organisations and, consequently, for a country's social and economic well-being. These interventions may entail strategies such as better career guidance, pre-apprenticeship training, case management approaches and strong partnerships between providers, government agencies, community organisations and employers. A more systematic approach to resource allocation and new models of collaboration, across multiple service providers is called for (SCOTese, 2011, p. 9). The development of literacy skills as foundational appears not to have fared favourably within Australian VET. They have been bound by an occupational orientation, and their so called generic transferability or foundational characteristics have been contained by the necessity of establishing their relevance to the workplace. The effects of the gaps that have eventuated, however, are significant and reach beyond the workplace. Admittedly, the gaps impact on the economy and on GDP but they reach into the social fabric, weaken civic engagement and community well-being.

People with higher language, literacy and numeracy skills are more likely to participate in the workforce and be employed, have higher levels of social participation and experience better health. There are significant benefits in terms of social inclusion and improved ability to contribute as active citizens since language literacy and numeracy skills are "skills for life, not just for work" (Skills Australia, 2010).

Employability and skills utilisation

The need for a greater investigation of the skills of individuals within Australia is gaining increased attention. Skills utilisation is considered a relationship between employer investment in skills and workers capacities to operate effectively so as to prevent underuse of skills resulting in workplace alienation and reduced levels of well-being (Skills Australia, 2012). Inattention to this is considered to be squandering the resources that have been invested in training and skill acquisition. It is the application of skills already acquired that generates skills utilization (p. 57). Australian enterprises are being urged to see skills development and utilization "... as an investment rather than a cost" (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 58).

While full skills utilisation in Australia is a growing aspiration, there is data that shows that skills acquired through lifelong learning and VET are not being utilised sufficiently. Karmel (2012) has produced data showing a lack of graduates working in areas for which they are trained. Karmel argues that data on student outcomes indicate that VET is more generic than occupation specific, leading to a majority of those not working in a matched occupation reporting that their training was of relevance to their work. Exceptions to this was for arts and media professionals – for whom over 60 per cent reported that their training was of little or no relevance (sports and personal service workers also reported high levels of training being of little relevance) (Karmel, 2012, p. 18).

Table 16 shows the following:

... there is a group of occupations where the training is quite specific, with high proportions working in the matched occupation: the trades, carers and aides and also cleaners and laundry workers. However, there are many courses for which the training is largely generic. That is, the training is used in the jobs graduates get although the proportion of graduates working in the matched occupation is relatively low (Karmel, 2012, p. 18).

Table 16: Courses Sorted by the Proportion of Graduates Reporting that the Training is of Little or no Relevance to their Destination Occupation: Graduates for whom Intended and Destination Occupations do not Match at the Sub-Major Group Level, by Selected ANZSCO, 2007

Intended occupation of training activity	per cent
21 Arts and media professionals	63.6
45 Sports and personal service workers	45.0
26 ICT professionals	36.7
73 Road and rail drivers	35.3
43 Hospitality workers	34.0
31 Engineering, ICT and science technicians	31.2
85 Food preparation assistants	29.7
59 Other clerical and administrative workers	28.6
84 Farm, forestry and garden workers	27.2
22 Business, human resource and marketing professionals	27.1
61 Sales representatives and agents	26.0
14 Hospitality, retail and service managers	25.9
53 General clerical workers	25.9
39 Other technicians and trades workers	24.1
23 Design, engineering, science and transport professionals	23.1*
83 Factory process workers	22.5
89 Other labourers	21.7
82 Construction and mining labourers	21.2
54 Inquiry clerks and receptionists	21.2
36 Skilled animal and horticultural workers	20.7
74 Storepersons	20.1
12 Farmers and farm managers	20.0
55 Numerical clerks	19.2
56 Clerical and office support workers	18.1*
41 Health and welfare support workers	17.7
27 Legal, social and welfare professionals	16.9*
13 Specialist managers	16.2
71 Machine and stationary plant operators	16.0
72 Mobile plant operators	15.8
62 Sales assistants and salespersons	15.5

Intended occupation of training activity	per cent
44 Protective service workers	14.7
51 Office managers and programme administrators	13.8
42 Carers and aides	13.5
24 Education professionals	12.0
35 Food trades workers	8.3
32 Automotive and engineering trades workers	7.8
81 Cleaners and laundry workers	5.4*
33 Construction trades workers	3.5
34 Electrotechnology and telecommunications trades workers	3.2*

Notes: Base is all graduates, irrespective of reason for study, who were employed as at May 2007, excluding those from the ACE sector and unknown intended ANZSCO; matching between intended and destination occupation occurs at the sub-major group level.

Some sub-major group level occupations are not presented due to too few numbers in sample cells.

* Relative standard error greater than 25 per cent; estimate should be used with caution.

Source: Karmel, Mlotkowski and Awodeyi (2008), cited in Karmel, 2012, p. 19.

These figures in Table 16 represent significant challenges to the sector. While the education and training system is sophisticated, its capacity to build skills in workers that are well matched to industry requirements is contested.

Summary

- Australia has a centralized vocational education and training sector that embraces schools, higher education and adult community education providers as well as solely VET providers.
- The focus of the VET sector lies with developing skills in wide variety of skills to a wide variety of learners for roles in the workforce.
- The VET sector has expanded rapidly since the 1970s and includes traditional apprenticeships and new traineeships as well as campus-based and workplace-based training. It is seen as second-chance education for those who may need up-skilling or re-skilling.
- Despite the focus on competency based training for industry supported by government, industry continues to express concerns that graduate learners are not adequately prepared for the workplace.
- Under-utilisation of workers' skills in the workplace is a concern.
- Graduate learners have low completion rates and often do not enter the occupation for which they trained leading to concerns about the adequacy of the qualifications.
- Despite government programmes, language, literacy and numeracy levels are not making solid gains.
- There are public expectations that socially disadvantaged learners will receive the training they need to achieve social mobility through VET training but this is not necessarily accomplished.

Section C

Contemporary policy around lifelong learning in Australia

Introduction

Lifelong learning in Australia is not encompassed in a direct policy initiative but is acknowledged in other policy initiatives. In vocational education and training and adult and community education, lifelong learning is inferred through government emphasis on workforce education and training designed to enable people to adapt to changing workforce demands. It is discussed with regard to school education (Kahn et al., 2012, p. 8) and by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*:

All governments and school sectors need to support young people's transition from schooling into further study, training or employment and enable them to acquire the skills that support this, including an appetite for lifelong learning. Support may also be needed for young people returning to education and training after a period of employment (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 12).

This statement indicates the positioning of lifelong learning in Australian educational and policy thinking. It is positioned more as a learning outcome or an accompaniment to other policy priorities, rather than as a goal in itself. This means that lifelong learning has to be read between the lines of policy initiatives in Australia which focus more on workforce development (and within that, on developing employable potential or current workers for which lifelong learning is a by-product) rather than on establishing a link between participation in lifelong learning and its contribution toward creating employment opportunities. This is discussed below in the context of a recent policy initiative around skill and workforce development in response to the current economic and social challenges that have been outlined in Section A. It is in this policy initiative that one can see the link between the design of education systems and learning that is meant to respond to: the changing industry landscape necessitating structural adjustment, decreasing productivity levels, low labour force participation rates, skills shortages yet high levels of long-term unemployment, an increasingly ageing population and finally, the widespread low levels of language, literacy and numeracy.

Below we discuss the most current Federal and State and Territory Governments' policies through the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development statement from the joint Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in April 2012. This statement reflects high level agreement between different levels of government that link skills and training with employment policy in Australia. Its directions are discussed as an exemplar of the way lifelong learning has been commandeered in Australian policy as a tool for enhancing employment prospects.

Policy Objective

The outcome of the 2012 agreement is an overarching policy objective from which flows outcomes, targets and measurement. There are then key reform directions which expand on the objective.

The high level policy declaration was driven by the following objective:

The objective of this national agreement is a VET system that delivers a productive and highly skilled workforce and which enables all working age Australians to develop the skills and qualifications needed to participate effectively in the labour market and contribute to Australia's economic future; and supports the achievement of increased rates of workforce participation (Skills and Training, 2012)

The agreement expands on this objective by specifying expected outcomes and targets for 2020 relating to the three areas:

- (i). qualifications – halving the proportion of Australians aged 20-64 without qualifications at Certificate III level and above and doubling the number of higher level qualifications held
- (ii). foundation skills – increasing the proportion of working age people with sound foundational skills
- (iii). training choice and quality – to improve economic participation of Australians, with increased employment rates and qualifications postparticipation in training

While it was deemed important to increase the “[p]roportion of employers satisfied that training meets their needs” (Performance indicator 1 (a), p. 5), this was not accompanied by a measurable target.

Policy Reform Directions

The objective and each of the outcomes has been expanded into “reform directions” (Skills and Training, 2012, <http://www.coag.gov.au>) which is a more finely grained explanation of the overall objective. The detail of these reform directions will be reviewed in turn.

Demand-driven training provision

A change in reform direction is directed towards the way training will be accessed by individuals and how it will be financed. It is built on the neo-liberal preference for developing an open and competitive training market. Improving training accessibility is explained by Skills Australia in their *Skills for Prosperity: A Roadmap for Vocational Education and Training* (2011) as moving gradually towards a government funding arrangement that is more demand than supply-based. That is, the funds are available to individual students or enterprises to use with the education provider of their choice (p. 35). Until recently, funding was approached from the supply side with government funding given to providers who then allocated this funding to learners whom they recruit for the courses they chose to offer. It was felt that giving individuals and employing enterprises the choice of using their training dollars at a provider that most suits them will create competition with “pressure on providers to be innovative in their responsiveness to local needs” (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 35). In response, there is the expectation that providers will be flexible in offering courses that will attract potential students to maximise their own productivity. This policy is promoting the move from a supply approach to skilling towards a demand approach.

A number of specific government programmes have been introduced and also expanded to directly fund enterprises themselves to up-skill current or newly recruited employees by using the services of a training provider of their choice. This aims to ensure that enterprises are encouraging training in the targeted skill areas their business and ensure that training providers respond to this opportunity through their choice of courses and will train in flexible and innovative ways best suited to the enterprises. In this way the recruit will be certain to have training suited to their job role and may therefore have a sustainable occupation.

A newly created initiative is designed to address skill shortages by funding enterprises, or groups of enterprises to up-skill staff in their industry areas of skill shortage. This Critical Skills Investment Fund includes co-contributions from the enterprises varying from 10 per cent to 50 per cent of the cost, depending on the size of the enterprise workforce (Skills Australia, 2012, p. 49).

National training entitlement to funding

To increase the number of people with qualifications to meet the agreed targets, it is estimated that Australia will need an average annual increase in enrolments in tertiary studies of 3 per cent a year in coming years (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 5).

To encourage people to up-skill, in 2010-11 the Federal Government introduced a guarantee of government funded training (an entitlement) to people under 25 years provided they are undertaking a qualification or course at a higher level than their current qualification (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 6).

Affordability of the education sector

Affordability, when referred to in this reform direction, concerns the affordability to government of its financial responsibility for skill development. Targets related to the large increase in the number of working age people with qualifications at Certificate III level or higher and a doubling of the number of people with diploma level qualifications or higher will require a much higher level of funding than at present. As noted previously, the majority of the cost of a vocational education and training qualification is carried by government on the basis that the social returns of education made the investment worthwhile with a small amount contributed as a fee by the learner.

New policy directions have embraced the human capital view of education and led to a decrease in the government funding or subsidy for each student's learning and the introduction of higher fees for students to make up the difference. The stance being taken by government is that education and training will benefit the individual learner through increased wages and return in their future and therefore the individual should make a much larger contribution to the cost of their education now (Watson, 2011, p. 3). Concerns around whether the individual should finance their own learning or whether the funds should stem from the public treasury have been soundly answered by the introduction of higher fees.

In order to support people who may not have personal funds to enable them to undertake education and training, the government introduced VET FEE HELP in 2010-11. This is a fund that provides income-contingent loans for students who are studying at diploma level or above (Australian Government Budget, 2012).

Participation in training for employment

Another reform direction concerns improving training participation and qualification completions by learners and those who may be experiencing disengagement or disadvantage. This has the goal of increasing the employment participation rate to 69 per cent by 2025 which relies on targeting groups in the community who are not currently employed. These groups have been identified as men aged between 25 and 64, women aged 25 to 34 years and older people aged 55 to 64 (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 3). To attract them into training the government will better equip them with skills to suit available jobs.

The support will be provided by individual case managers with Skills Australia taking this one step further by promoting the establishment of formal links between employment services and vocational education and training providers and adult and community education (Watson, 2011, p. 56). Investment in specialist wrap-around services for disadvantaged people will include individual learning plans and access to advice to inform choices and achieve successful outcomes (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 72).

There is a strong emphasis on the effectiveness of local responses to address differences in skill shortage, unemployment rates and employment demand. Up-skilling the unemployed is only seen to be of benefit where local employers are willing to offer jobs of suitable quality (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 65) so recommendations for training are to be linked to local employment demand. Partnerships between industry, community services and training providers and adult and community education providers are strongly encouraged to address local disadvantage. This is especially the case for supporting Indigenous people through education and training and into employment (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 4). The quality of the training and assessment and the public information about it will be overseen by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 42).

Training and workforce development

Another policy direction revolves around workforce development. Government policy is now committed to a new approach to workforce development that addresses the under-utilisation of employees' skills in workplaces. The Skills Australia (2011) goal is to reduce firms' underutilisation of skills from 41 per cent to 36 per cent (p. 29).

The key to resolving the mismatch of skills required by employers and those of employees is seen as effective business leadership by enterprise managers who can be encouraged by government to more effectively use the skills, expertise and talents of their existing employees (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 4). Employers are expected to be keen to maximise the full range of skills of their employees while employees are seeking job satisfaction, even though the reasons why this is not already occurring are not questioned.

The government policy considers that under-utilisation can be addressed through establishing partnerships between enterprises and training organisations. These organisations can assist by conducting skills audits of staff to identify skill gaps and investigating re-organisation of job roles. Task diversification and knowledge sharing can also be designed to contribute to make best the use of existing and future skills within that workforce.

To date, vocational education and training providers' engagement with workforce development has been seen as merely "embryonic, and [it] requires a scaled-up and coordinated approach" (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 48) for improvement in workforce utilisation to be significant. Avoiding skill mismatch is linked to the enhancement of business innovation (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012, p. 26) which is expected to come from improved processes and products.

Training and workforce development – foundation skills

There are three policy approaches to the provision of foundation skills for adults:

1. The Federal Government will provide funding for the Workplace English Language and Literacy programme (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 51) to address the English language needs of the migrant workforce. Specifically, this programme provides English language courses within the context of “job-related workplace training and is designed to help workers meet their current and future employment and training needs” (Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education, 2012).
2. Adult native speakers of English with low literacy and numeracy skills are to have these needs addressed through the Foundation Skill Strategy which is targeted at people of working age. The development of the curriculum through the new Foundation Skills Training Package is designed to support teaching foundation skills in association with teaching vocational skills and knowledge (Adult Learning Australia and the Australian Education Union, 2011, p. 4).
3. The Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program addresses the needs of unemployed adults with low literacy and numeracy skills. It aims at improving skills “with the expectation that such improvements will enable them to participate more effectively in training or in the labour force and lead to greater gains for them and society in the longer term. The LLNP provides up to 800 hours of free accredited language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) training for eligible job seekers” (Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations, 2012).

Projections show that more than 4.5 million working age Australians will benefit from these foundational skills programmes (MCTEE, 2011, p. 4).

Apprenticeship system streamlining

The Agreement focuses on strengthening the Australian apprenticeship system because apprenticeships and traineeships have historically had poor completion rates. As stated elsewhere, it has been calculated that in 2007, only 55 per cent of learners studying and working under these arrangements completed their courses (NCVER, 2011, p. 5). These completion rates are deemed unacceptably low. (The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012, p. 2). New Federal Government incentive payments to both learners and their employers are intended to assist both parties in working towards improving apprenticeship completions. However, state and territory governments also offer incentives and apprenticeship support services resulting in 130 different support/incentive programmes across the country (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 56). Greater national coordination and efficiency is called for.

The Federal Government has introduced an apprenticeship mentoring arrangement with 144 advisors being made available to assist learners in choosing the right trade for them and another 330 mentors will support them through their apprenticeships. This programme is especially targeting apprentices in industries experiencing skills shortages. Research has shown that apprentices are most at risk of leaving their apprenticeships in their first year, so mentors will concentrate their efforts with those in the early stage of apprenticeships.

Traditionally, an apprentice signed up to an employer for a definite time span and completed their apprenticeship at the termination of that contracted time. A new approach to streamline apprenticeship

now allows an apprentice who is deemed to be fully competent before their contract has expired to complete their apprenticeship. This aligns with a competency model where emphasis is placed on achieving training outcomes rather than serving time in training. All levels of government are supportive of this approach to apprenticeship and this is encouraged across the training system.

Industry confidence in the training system

To further entrench the needs of industry within the training system, new policy directions will effectively make room for greater industry involvement in training delivery. Industry representatives in Industry Skill Councils will not only develop the curriculum in the form of training packages, they will also develop training delivery and assessment materials for training providers to use as they choose. Additionally, government has dictated that industry representatives must validate training provider assessments to ensure the assessments reflect current industry practices. Hence the government claim that Australia has an industry led training system.

Transparent public training information

One of the strategies being used by the national regulator for VET, the Australian Skills and Quality Authority to make training provider information transparent to individuals and industry, is the public reporting of training organisation delivery and assessment statistics, student feedback comments and employer satisfaction ratings on a website. It is felt that this public information will support increasing quality of training provision through competition between RTOs. This approach conforms to the neo liberal view of achieving efficiencies through competition.

Currently, governments obtain information about student enrolments from the training providers who receive government funds. Unfortunately, this has meant that training paid for by employers or individuals has not been included in training statistics. Skills Australia (2011, p. 102) recommends that in the future all training provision must be reported by providers as a condition of their registration. This will enable a more “comprehensive national data collection and promote transparency” (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 102).

Training data collection for planning

The government is introducing a Unique Student Identifier (USI) for every person enrolled at an educational organisation (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 32) which will provide longitudinal information about each student’s formal education credentials over their lifetime. This will inform policy about pathways between educational sectors. The USI will inform government agencies about each individual’s educational record to ensure that entitlement requests are genuine.

As well as recruitment concerns raised by employer groups from the workforce demand-side, the training data can be examined from the supply-side for areas of potential skill shortages. This data will contribute to skills forecasting. Government policy can then respond through altering some skill area funding, adjusting incentive payments or altering the Skilled Occupation List for the General Skilled Migration List. There is regular national occupational, industry and labour market profiling undertaken by the government (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 19).



Pathways between education sectors

Policy directions on up-skilling are predicated on effective educational pathways between the school, vocational education and training, adult and community education and higher education. This policy is supported through the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) which is a nationally consistent framework of formal education credentials offered in post-compulsory education across education sectors from Certificate I through to a doctoral degree (see Appendix 1).

One of the prime goals of the Framework is to support “individuals’ lifelong learning goals by providing the basis for individuals to progress through education and training and gain recognition for their prior learning and experiences” (Australian Qualifications Framework, 2011, p. 8). Even though this pathway is clear and acknowledged by all education sectors, an individual’s movement along it can be difficult because articulation arrangements between the vocational education and higher education sectors are fragmentary in both directions. Government policy is endeavouring to improve people’s access to movement between the sectors to ensure skilling mobility.

The latest policy goals described above are an exemplar of the specific priorities adopted in Australia around lifelong learning. It is clear that while there is a vision to join up education sectors and to promote learners to move across these sectors in the spirit of support for on- going learning, there is little explicit discussion of lifelong learning as a policy priority. There is, though, much discussion of the relationship of intended policy directions to workforce development and initiatives designed to centralise the role of industry in the system and to prioritise its position in monitoring the system’s responsiveness.

There are a range of issues raised by such directions which are identified below:

Complexity around employability

These policies do not acknowledge the level of complexity that exists in the Australian labour market. Factors such as “[m]acro economic conditions, export policies of trading partners, technological and communication advances” affect the demand for employees (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 17). It is not just individuals’ skills that determine opportunities for employment. More recently, Skills Australia itself granted that the supply of skilled labour does not necessarily ensure effective skill utilisation. Accomplishing the proposed targets for qualification achievement in the Australian workforce may not guarantee increased innovation and productivity (2012, p. 12).

The limited employment opportunities for new graduates were discussed in Section A. The policy directions discussed in this section do not address them. Employment opportunities rest on more than skill acquisition. Wang (2012, p. 43), for the World Bank, details the factors that contribute to a person being employed including: job opportunities, family background, work experience, career information and others that may require specialist assistance. While the engagement between training providers and industry as outlined in these reforms may infer support for novice graduates, no explicit direction to address the needs of these potential employees post-skill acquisition is provided.

The spirit of the objective

The restricted nature of the objective itself can be questioned. The United Kingdom’s optimal skill set target for 2020 by the 2006 Leitch Review aimed to “maximise economic growth, productivity, and social justice” (Wang, 2012, p. 37). Noticeably, the Australian vision does not include social justice specifically.

The *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development 2012* is a preliminary statement that “[p]arties are committed to addressing the issue of social inclusion, including responding to Indigenous disadvantage” (p. 2) but the spirit of this commitment is muted in the objective and reform directions.

Reference to individuals’ experience of disadvantage is limited. Past comments on limitations of the Australian direction on education and training perceived “aspirations for a more humane and socially just society [to be] sidelined” (Crowther, 2004, p. 126). Billet (2010) expressed concern that students’ interests had been subsumed by the government focus on the interests of big business has not diminished in the intervening years, as noted by the positioning of business in this *Agreement* (p. 402).

Australia’s relatively poor record around employees’ achievement of what has been termed work-life balance has been noted (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012; Belchamber cited in Watson, 2011). Recognition of individual well-being in contexts where people engage in a number of jobs, care for children or other family members, carry out community responsibilities and undertake additional skilling, is absent.

Cost bearing

The Australian Government, through a Discussion Paper for the MCTEE Industry Forum (2011), has claimed that “the benefits of having a larger workforce far outweigh the costs of expansion of education and training” (p. 3). However, the attention to increasing skill targets as a policy direction without an increase in funding, with expectations that most learners will contribute through a user pays co-contribution brings into question the responsibility of public funds allocation.

Education and the market

The market is being called upon in different ways in this policy direction. On the one hand, the educational system is embedding market forces as ways of directing trends and priorities and, on the other, it is proposing support for enterprises to optimise productivity and innovation through maximising skills utilisation. Competition among training providers in order to increase training flexibility and responsiveness to industry needs (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 35) sits uncomfortably with an approach that is attempting to increase social inclusion and disadvantage.

The government acknowledges that skills gaps exist and has created the Specialist Occupations List (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 2) to highlight areas of shortage around which migration trends are meant to respond. Market forces alone, therefore, will not provide the skilled labour required by industry. Despite the rhetoric of creating an effective competitive training market in which students and employers are positioned as consumers, government directions concede that market forces alone do not ensure optimal productivity and skills utilisation.

Learning and employability

The government policy outlined above does not specifically address employability skills. It only makes oblique reference to them. Employability skills are included in the competencies comprising every qualification. These qualifications and competencies have been developed by Industry Skill Councils on behalf of the industry each represents and are presented in their Training Package. In its role as a government instrument, Skills Australia (2010, p. 40) conducted consultations with industry representatives in 2010 from which emerged a request for the government to attend to the “development of people’s core skills,

including critical thinking at higher levels throughout careers, to increase ongoing learning potential and individual adaptive capacity throughout working lives.”

The emphasis placed by business on the need for strengthening employability skills infers concerns around the existing qualifications with their embedded employability skills, their delivery and assessment by training providers and, possibly the adequacy of their existing employability skills. The policy reforms outlined above make only an oblique reference to employability skills.

Summary

- Lifelong learning is not specifically addressed in government policy.
- Problems with the provision of skills, and indeed the skills shortage, are blamed on previous supply-side funding arrangements which are now being oriented toward a more demand-side funding system.
- In order to achieve increased training targets, individuals are now expected to carry much more of the cost of their training.
- Government support for training is being provided to those who are unemployed to skill them to join the workforce.
- The underutilisation of skills in the workplace is being addressed through the support of enterprises to work with RTOs to identify workforce improvements.
- Foundation skills training is being funded for migrants, adults with low language, literacy and numeracy in the workplace as well as the unemployed.
- Greater support is being provided for apprentices in an effort to improve completion rates.
- Confidence in the VET sector providers is to be reinforced through greater competition between providers and public reporting of their training performance.
- Articulation pathways between the education sectors are being encouraged.
- A government emphasis on education for employment is being made at the expense of education for a just and humane society.
- There is an apparent conflict between the government policy of promoting the market forces of competition between providers to ensure effective training for employment and the policy of supporting enterprises towards workforce efficiencies and providing training in areas of skills shortage.

Section D

Learners' engagement in learning: motivations and barriers

Introduction

As has been the theme throughout this review, the literature in Australia on participation in education and training focuses on maintaining and developing each person's employability to ensure that workers are adaptable in the face of changing employment circumstances. Investigations indicate that each person can expect to have multiple careers during their lifetime so "adaptability in the face of change is crucial" (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 59). One of the policy debates surrounding lifelong learning in Australia is whose responsibility is it to ensure individuals' are employable throughout multiple careers? Is it the responsibility of the individual to maintain their motivation to learn or does government have a role to play in engendering motivation and supporting participation? The answers to this lie in views about the relationship between structures and individual agency, and whether individual motivation can be developed in isolation from the structures and cultures that support or constrain it. At present, the responsibility for maintaining motivation for lifelong learning is primarily seen as the individual's, with government policy and employer assistance making a contribution to this, particularly in programmes that may overcome lower levels of participation or when individuals face barriers preventing participation.

Australians appear to be responding to a number of motivational factors in the process of assuming responsibility for lifelong learning. The initial motivation is to gain employment. This is later followed by top-up skilling in order to maintain employment. The top-up skilling may take the form of required workplace training, to meet changed occupational or legislated requirements or to build confidence and capacity. The third motivation (Billett et al., 2012, p. 12) is to further enhance employability in order to gain promotion or assume a different job role.

Positive influences on learner motivation

Securing employment

The general assumption that motivates individuals to participate in education and training is that in undertaking training in order to obtain employment, a person avoids their own "high social and economic costs" of being on welfare (Bretherton, 2011, p. 4) and the accompanying stress of "labour market churning or a succession of casualised jobs" in order to find security in employment (Watson, 2011, p. 56). Gaining employment is seen to motivate training in industry technical skills and/or foundation skills. There is a presumption that gaining higher education levels will create greater likelihoods for skills to be matched to, and used within, a workplace. Drawing on Mavromaras, Watson confirmed that "employed people with higher education levels are less likely to be mismatched in their workplace" (Mavromaras et al., 2011, cited in Watson, 2011, p. 47).

Aligning with a human capital approach to training is the assumption that qualifications bring the greatest return by “investing earlier rather than later in life” (Karmel, 2011, p. 14). With this in mind, the motivation to undertake training early in life and as often as possible still acts as a strong motivator to maximise financial and personal returns. Added to this, says Karmel, is a traditional notion (without evidence to bear this out) that learning early in life is advisable because “the better educated you are, the easier it is to acquire more education” (Karmel, 2011, p. 14).

The narrative of neo-liberalism which underlies the Australian approach to lifelong learning, with its focus on employment, is that the more education a person undertakes, the greater their financial reward will be in the workplace. With this assumption to the fore, Table 17 outlines the post-graduation annual income received on full time employment, according to various graduate characteristics.

Table 17: Average Annual Income After Training for Graduates Employed Full Time by Personal Characteristics, 2011

Personal characteristic	Income AUD\$
Sex	
Male	56,600
Female	47,000
Age	
15 – 19 years	30,400
20 – 24 years	43,900
25 – 44 years	59,700
45 – 64 years	62,400
65 years and over	60,600
Location	
Major cities	52,800
Inner and outer regional	52,700
Remote and very remote	64,600
Indigenous status	
Indigenous	50,700
Not Indigenous	53,600
Disability status (including impairment or long-term condition)	
With a disability	49,600
Without a disability	53,700

Personal characteristic	Income AUD\$
Highest qualification	
Diploma or higher	64,100
Certificate III-IV	57,500
Year 12	45,400
Year 11 – Certificate I-II	44,700
Year 10 or below	46,100
Employment status before training	
Employed	55,200
Not employed	39,800
All	53,500

Source: Adapted from NCVET (2011) Australian vocational education and training statistics, p. 16.

Table 17 shows that the older a person, the higher their income is on graduation (except those over 65). This confirms that the skills acquired over the course of working life are valued by employers who pay higher wages for those with qualifications plus experience. These statistics support lifelong learning as financially beneficial to individuals and thus act as a motivational factor. The exception is for those over 65. The literature makes no comment to explain this. Location appears to be significant with “Remote and very remote” graduates having higher earnings. This could reflect the high wages paid to entice urban and regional graduates to move to remote areas, especially by the mining industry. The literature does not indicate whether these high wages induce people who already live remote areas to undertake further training.

It is noteworthy that those people who had been previously employed ‘before training’ have a higher income as graduates than those who are novice workers. This is supportive of the concept of lifelong learning bringing financial benefits when accompanied with experience. However, it must be recalled that Parts A and B identified that this does not apply universally across the population. This is already evident in the table above, with differences in graduate income among people of different gender, indigeneity and ability. We know from the Parts above that non-Australian born job seekers fare worse in their skill utilisation than Australian counterparts and this varies across skill levels. Further, there is evidence to suggest that graduate starting salaries, between 2002 and 2010, differed by field of study and that there was a long-term decline in graduate starting salaries (Ryan, 2002, cited in Watson, 2011, p. 12).

There is a general indication from Table 17 that the higher the qualification in the “highest qualification” grouping, the higher the post-graduation income, but this is not entirely so. Those with “Year 10 or below” actually earn more than those with “Year 11/Certificate III” and “Year 12”. Aware of this information and the motivation of increasing income, a person with a Year 10 would be unlikely to undertake further training unless it were at Certificate III level or higher. However, the relationship between qualifications and wages may not be as direct as this interpretation infers. Many Certificate I and II qualifications “are quite workplace specific, and are undertaken by workers who are already in their jobs (such as occupational health and safety training or being instructed in particular methods of work)” (Watson, 2011, p. 18). Often, these qualifications do not augment earnings and allow workers, often women in low paid jobs, to maintain employment (Pocock, 2009).

Maintaining employment

Another motivation for participation in lifelong learning for Australians relates to maintaining a job (Karmel, 2012, p. 22) rather than to seek new roles. This is especially true for people up-skilling in the areas of occupational health and safety or technology as already noted (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009; Billett et al., 2012). There is encouragement from government for on-the-job upgrading but no policy or other forms of support for it.

As industries change in response to the economic environment, the skills of their workforces need to change too. The skills people have when they are recruited may become inadequate in the changing work environment. “Many individuals with relatively high qualifications, even professionals, need to develop or build on their literacy, numeracy and employability skills. What they need to learn will depend on the evolving nature of their jobs” (Karmel, cited in Townsend and Waterhouse, 2008, p. i).

Employees undertaking learning in the workplace are building on existing occupational knowledge, they have a mature capacity for self-directed learning and can integrate their learning from various sources. In fact “there is often a strong imperative for these individuals to exercise interest, discretion and personal agency in the conduct of their learning” (Billett et al., 2012, p. 13).

Changing job role

Motivation to undertake learning may also result from a change in occupation by choice as directed by an individual’s interests and aspirations with a view to promotion (Billett et al., 2012). Alternatively, it may be caused by retrenchment or dismissal. Whether the change is voluntary or not:

[this] kind of change requires their engagement in continuing education and training to enable employability in new occupations and may include individuals having to learn a new occupation or significantly extending the knowledge base of their existing occupation (Billett et al., 2012, p. 12)

Employer provision or supported training

Employers, especially in large enterprises, provide formal and non formal training for targeted employees. This is usually for full time and on-going employees (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 60; Sheldon and Thornthwaite, 2005, p. 405) rather than part-time or casual employees. Those who receive this training generally appreciate their employers’ investment in their skills, so while the goal of the training is to increase productivity for the enterprise, it has the added benefit of improved employee well-being and commitment to their work (Skills Australia, 2012).

Learning at work may be a valuable experience for those who have had negative experiences at school and who consequently may lack motivation for learning. The workplace provides a different learning environment “the liberation provided by entry into the world of work may be just the catalyst that many learners need in order to bloom. In such circumstances the ‘development’ provided in and by the workplace becomes crucial” (Townsend and Waterhouse, 2008, p. 33). The same authors found that many employers had recruited staff knowing they had lacked some skills. But because employees showed a “... a clear passion for the work he/she had chosen, a positive attitude and a demonstrable work ethic” (p. 19), employers provided workplace training to address the skill deficits. This is particularly the case for workers who need to consolidate their language, literacy and numeracy skills which are integrated as foundational skills during formal workplace training.

Government policy and learner motivation

McKenzie (2001, p. 376) acknowledges that government has responsibility for developing macro-economic and structural policies to ensure the demand for labour and to facilitate structural adjustment on the one side but on the other, to also place “greater emphasis on learning opportunities throughout the life span ... to ensure that productivity and growth rates are sustained”. The role of government in supporting learner motivation is characterised as a contribution which is often more fulsome in programmes that align closely with the employment (for example, with labour market assistance programmes) and in subsidising training expenses to greater or lesser amounts in programmes that are deemed to directly or indirectly employment related (Bretherton, 2011).

On the whole, this support rests on the assumption that many people are motivated to undertake lifelong learning activities for personal growth. According to Skills Australia (2009), research shows that people want to:

function more confidently in life as the result of such training, including the ability to participate in formal and informal discussions, to make telephone enquiries and to listen to the views of others. The most powerful increase in social capital was found to be improvements in people’s ability to engage and interact with social networks, with 32 per cent of all participants citing an improvement, and importantly, 51 per cent of Indigenous participants identifying an improvement (pp. 37-38).

Barriers affecting learner motivation

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported in 2009 that “there were 11.6 million persons aged 15-64 years who did not want to participate in formal learning and 12.3 million who did not want to participate in non-formal learning in the 12 months prior to the survey” (ABS, 2009, p. 6). These numbers of people represent approximately half of the population who had no intention of undertaking formal and non-formal learning that year. These statistics represent a challenge to lifelong learning in Australia. The reasons behind the reluctance in undertaking learning may be due to many factors.

The first relates related to peoples’ lack of belief in the notion that investment in lifelong learning will bear results which make the costs worthwhile (McKenzie, 2001). Data canvassed in Parts A to C bear this view out within specific industries, for particular qualifications and among particular groups. Karmel (2012) advises against making assumptions that all learning yields financial benefits. He has found that “when training increases the time and money demands on workers but without generating genuine new skills or better prospects, it can make things worse for low-paid workers by falsely raising expectations” (p. 22). Such realities affect motivation.

Second, while employer funded support for learning acted as a motivator as outlined above, it is mostly employees with the highest level qualifications who are most likely to receive employer supplied training (Sheldon and Thornthwaite, 2005, p. 405). Consequently employees who are part-time or casual have less access to workplace training (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 60) confront barriers to learning in the form of lack of employer-funded training with a consequent need to fund their own learning outside of work hours.

The responsibility for lifelong learning then lies with these individuals, with part-time participation the likely attendance mode. This is confirmed in the report of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008) into adult learning which identifies that “almost three quarters (74 per cent) of the one million adults who were studying for a non-school qualification in 2005 were doing so part-time.” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008, p. 7).

Third, people’s readiness via skills training to engage with the labour market varies in response to local labour market conditions. Bretherton (2011) has observed that local factors are important – “[r]egions which have historically held a high proportion of ... (traditional capital goods industries such as coal, steel, shipbuilding) are limited in their ability to expand to new forms of economic activity” (p. 16). Where there are minimal employment opportunities, the motivation to undertake new learning is constrained.

Finally, motivation to learn is reduced where local employers discriminate in their recruitment on the grounds of “racism, ageism, sexism and cultural discrimination” (Bretherton, 2011, p. 15). Discrimination in employment on these grounds is unlawful in Australia but, nevertheless, covertly exists. The fear of employment discrimination diminishes motivation to learn.

Gender and barriers to learning

In their survey of education and training experience, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009) found that that more females (18 per cent) than males (12 per cent) reported that they would have liked to have participated in more non-formal learning in the 12 months prior to the survey but had not. Females were most likely to report personal or family reasons (25 per cent) or a lack of time (25 per cent) as their main barrier to participating in more non-formal learning than any other reason. Males were most likely to report work-related reasons (29 per cent) or a lack of time (28 per cent) as their main barriers.

These gendered patterns affecting motivation to learn while out of the workforce was confirmed by the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (2012) which found that:

Men’s and women’s participation are differently affected by the presence of children in the family. The tendency appears to be for men, rather than women, to claim unemployment benefits if both are unemployed. Policy development for women with children experiencing unemployment should...ensure that women have equal access to labour-market programs with men (p. 79).

The same government agency (2012) found that after prolonged periods away from the workforce, “women may also lose confidence in their ability to perform job roles, especially where specialist knowledge is concerned” (p. 80). The report infers that it is women who take time away from the workforce for the care of family members and who may later benefit from up-skilling or re-skilling to return to the workforce. The report did not make a comment about men’s levels of confidence after long absences from the workforce.

Individual and socio-economic factors influencing motivation

Reviews of the literature on educational disadvantage are often linked to the multi-dimensional elements of disadvantage and barriers to participation. The research highlights a number of barriers preventing meaningful engagement in training and the labour market, including:

- poor physical health, mental health and well-being;
- unstable housing and accommodation;
- insufficient finances and self-sufficiency;
- low self-esteem and self-confidence;
- history of trauma and disrupted personal circumstances;
- low levels/limited formal education;
- limited employment-related skills and work experience;
- poor language, literacy and numeracy skills;
- limited access to information and networks;
- limited access to culturally-safe and appropriate training programmes;
- limited life skills, social engagement and community connections;
- limited access to transport, infrastructure, childcare and learning support;
- few/no family members/parents with tertiary level qualifications and/or attachment to long-term employment; and
- negative perceptions of, attitudes towards, structured education and training.

Sources: Bowman, 2011; NVEAC, 2011.

These types of barriers can be categorised into four groups: personal, financial, educational and employment – some of which relate to individual barriers and others to structural barriers. Structural barriers are systemic features of an education system over which individuals have little or no control. The existence of structural barriers means that the system is failing to meet or adapt to the diversity of all the potential learner population. Individual barriers, such as mental illness or low literacy skills and low self-confidence can affect personal capacity to enter an education and training system.

Importantly, each individual learner may be facing several of these barriers at any given point in time. Those learners who are commonly underrepresented in education and training are also less likely to self-refer to services, self-identify for administrative purposes or readily seek to engage in learning programmes or courses (Brackertz, 2007). There are a number of groups who in general are underrepresented in VET and/or experience relatively poor outcomes:

- a. Indigenous Australians;
- b. People with a disability;
- c. People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, new arrivals, refugees, asylum seekers and emerging communities;
- d. People from low socio-economic status backgrounds;
- e. Young people in out-of-home care;
- f. Early school leavers;
- g. People at-risk of, or currently experiencing, homelessness;
- h. People from rural, regional or remote locations or communities;
- i. People experiencing physical and mental health issues;
- j. Women facing barriers to participation in VET and the labour force;
- k. Older job seekers/workers facing barriers to participation in VET and the labour force; and
- l. Prisoners and offenders.

Sources: Bowman 2011; NVEAC 2011.

There are a number of social, cultural, financial, physical, health, gender and language differences that individually and collectively distinguish different groups of people (NVEAC, 2011). Much of the literature cautions against viewing disadvantage in terms of abstract client groups because this fails to recognise diversity within groups (North, Ferrier and Long, 2010).

A focus on motivations for lifelong learning has to acknowledge the ways in which social factors shape that motivation. These impact on the type of learning undertaken (or not) and the mode of learning selected by learners. As Crowther (2004) identifies, the technical mastery of learning skills is not neutral. It involves interactions and understandings between people and their relations with the world. In Australia, participation in lifelong learning is strongly connected to socio-economic status.

In Table 18 (based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics information, 2009) the total population has been divided into five quintiles according to socio economic disadvantage and aligned the percentage of students attending VET and higher education accordingly. Quintiles are “groupings that result from ranking all households or persons in the population in ascending order according to some characteristic such as their household income and then dividing the population into five equal groupings, each comprising 20 per cent of the estimated population” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009).

Table 18: Students by Sector of Education and Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage, 2010

Full time and part-time students	VET students per cent	Higher education students per cent
Domestic students only		
Quintile 1 (most disadvantaged)	15.2	9.8
Quintile 2	24.3	12.9
Quintile 3	21.2	17.4
Quintile 4	21.1	22.6
Quintile 5 (least disadvantage)	15.2	36.7
Not known	3.2	0.6
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Adapted from Table 13 NCVER, Tertiary Education and Training Australia, p. 20.

It is noticeable that the most disadvantaged quintile has the least percentage of students undertaking higher education while the most advantaged have the highest percentage. The VET sector is accessed much more equitably across the socio-economic spectrum than the higher education sector. Overall, as indicated in a study undertaken in early 2000, “the desire to undertake further studies [is] inversely related to the neighbourhood unemployment rate” (Jensen and Seltzer, cited in Shah et al., 2012, p. 24). In areas of social disadvantage there are lower levels of participation in adult education (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 78) and higher rates of unemployment (Andrews, cited in Shah et al., 2012, p. 24). In disadvantaged areas, there are poorer informal networks to support job seekers because local employment possibilities are limited and traditional pathways into jobs, through personal contacts, no longer exist (Watson, 2011).

Summary

This section has presented data to explain the motivations of Australians to engage in learning. The following aspects are highlighted:

- Reviews on learner motivation to participate in learning adopt either an individualist perspective, in which motivation is constructed as a choice of individuals, or adopt a socio-cultural orientation which sees motivations as shaped by wider social relations.
- Positive influences on motivation relate to acquiring, maintaining or shifting employment.
- Traditional assumptions around motivation, which align with a human capital approach to training, suggest that learning earlier in life reaps financial and personal returns.
- Learner motivation to participate in and complete a qualification in education and training, coupled with experience prior to graduation, are attractive to employers.
- Employer support for learning can only be a motivator to those who are eligible to receive it. This favours full time and permanent employees above others.
- Gender emerges as a significant factor shaping motivation, with more women reporting lack of time as a factor constraining their participation in lifelong learning.
- A greater number of people participating in VET experience greater social disadvantage than those undertaking higher education within the university sector.
- There are a number of individual and structural barriers that prevent people from participating in education and training. Frequently, people experience multiple elements at once. These affect levels of representation in VET and negatively influence outcomes.

Appendix

Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)

Summary of qualifications

AQF level	Title of the qualification
	Senior Secondary Certificate of Education This qualification is primarily undertaken by Year 12 learners within the school system. It has no assigned AQF level.
1	Certificate I
2	Certificate II
3	Certificate III
4	Certificate IV
5	Diploma
6	Advanced Diploma Associate Degree
7	Bachelor Degree
8	Bachelor Honours Degree Graduate Certificate Vocational Graduate Certificate Graduate Diploma Vocational Graduate Diploma
9	Masters Degree
10	Doctoral Degree

Source: Adapted from the Australian Qualifications Framework, Council Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (2011).

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