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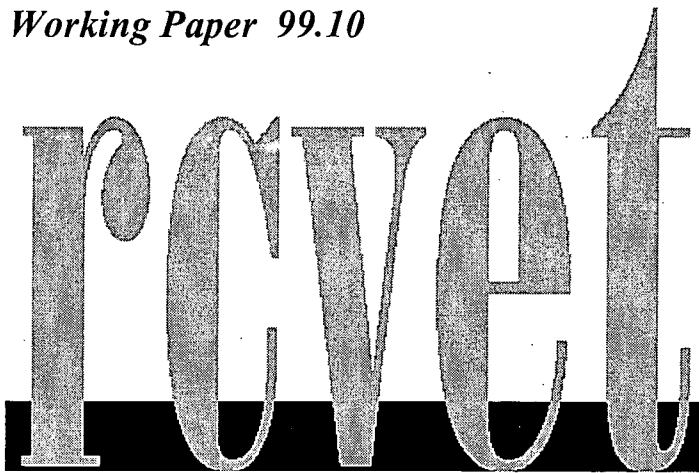
ABSTRACT

This publication is comprised of 12 position papers from the National Equity Workshop held at the University of Technology Sydney (Australia) at which participants summarized their positions on the way equity should be understood, their views on the strengths and weaknesses of current vocational education and training (VET) policy, and what they saw as the priorities for future research. The papers are prefaced with a summary of the conclusions of the workshop--strengths of current research, weaknesses, and new directions--and participant biographies. The papers are: "Using Statistical Methodologies to Interrogate Large Data-Bases" (Katrina Ball); "Managing Diversity" (Kate Barnett); "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategic Policy and Research Priorities for VET, 1999" (Tony Dreise); "Equity Outcomes" (Tom Dumbrell); "Equity and VET: An Antilogous Project? A Personal Story of Equity Work in VET" (Elaine Butler); "Regrouping Equity" (Barry Golding, Veronica Volkoff); "Equity: VET for the Good of the Nation" (Ian Falk); "An Overview of Current Equity Research in the National Program" (Jennifer Gibb); "Locality and Community Agency in VET Research" (John McIntyre); "Equity for Training and Employment: Research Questions from a Policy Perspective" (Marion Norton); "Position Paper" (Rachel Robertson); and "Some Observations on Equity in VET" (Kaye Schofield). (YLB)

National workshop on equity research

*Report and papers from a national workshop
convened by the
UTS Research Centre for Vocational Education and Training
at the University of Technology Sydney
May 21-22 1999*

Working Paper 99.10



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National workshop on equity research

INTRODUCTION

Research on equity issues in vocational education and training has a long history that in recent times can be traced to the impact of the Kangan Report TAFE In Australia (1974) and its concepts of access and disadvantage. Since then, equity policy has seen many mutations and transformations particular through the period of training reform and the emergence of national frameworks for VET.

In recent years, the Australian National Training Authority through its research advisory committee has stimulated a good deal of research attention to equity issues, with the result that there is not only an increasing body of work on strategies to increase participation and ensure equitable outcomes (ANTA 1999) but a leavening of critical interest in equity policy. Research has helped to highlight some of the limitations, as well as the strengths, of policy.

Against the background of a stocktake of equity research taking place in 1999, and the awareness by researchers of their potential contribution to developments to the policy area, the Research Centre for Vocational Education and Training at UTS convened a national invitational workshop to consider the state of research and its policy implications. This workshop formed part of the 1999 workplan of the RCVET as a national key centre of the Australian National Training Authority.

The National Equity Workshop was held at UTS on Thursday 20th and Friday 21st of May 1999. The first day was taken up with a review of equity research based on short papers prepared by participants and distributed a week before the event. The participants were asked to summarise their position on the way equity should be understood, their views on the strengths and weaknesses of current VET policy, and what they saw as the priorities for future research.

Those papers in their unedited form are drawn together here, prefaced with a summary of the conclusions of the workshop. It is hoped that the working papers will be a useful resource for both researchers and policymakers in Australian vocational education and training, and strengthen the impact of research on current state and national thinking around equity policy.

John McIntyre
Convenor

SUMMARY REPORT

Following the first day reviewing the position papers of participants, the second day discussed and summarised the strengths, weaknesses and future directions of for Australian VET equity research.

Strengths of current research

- There is a large body of knowledge, a database that could be more fully exploited. There is an established body of researchers and policy thinkers, good networks. Researchers tend to have a shared understanding, passion and commitment.
- Research keeps equity on the agenda, 'socialises' the economic questions. It doesn't avoid the hard questions and challenges the orthodox. It has moved beyond romanticism, recognises complexity. It is an area with a good deal of creative thinking 'outside the square' of VET policy.
- There is a good focus on defining strategies for particular groups. It acknowledges that learners are situated in-group or community. Research refers to multiple contexts, such as small business and indigenous communities. It has the potential to bridge 'industry' and community (but often doesn't).
- Research is well-disseminated, has a practice orientation, and has credibility with the stakeholders (publications used by constituents) eg in the regions. It often draws out practice wisdom, and has led to better outcomes, eg. via work on VET key performance indicators.
- There is a balance and diversity of approaches, qualitative and quantitative. It is cross-disciplinary and draws on different perspectives. It has a commitment to include the voices of constituents (especially through qualitative research)

Weaknesses

- Though there are national funds available, the success rate of around 10% is less than ARC and other competitive grant schemes. Funding is, again by comparison with university ARC funding small in scale so that the researcher carries some costs.
- Research is usually tied to political agendas eg economic liberalism - yet doesn't do economic analyses of equity eg. costs and resourcing. There is not much scope for researcher-determined equity research.
- The research is not exploiting international policy frames or literature eg. the well-developed methodologies in public health or transport. Does Australian research have international currency?
- Research is often small-scale and individual, not major or large in scope, perhaps due to funding structures and the ways of commissioning of research, or framing briefs. Research tends to be narrow and restrictive in conception.
- There has been a failure to take up recommendations, leading to needless duplication of research effort, for example in the areas of more inclusive competency-based training or rural or remote issues. It has been easily discounted where it has been tied too closely to strategies that were later abandoned or discredited. There are examples of the suppression or censorship of unpublished reports, and quality assurance issues.

- There are major limitations of the 'target group representation' framework in current policy. There is an avoidance of poverty, unemployment, incarceration, illiteracy, and non-participants. An exclusive focus on the learner has led to a neglect of systemic analysis, including cost benefit analysis. Research has not engaged with labour market issues.
- Equity perspectives are not taken in other VET research, equity research tends to be marginal. It has not developed major (theoretical) perspectives that would give it more leverage on policy. There are limited concepts of equity often based on false and outdated notions of the vocational. There is not much on cross-sectoral issues - on generic vocational education
- The relationship with policy is problematic, in the way that research is positioned in regard to decision-making, in the way that 'problems' are perceived and defined. If research is also too driven by policy, VET policy is also under-theorised.
- Issues surrounding state and regional territory differences in national research, difficulties of comparisons and parochialism in research and policy.

New directions

- There is a need for explicit and coherent theory-building and better frameworks, in terms of the weaknesses identified above (eg 3, 6 & 7). This could include economic perspectives on output models of funding, how to handle diverse student needs eg. apprenticeship and the real costs of training.
- Research needs to focus on system issues, for example, examine the capacity of the system to respond, customise for diverse client needs, to identify resourcing arrangements that support equity outcomes (WA). However, there is a need to be aware of the politics of VET resourcing, the move to shift costs to the client/individual eg through shifting to a HECS model for TAFE.
- A focus on outcomes, not only the key performance indicators but also wider range of outcomes. A broader palette of outcomes will address narrow vocationalism. How can personal, social, community, employment outcomes be measured? There are also the community building outcomes of VET, eg the OECD social well being indicators, and the ACE key performance indicators (Schofield). VET and the labour market outcomes is a neglected aspect of equity research.
- There needs to be more of a regional focus for planning VET, mapping VET locally and regionally. How can regional level analysis be integrated into VET planning?
- What are the equity dimensions of on-line learning? There is a need to go beyond panacea to researching how groups might take up on-line learning and know what learning they do, with what outcomes.
- There are equity issues resulting from the reshaping or rethinking of institutions and models for VET eg the equity effects and alternatives to work-based pathways. With VET in schools is an unexplored area, with a range of issues - output measures, career pathways, effects on equity (who participates) and coordination.

POSITION PAPERS

Katrina Ball

Quantitative research using large national data-bases

Kate Barnett

Managing diversity

Elaine Butler

Equity and VET: an antilogous project? A personal story of equity work in VET

Tony Dreise

The work of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Training Advisory Council

Tom Dumbrell

Recent work on equity

Ian Falk

Equity: VET for the good of the nation

Jennifer Gibb

An overview of current equity research in the national program

Barry Golding & Veronica Volkoff

Regrouping equity

John McIntyre

Locality and community agency in VET research

Marion Norton

Equity for training and employment: Research questions from a policy perspective

Rachel Robertson

Rethinking equity research

Kaye Schofield

Some observations on equity in VET

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

KATRINA BALL manages the in-house research program at NCVER and is an economist and statistician. Over the last twenty years she has undertaken quantitative economic and statistical research in a number of areas including labour markets, industry development and vocational education and training. Her research interests that relate to equity in are concerned with analysing student outcomes including the factors that influence satisfactory course completion and employment outcomes for different groups of Australians.

KATE BARNETT is the Director of Kate Barnett and Associates, a consultancy firm that specialises in addressing access and equity and in developing strategies for the management of diversity, in particular, cultural diversity. Her equity-focused work occurs within two sectors – the VET sector and the human services sector, and has a specific focus on people from diverse cultural backgrounds, people living in rural and remote areas, women and to a lesser extent, people with a disability. Some of her work in the vocational sector was undertaken for the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) when I was Senior Research Fellow, specialising in Access and Equity issues. The remainder has been undertaken on a consultancy basis as Kate Barnett and Associates.

ELAINE BUTLER is a senior lecturer in education at the University of South Australia. Equity and social justice have always occupied a central role in her personal, political and academic lives, with Elaine actively seeking to maintain a synergy between them, optimism, humour and her sense of self.

TONY DREISE was at the time of the workshop, National Executive Officer The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Training Advisory Council. ATSIPTAC is the national advisory body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' vocational education and training (VET), responsible for setting strategic policy advice for and on behalf of Indigenous Australians. He is currently with the Aboriginal programs, NSW Department of Education & Training, based at Sydney Institute of Technology.

TOM DUMBRELL has been working as a private consultant in VET and labour market research for the last 15 months. Tom is a research associate of the UTS RCVET and a member of the advisory committee to the Group on Research in Employment and Training at Charles Sturt University. One of his major studies during the last year has been the analysis of differences in earnings of full time employed male and female TAFE graduates. Prior to becoming a private consultant Tom was, for nearly eight years, a senior executive in the NSW government, working in VET and employment related policy development, research, performance review and evaluation. He was a member of the National Advisory Committee on VET Statistics. Tom's earlier experience was in DEET and its predecessors where inter alia he worked as a labour market analyst, developer of vocational guidance material and in performance evaluation.

IAN FALK is Director of the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia (CRLRA) at the University of Tasmania, Launceston. He has worked in adult and vocational education for some twenty years and researched a range of aspects of equity in VET. His main interests are in the ways social capital can be used to evaluate the inclusiveness and effectiveness of equity and access measures. Other specialist fields of expertise and interest include adult literacy and numeracy, rural disadvantage and the ways that some adult teaching practices can be counterproductive by reproducing 'disability' and 'remedial' behaviour.

FRAN FERRIER is a Research Fellow in the Monash University-ACER Centre for the Economics of Education and Training, where she has worked since 1993. Prior to this she was in the Higher Education Advisory Research Unit at Monash and for eight years was the Researcher for the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations. Working for a national student organisation provided Fran with a unique perspective on equity, particularly in the context of higher education. At CEET this has been extended to include adult and vocational education and has been challenged by the framework of the economics of education. Currently Fran is reviewing equity target groups at Monash University, is writing on the mainstreaming of equity in VET and is researching human resource reporting and its impact in enterprises.

JENNIFER GIBB is manager of the National VET Research and Evaluation Branch, NCVER. The National VET Research and Evaluation Branch has funded a number of projects related to equity groups in VET. Jennifer has been a VET researcher since 1989 both as an employee of NCVER and as a private consultant. Her contribution to the equity area has been to prepare a series of overview publication which present data drawn from the National VET statistics collection and commentary on participation and outcomes of 3

groups of VET clients: indigenous students, students with a disability and students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Jennifer has also written a literature review for a project that seeks to identify good practice in providing education and training to indigenous people.

BARRY GOLDING has 20 years experience in a range of education sectors as a teacher and researcher. He is currently a full time researcher for Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, but also seconded to the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia and the secretariat of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Training Advisory Council. Barry's research includes inter-sectoral movement and equity in VET in all its forms.

JOHN McINTYRE is Director of the Research Centre for Vocational Education and Training at the University of Technology Sydney, and a member of the Adult and Vocational Learning group that UTS has designated as one of its key research strengths. John has been researcher for national and state governments on a range of research work in vocational education and training, including several studies of adult community education in Australia, examining the vocational outcomes of ACE (cited by the recent second Senate Inquiry into ACE). His interests in equity research have centred on questions of participation and learner pathways from informal to formal courses. His most recent research (funded by NREC) is Early School Leavers At Risk been published by NCVER.

MARION NORTON at the time of the workshop was acting Manager, Access & Equity, Division of Training, Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, Queensland where she has been active in managing research to increase the participation and outcomes for under-represented groups in vocational education, training and employment. The research has moved increasingly towards a community development approach, providing small communities with funds and support to enable them to identify their own needs and to propose their own solutions. Marion has a background in adult literacy and holds a PhD in education.

RACHEL ROBERTSON is an independent consultant based in WA specialising in the equity and vocational education and training areas. Her work has included projects on women, on small business, the adult community education sector and recognition of prior learning. Her most recent major projects have been developing 'workable solutions' for women, migrants, Indigenous peoples and people with a disability for ANTA, and developing a new skills recognition framework for the WA VET system. She has been co-convenor of the Network of Women in Further Education Inc and has strong ties to the community sector in WA.

KAYE SCHOFIELD has for the last five years worked as a consultant/researcher primarily in the VET sector. She is Chair of the NSW Adult & Community Education Board and was formerly Chair of the Advisory Committee of the Research Centre for Vocational Education and Training (RCVET) at UTS. In recent years her diverse and long-standing interest in equity has moved towards the development and use of equity performance indicators at national, state and provider level. In 1997 she produced (with Robyn Dryen) a report for NCVER on "Equity measures for Women" and she has recently worked with Robyn Dryen to develop a suite of performance indicators for adult & community education at the national level. Her most recent work has been to review traineeships and apprenticeship provision for a number of state governments.

VERONICA VOLKOFF has during the last five years conducted research closely linked with her co-ordination of a post-graduate diploma course for VET practitioners at RMIT University, international consultancy for AusAID related to the reform of VET and her involvement in the Adult Community Education sector in Victoria, as Regional Council Chair and Adult Community and Further Education Board member. Her research work has included a longitudinal study carried out in collaboration with Barry Golding and projects focussing on non-English speaking background people and the role of the ACE sector in delivery of VET. She is particularly interested in intra-group and inter-group diversity in VET and how such diversity can be addressed by equity policy. She is currently involved in a project providing professional development and advice to policy makers and managers planning reform of the Chinese VET system and their programs.

Using statistical methodologies to interrogate large data-bases

Katrina Ball

NATURE OF EQUITY RESEARCH

My research into areas of equity and VET has been nationally focussed and is quantitative in nature utilising statistical methodologies to interrogate the unit record level data of large data-bases. The studies have been concerned with the mechanisms that exacerbate and entrench inequality, and thereby act to limit access to VET for disadvantaged groups, and the outcomes from VET for particular groups of Australians. The studies have used survey data from the TAFE Graduate Destination Surveys and the Australian Youth Survey, and census data from the national collection of VET providers.

The focus of the studies has been on groups rather than individuals. The studies have been concerned with identifying if differences or inequities exist and do not seek to address or identify the specific problems or issues faced by individuals that can be probed through qualitative research methodologies.

Equity and Access to vocational education and training

The research I have undertaken in the topic area of equity and access to VET has been concerned with identifying mechanisms that transmit inequality. I recently completed a project with Stephen Lamb from the Australian Council of Educational Research that found that the senior secondary school curriculum acts as a mechanism to transmit inequality. The study analysed the education outcomes of students surveyed in the Australian Youth Survey who undertook year 12 between 1990 and 1994. The results of the study provide information on the important role played by curriculum choice in senior secondary school for entry to a vocational education and training pathway. The following is a summary of the findings of this study.

Students currently undertaking vocational education courses have completed more years of schooling than was the case at the start of the decade. This change reflects the increase in apparent school retention rates since the early 1980s — two-thirds of VET students aged 20-24 years in 1997 had completed year 12.

Commensurate with the increase in school retention rates to year 12 has been an expansion in the subject choices available and the curriculum offered in senior secondary school. There has been some debate over whether curricular reform over the last decade, including the expansion in course offerings in schools, has improved outcomes for young people or whether it will lead to unequal education and labour market opportunities in later life. There is also concern about whether the senior school curriculum works to perpetuate or to alleviate differences associated with socioeconomic background, gender and region.

The study analysed national subject enrolment patterns in year 12 among senior secondary school students giving particular attention to relationships with gender, socioeconomic

status, ethnicity, rural or urban place of residence, school type, and early school achievement.

The curriculum was mapped nationally to 20 mutually-exclusive subject groupings. The subject groupings are presented under the broad curriculum groups of 'arts and humanities', 'business studies', 'business studies and humanities', 'business studies and sciences', 'sciences and maths' and 'sciences and humanities'.

The year 12 certificate, in conjunction with tertiary entry scores influences participation in different types of post-school education and training as well as employment. The study found that the curriculum plays a decisive role in shaping outcomes and operates to translate differences that affect post-school educational and occupational opportunities. The curriculum acts as a relay mechanism to formalise differences in further education and labour market destinations related to social background, type of school attended and early school achievement. Cultural and social differences emerge as students progress through school and these result in differences in senior school course enrolments. The senior school course enrolments in turn lead to differences in access to higher education, vocational education and training, and to labour market outcomes.

The senior school curriculum also makes an important independent contribution. Students from the same social background, of the same sex, attending the same type of school, and with the same levels of achievement at age 14 have different post-school education and training experiences depending on the subjects they take in senior school. After controlling for background, achievement and school differences, there remain large variations in the chances of entering higher education and the likelihood of participating in vocational education and training depending on the senior school programs undertaken. Therefore, school curriculum and student course-taking are powerful predictors of post-school outcomes.

OUTCOMES ORIENTED RESEARCH

There have been a number of studies and reports in recent years concerned with access to vocational education and training and the under-representation of particular groups in further education. Strategies are set out in ANTA's 1996 report *Equity 2001* to improve access and equity in vocational education and training. In this report ANTA stressed that access and equity are more than providing 'equal access' to vocational education and training¹. Rather, strategies need to be able to deliver training and employment outcomes at least on a par with the community average for members of the identified disadvantaged groups.

In contrast to the number of studies that have provided information about the participation of individual client groups in vocational education and training there has been a dearth of quantitative evidence about the outcomes of these groups once they have accessed further education.

The 'outcomes' studies I have undertaken have been impact studies with the aim of providing base-line data to monitor the effects of policy decisions on access and equity and outcomes from VET. Base-line data is important as a means to measure progress. On-

¹ Equity 2001, pg 3

going monitoring is important to ascertain what works and in what areas inequity continues. Regular analyses are important to measure and evaluate any changes to access and equity and VET outcomes.

What outcomes should be measured?

There are a number of outcomes that should be measured. One outcome is the satisfactory completion of a qualification. However, as about 30 per cent of all enrolments in the vocational sector (26 per cent of male enrolments and 29 per cent of female enrolments in 1997) are in courses that do not lead to an AQF or RATES qualification it is important to also measure satisfactory completion of modules. Other outcomes relate to satisfactory employment outcomes or the enrolment in a higher level qualification. These can be measured through a range of indicators including:

- Length of time taken to find a job;
- Type of employment (occupation);
- Full-time/part-time employment;
- Income obtained from employment;
- Number and length of periods of unemployment.
- Enrolment in a higher level qualification.

Demographic factors influencing success in VET modules

The study reports the results of an empirical analysis using the unit record level data from the national VET provider data collection to model the dominant demographic influences affecting the probability of module success and module completion in 1996. Results are reported on a field-of-study basis and the success of apprentices is compared with non-apprentices.

The objective of the study was to provide quantitative evidence on the outcomes of disadvantaged groups whose members have obtained access to the VET system. In addition, the study provided a baseline against which future changes to the VET training system can be measured and evaluated. Having a base-line will allow an assessment to be made in the future about the impact of the changes to VET delivery on the outcomes of individual client groups that have accessed vocational education and training. The disadvantaged groups that are identified in the analysis are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- people with a disability;
- people from a non-English speaking background;
- people living in rural and remote areas;
- the unemployed;
- early school leavers;
- youth; and
- women.

The results of this study suggest that the outcomes from vocational education and training in 1996 were influenced significantly by demographic factors and that some individual client groups who have accessed vocational education and training did not achieve the same outcomes from their studies as other Australians. In particular in 1996, the probability of success or completion of vocational education and training modules was significantly reduced for people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, people with disabilities, youth, people from a non English speaking background and the unemployed.

Employment outcomes after VET

An area of current research I am undertaking in the topic of equity and VET is to analyse the employment outcomes of diverse groups of Australians after the completion of a VET course. The aim is to determine if the attainment of a VET qualification makes a significant difference to addressing inequality in employment opportunities after allowing for differences in the qualification attained and field of study. The range of employment outcome measures described above will be analysed. The study also considers enrolment in a higher level qualification as a positive outcome from a VET course.

The analysis is using unit level record data from the 1997 and 1998 TAFE Graduate Destination Surveys. Statistical tests are being undertaken to assess if there are any significant differences in the outcomes achieved by identified disadvantaged groups in 1997 and 1998.

The disadvantaged groups that have been identified include

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- people with a disability;
- people from a non-English speaking background;
- people living in low socio-economic regions (regions with high unemployment and low incomes);
- people living in rural and remote areas;
- people who were unemployed prior to commencing a TAFE course;
- early school leavers;
- people aged over 45;
- youth; and
- women.

The study is focussing employment outcomes for qualifications that have been gained in subject areas including:

- accounting
- electrical/electronics
- civil engineering
- automotive

- carpentry
- information technology
- hospitality.

Differences in employment outcomes according to the level of qualification attained are being reported.

Apart from providing information about the employment outcomes for a diverse range of Australians the study is providing base-line data against which changes in the employment and education outcomes of the different groups can be monitored in the future.

UNDERSTANDING OF THE TERM 'EQUITY' AND CURRENT VET POLICY

In my research I take an eclectic approach to the use of the term equity and use the term broadly to encompass a range of disadvantage in addition to the usual target groups. The main focus of VET research into equity issues has primarily been concerned with access issues for target groups – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, women, people from a non-English speaking background, people with a disability, people from rural and remote localities. Notwithstanding the level of disadvantage faced by people in these target groups and the importance of improving their vocational education opportunities there are other groups in the Australian community who are also disadvantaged in terms of access to employment and vocational education whose needs are not being addressed by this approach. Such groups include: people from low socio-economic backgrounds, the unemployed, people living in areas of high unemployment, people working part-time, early school leavers.

By dealing with equity in an eclectic, broad manner it is possible to isolate the mechanisms that lead to the compounding of disadvantage and develop strategies to deal with these issues directly. It is always better to deal with the direct cause of the problem than to target the effect. Often the same mechanisms are acting to entrench and intensify disadvantage for a number of individual client groups. By concentrating on individual target groups the reasons leading to sustained disadvantage are not being identified or addressed. Another problem with targeting individual client groups is that it implies that all members of a target group are disadvantaged.

PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

I consider that priorities for future VET research in equity areas should include:

- further work on the outcomes achieved by disadvantaged groups from participation in vocational education and training, and
- a detailed analysis of participation and outcomes from VET preparatory courses. Individual client groups are strongly represented in basic preparatory courses that do not lead to a qualification but little is known about the outcomes achieved by people taking these courses.

Continued monitoring of the outcomes achieved by disadvantaged groups is essential to monitor progress in improving the outcomes from VET achieved by different groups of Australians. On-going monitoring is necessary to assist in determining the strategies that are most effective in alleviating disadvantage, and the groups of people that are benefiting from different strategies.

Secondly, an evaluation of the participation and outcomes from 'enabling courses' would assist in identifying groups of disadvantaged people who benefit from these courses, and the modes of delivery that are most effective in achieving positive outcomes. Enabling courses encompass the courses classified under the 'TAFE multi-field education' field-of study classification and the 'social, educational and employment skills' area of learning classification. These courses are undertaken by people without adequate social, literacy or numeracy skills.

Positive outcomes from these courses would be a 'successful completion' in a module, the enrolment by a student in another VET course and a satisfactory employment outcome.

Managing diversity

Kate Barnett

Equity studies undertaken by Kate Barnett

My equity-focused work occurs within two sectors – the VET sector and the human services sector, and has a specific focus on people from diverse cultural backgrounds, people living in rural and remote areas, women and to a lesser extent, people with a disability. Some of my work in the VET sector was undertaken for the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) when I was Senior Research Fellow, specialising in Access and Equity issues. The remainder has been undertaken on a consultancy basis as Kate Barnett and Associates.

The work for which I first became known in the VET sector involved an analysis of the 'open training market' on women's participation in TAFE, which was a direct response to the then radical notion of promoting competition between 'public' and 'private' training providers. Undertaken in 1993 for NCVER, the study resulted in the report *Swings and Roundabouts: the open training market and women's participation in TAFE*. One of its conclusions was that the equity impact of competition would be determined by the conditions attached to tendering for training provision and the degree to which policy was structured to balance demands for efficiency, effectiveness and equity.

While at NCVER, I undertook research with commercial and community providers of VET to identify their attitudes to gender equity. This identified that commercial providers regarded the addressing of access and equity issues as a public sector responsibility – confirming the need for policy processes to be designed to ensure that the VET public and private sectors were not to become segmented on this basis. That study was funded by the Women's Research Employment Initiatives Program (DEET: 1995) and was released as a report known as *Separate Responsibilities: a comparative, equity-focused study of commercial and community providers*.

In conjunction with John Foyster and Mark Werner of NCVER, I also produced a gender-focused statistical analysis of patterns of participation in TAFE. This was undertaken in 1996 for the National Action Plan for Women in TAFE and produced the report *Patterns of Participation in TAFE: a gender-focussed analysis*. This quantified the segmented patterns characterising female and male participation and grouping these together, found that the typical patterns for men students was essentially employer driven and focused, with employers providing financial support and courses being selected for their employment relevance. By contrast, women's participation was self-driven rather than employer-driven, did not involve financial support from employers and was influenced by their own needs and their ability to balance study with family-related responsibilities. Women were more likely to select courses for a range of personal, recreational and vocational reasons and to withdraw from these courses if they did not fulfil their expectations. Men were more likely to withdraw from their courses because of employment reasons.

During my employment with NCVER I also undertook several analytical studies with an equity focus. These involved-

- an analysis of the likely equity implications of the introduction of tuition fees in TAFE, producing the report *Some Can, Some Can't: the impact of fees and charges on disadvantaged groups in TAFE* (1994)
- an analysis of the likely effects of award restructuring and competency-based training on people with a disability accessing training and employment, producing the report *Threat and Opportunity: workplace reform and disability* (1993: DEET)
- an analysis of the implications for access to VET of Australian disability legislation. This was presented as a report to the ILO's Regional Workshop on Equity-Oriented Training Policies for People with Disabilities - *Disability Legislation in Australia: Implications for Integrated Access to Vocational Education and Training* (1994), Chiba, Japan

Kate Barnett and Associates have undertaken several equity-focused projects within the VET sector. In 1996 we were commissioned by DETAFE in Adelaide with ANTA funding to identify collaborative strategies which could be developed between the VET and disability sectors, with a view to enhancing access to VET for people with a disability. That study found that collaborative initiatives typically occur at the level of service delivery, while at the planning and policy level few such initiatives exist, largely because of boundaries imposed by portfolio structures, a lack of synchronicity in planning and funding cycles and a lack of incentives for collaboration. The report from that study is entitled *Collaborative Strategies to Enhance the Participation of People with Disabilities in Vocational Education and Training* DETAFE (1996)

In 1996, we were also commissioned by DETAFE to evaluate the equity outcomes of the Department's 'General Tender Program'. This program allocates funding on a competitive tendering basis, and policy staff were interested to identify how this affected specified target groups. The review found that these target groups had been well supported by the Program because of the incentives provided in the funding process. Target groups were identified among the Program's priorities, and a significant proportion of funding had been allocated to training initiatives focusing on those groups. A survey was undertaken of students from these target groups and this found a high level of satisfaction with the programs in which they had participated. The report is entitled *Review of the General Tender Program 1996*, DETAFE (1998)

Drawing together research findings produced by Departmental staff, Kate Barnett and Associates prepared a report for the Minister on gender issues related to women's access to TAFE courses in South Australia and their subsequent employment outcomes (DETAFA: 1995). This was subsequently released as *Leaps and Boundaries: women's participation in TAFE courses and employment outcomes for women from TAFE courses*. In 1995 we prepared for publication a report representing the findings of research undertaken by TAFE Institute staff for the National Plan of Action for Women in TAFE. This was released as *Women and TAFE: Flexible Delivery and Women in TAFE*.

Kate Barnett has also been a member of a number of VET committees or advisory groups with a specific equity focus. These are –

MCEETYA VEET Women's Taskforce (1992-95)

MCEETYA VEET Women's Taskforce NPAWT sub-group (1992-94)

National TAFE Women's Network (1994-95)

Reference Group for the Evaluation of the NPAWT (1994)

SA Women's Employment Strategy Ministerial Advisory Committee's Vocational Education sub-group (1993-94)

DEET Adult Literacy Flexible Delivery Project Advisory Committee (1994-95)

DEET National Research Strategy for Adult Literacy Advisory Group (1995)

Barriers to Participation in Adult Community Education Project Advisory Committee (1995).

UNDERSTANDING EQUITY

Although much of the policy focus in the VET and other sectors has been to specify groups who are relatively disadvantaged in their ability to access or participate in programs and services, my interest and commitment lies in what is usually referred to as 'the management of diversity'.

Clearly it has been important for research to identify and quantify disadvantage in order to ensure that this translates into specific policy strategies which actively compensate for inequality. There are few people today who need to be taught that equity outcomes require a strategic removal of barriers, and it is important that these barriers are identified and addressed.

However, there are two problems with confining our equity research and policy to what I would term the 'target group' approach. These are –

- While access and equity is promoted at the group level, individuals within these groups cannot be guaranteed successful outcomes. A target group approach does not identify individual need, and this is most apparent in the defining of women as an equity target group.
- The target group approach removes the responsibility or the incentive to value difference, which is the underpinning philosophy of a diversity management approach. The target group approach sustains a belief that difference is a problem and that those affected by their difference from the majority are responsible – rather than the system which is causing them problems.

A managing diversity strategy requires a review of a system or an organisation, and the orienting of that system or organisation to be responsive to individuals. Diversity management is associated with, and seen by most large international corporations as

critical to maintaining a competitive edge. As such, it complements VET policy and the philosophy shaping this policy. I believe that considerable scope exists to promote a system wide management of diversity approach in VET, and that this should be underpinned by an accompanying policy-focused research strategy.

Attached is a brief paper which I use as background reading when working with organisations on diversity management issues.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategic policy and research priorities for VET, 1999

Tony Dreise

BACKGROUND: WORK OF ATSIPTAC

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Training Advisory Council (ATSIPTAC), as the national advisory body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' vocational education and training (VET), is responsible for setting strategic policy advice for and on behalf of Indigenous Australians. The Council sees part of its role as:

- identifying opportunities within the Australian National Training Authority's (ANTA's) framework for VET;
- adding value to both public expenditure on VET and outcomes for Indigenous Australians;
- improving access to higher level vocational programs in VET for Indigenous peoples; and
- increasing opportunities for collaboration which supports the wider national interest of Reconciliation.

This paper outlines ATSIPTAC's five priorities for 1999 as recently recommended by ATSIPTAC to the ANTA Board in relation to the priorities. The priorities and recommendations flow directly from community consultations and research as authorised and disseminated through its State and Territory councillors and their respective community networks.

While the aspirations of Indigenous Australians are partly accommodated within the objectives in the broader National Strategy for VET - A Bridge to the Future, Indigenous people have specific and different needs. Moreover, Indigenous Australians are universally recognised as being most disadvantaged and less well equipped than other Australians to develop the potential identified by ANTA:

- for the world of work;
- in terms of job market mobility;
- achieving equitable outcomes;
- community investment in training, and of
- outcomes from public expenditure in VET.

This paper therefore focuses on the priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and are entirely consistent with the objectives in Partners in a Learning Culture: Australia's draft National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy for VET,

1999-2003. *Partners in a Learning Culture* was developed in response to ANTA's desire², and Indigenous people's desire, for strategies to 'be developed at a national level to improve vocational education and training experiences and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'.

The Council recognises that not everything can be achieved overnight. The recommendations are therefore based on a small number of strategic priorities for VET. Three priorities have been identified by Indigenous people as being particularly urgent to break the cycle of disadvantage for the next generation, particularly for:

- Indigenous children in school;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (including juveniles) in custody;
- Indigenous learners at risk of being by-passed by the potential benefits of information technology.

ATSIPTAC has five widely disseminated papers which support the strategy and the recommendations in this report:

1. Partners in a learning culture: Australia's national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy for VET, J 999-2003. (Draft Version)
2. Building pathways: school industry work placements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students.
3. Making IT our own: learning about information technology, learning through information technology.
4. Working together to break the cycle: the development of a national VET strategy for adult correctional facilities and juvenile justice centres in Australia
5. Community development through skills development: new apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

PRIORITIES FOR INDIGENOUS VET IN 1999

Four priority areas are identified for 1999, consistent with the strategic directions identified in *A Bridge to the Future* and the Council's own priorities. The priorities are:

1. the development and implementation of *Partners in a Learning Culture: Australia's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1999-2003*;
2. an increase in the number of school-industry work placements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students;
3. the delivery of training programs in multimedia and information technology for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; and

² Achieving Equitable Outcomes, See ANTA 1998, p.5.

4. the introduction and resourcing of a National Vocational Education and Training Strategy for Adult Correctional Facilities and Juvenile Justice Centres in Australia.

Priority 1: Development of an Indigenous National VET Strategy

The vision, objectives, strategies and key performance measures in Partners in a learning culture were developed as part of an extensive consultation process. They embody the overarching aspirations for Indigenous peoples in Australia, and how VET can be applied as a means to a larger end and that is for: community economic development and sustainability, lifelong learning, cultural affirmation, community choice, equity and reconciliation. (The final draft of the strategy has been submitted to the ANTA Board and ministers for endorsement.

Priority 2: VET in Schools for Indigenous Australians

Indigenous peoples are widely recognised as having been disadvantaged in relation to school education for many years. While there have been measurable improvements in Indigenous access to and participation in all sectors of public education and training since the adoption of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy in 1989, these improvements have lagged behind improvements for other Australians.³

What happens in the transition from school to work is critical for all Australians. This transition is of particular concern to Indigenous people since Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is skewed towards youth: 40 per cent are under 15 years of age compared with 21 per cent for all Australians⁴

Indigenous students are currently leaving school much earlier and at higher rates than non-Indigenous Australians. Seventy one per cent of Indigenous Australians in Australia drop out of school before Year 12 compared to just 26 per cent of the whole student population.⁵ Indigenous students aged 16 to 17 years have school participation rates of 37 per cent compared to all Australians' rate of 67 per cent.⁶ This disparity in upper levels of school has grave consequences for equity in relation to future national skills, labor market participation, and community development for Indigenous peoples.

The net effect of historic and current disparities is evident in the profile of current VET participants. While 36 per cent of non-Indigenous VET participants have completed Year 12, only 12 per cent of Indigenous VET participants have completed Year 12. Around one quarter (28 per cent) of Indigenous VET participants achieved a level of Year 9 or lower.⁷ As a consequence, Indigenous VET participants and graduates are concentrated in low level certificates outside of the AQF framework: 44 per cent of Indigenous VET graduates completed 'other' Certificates compared to 26 per cent of non-Indigenous students.⁸ These

³ Robinson and Bamblett 1998, p.13.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics Census, 1996.

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics Census, 1996.

⁶ 1996 data for Australia: Robinson and Bamblett 1998, p.15.

⁷ NCVET Indigenous students 1996 1998, p.13.

⁸ NCVET Indigenous students 1996, 1998, p.2 3. NCVET Indigenous students 1996, 1998, p.23.

disparities flow on to employment outcomes after VET: while 71 per cent of non-Indigenous VET graduates are in employment after their course, only 52 per cent of Indigenous VET graduates are in employment after their course.⁹

While Indigenous retention at school and subsequent participation in VET is encouraged, there is a requirement that mainstream, school based education is not always an attractive option for Indigenous young people. There are real benefits from exposing Indigenous students to culturally relevant school programs linked to structured workplace learning.

The Council is committed to improving VET in schools for Indigenous students and is presently assisting in the implementation of a specific Indigenous strategy in collaboration with the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF).

Group Training Companies, because of their nature, can provide many employment and training opportunities for Indigenous people through supporting work placements in industry and New Apprenticeships. While this is important generally, it has particular relevance to VET in schools.

*ATSIPTAC recommends
that the ANTA Board:*

- (i) refer ATSWTAC's Building Pathways report to the MCEETYA Taskforce on VET in Schools to inform emerging national policies for VET in schools and work placements as it relates to Indigenous students;
- (ii) recommend that the MCEETYA Taskforce focus on vocational learning programs which are targeted at Indigenous students in the middle years of secondary education. (The programs should be designed to articulate with post-compulsory schooling qualifications and apprenticeship programs in schools at the senior secondary level);
- (iii) recommend that the MCEETYA Taskforce incorporate an Indigenous perspective into the State and Territory policy frameworks for VET in Schools through the inclusion of an Indigenous representative on the Taskforce;
- (iv) work with the Commonwealth and States and Territories to ensure that resources are provided to Group Training Companies to work with Indigenous communities in establishing New Apprenticeship programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and
- (v) resource a national project to develop strategies for the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills for Indigenous students through workplace learning.

Priority 3: Information Technology for Indigenous Australians

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ANTA, in a *Bridge to the Future*, noted the potential benefits of new technologies in VET, an issue which has been further advanced in ATSIPTAC's *Making IT Our Own* discussion paper.

While Australia is one of the most highly urbanised countries in the world, one third of Indigenous Australians live in their traditional lands.¹⁰ Many such people live in rural and isolated areas beyond the reach of services available to metropolitan Australians.

There is little factual data available on the current state of information technology use in remote areas. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that there is limited technology and the skills to access and gainfully use this technology need to be developed as a matter of urgency. Unless this issue is addressed, the inequities associated with the uneven development and application of Information Technologies (IT) have the potential to further disadvantage Indigenous Australians by becoming the 'information poor' of Australia.

Telecommunications initiatives with the capacity to redress some existing inequities on the isolated- metropolitan continuum, such as Networking the Nation, can only reach Indigenous Australians ... if they are applied and developed beyond their broad context, with consideration for the particular needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities'.¹¹ Geographic dispersion, cultural and linguistic diversity and the remoteness of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are both challenges and opportunities which need to be considered when considering the use of information technology associated with VET.

Information technology has 'tremendous opportunities... for promoting Indigenous issues, encouraging kids within the communities to respect and understand their cultures, and promote literacy and technological skills within the community'.¹²

The challenges and opportunities in the labour market are equally significant. As noted in *Eyes Wide Open*,¹³ 'workers will need to be skilled in technology both to get jobs and to do those jobs competitively and effectively'.

Proactive and strategic thinking must occur now to mitigate against looming inequities between the 'digital haves and have-nots'. To this end, it should be noted that there is currently a lack of ongoing training in IT which would enable Indigenous communities to access existing equipment and resources.¹⁴ There is also a shortage of Indigenous teachers who have the skills required to train Indigenous people in information technology. The Council explored these and other issues in detail when it co-convened a National

¹⁰ ABS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survey, 1994.

¹¹ ATSIPTAC *Making IT our own*, p.7.

¹² Richardson (1997) *The bush track meets the information superhighway*, Australian Film Commission Indigenous Branch, p.2.

¹³ ANTA Key Issue 3, p.1.

¹⁴ Richardson 1997, *ibid*.

Indigenous Information Technology Conference called 'Learning IT together' in April 1999 (see website ion:unisa.edu.au).

In relation to information technology, ATSIPTAC has recommended:

Recommendation 2

that the ANTA Board:

- (i) commission an independent national research project, including a skills audit, of the state of Indigenous information technology and training;
- (ii) resource a project to scope the development of an multimedia/IT training package for Indigenous communities that reflects the national skills audit (above), Indigenous learning styles, and flexible delivery standards; and in the longer term
- (iii) resource train-the-trainer programs, based on these packages, for Indigenous trainers.

Priority 4: VET in prisons for Indigenous Australians

Indigenous Australians continue to be arrested and incarcerated at rates far above those of other Australians. In 1996 this rate was 16 times higher than for other Australians.¹⁵ The number and proportion of Indigenous people in prison continues to increase in all States and Territories.

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) in 1991 found that quality VET and employment programs have a pivotal role in both preventing crime, as well as playing a positive role in rehabilitating offenders.

ATSIPTAC is concerned by the lack of progress in implementing VET recommendations contained both within the RCIADIC Report and subsequent Senate Inquiry in July 1995. The Senate Inquiry identified particular problems nationally with VET provision in correctional facilities¹⁵. Many of these problems are expanded upon in ATSIPTAC's Working together to break the cycle discussion paper.

In the 1996 *Senate Report into Education and Training for People in Custody*, it was recommended that Ministers for responsible for corrections and Ministers for VET sign a National Memorandum of Agreement on Education and Training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Custody. As yet this agreement has not been signed. It is understood that DETYA and correctional services in each state and territory are preparing to sign a memorandum next month, which will establish the basis for a framework for VET in corrections.

¹⁵ *National Corrections Statistics* 1996.

ATSIPTAC has brought these issues to the attention of the ANTA Board by means of the following specific recommendations:

Recommendation 3

that the ANTA Board:

- (i) allocate resources for an independent assessment of how the issues raised in ATSIPTAC's *Working together to break the cycle* paper might be agreed on and implemented nationally;
- (ii) commission research to explore the potential of on-line delivery programs in correctional facilities;
- (iii) recommend to Ministers for Vocational Education and Training and Ministers for Corrections that they support the national Memorandum of Agreement on Education and Training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Custody to be signed by DETYA and State and Territory correctional services.

PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In general terms, ATSIPTAC is supportive of any research that is consistent with the vision, strategic directions and key performance measures identified in *Partners in a learning culture*. that is research which investigates the role of VET in facilitating:

- Indigenous community economic development and sustainability;
- lifelong learning, cultural affirmation and community choice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- Indigenous equity and reconciliation.

To be consistent with ATSIPTACs vision, all research should be designed and conducted in a manner which acknowledges Indigenous self determination, cultural affirmation and community choice. In effect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be actively consulted, and wherever possible directly involved in the research process. Research should add value to Indigenous learning communities beyond the final research product.

In particular, ATSIPTAC encourages such research which specifically addresses the priorities identified above, that is which improves knowledge and strategies of the role of VET in:

improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in and outcomes from post-compulsory schooling, in particular in VET in schools, work placements, apprenticeships and traineeships; encouraging Indigenous access and outcomes from information technology; reducing Indigenous incarceration and recidivism.¹⁶

¹⁶ Report of the Inquiry into Education and Training in Correctional Facilities, Australian Senate, 1996.

KEY DOCUMENTS

1. *Partners in a learning culture: Australia's national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategy for vocational education and training 1999-2003.* (Draft 1999)
2. *Building pathways: school-industry work placements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students.* (1998)
3. *Making IT. our own: learning about information technology, learning through information technology.* (Conference brochure, 1999)
4. *Working together to break the cycle: the development of a national VET strategy for adult correctional facilities and juvenile justice centres in Australia.* (1998)
5. *Community development through skills development new apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.* (1997)

Equity outcomes

Tom Dumbrell

THE NATURE OF MY WORK ON EQUITY

My most recent work on equity is a work in progress. Stage one of that study is summarised in a separate paper that I have prepared for this workshop. In brief, that paper analysed data on earnings from the 1997 TAFE Graduate Destination Survey. It is primarily focussed on determining why female graduates working full time earn on average about 84% of male graduates working full time.

I was attracted to this form of research because it allowed the analysis of hard data on what is a pretty important outcome measure, namely earnings. The ANTA Ministerial Council has identified, *inter alia*, the importance of VET outcomes in revealing the value derived by the community from VET and the importance of VET in improving outcomes for under-represented clients. My preliminary analysis of graduates' full time earnings appeared to show that, in some industries, a TAFE qualification did not improve the relative earnings of females vis à vis comparable males and hence was not fulfilling the objective of improving the outcomes for a major client group. There was also the implication, in some industries at least, that the community was not placing any value on a VET qualification, particularly if it were gained by a female.

The study has suggested a number of factors contributing to inequitable outcomes in full time earnings for female TAFE graduates. One important finding is that women generally do not undertake lower level VET courses than males. The main difference in course profiles between the surveyed graduates was, predictably, in the trade certificate area. Those with trade certificates did not however earn the highest incomes and this difference in course profiles did not appear to be a significant factor in full time earnings differences.

In some industries, notably Finance and insurance, where they are at a significant earnings disadvantage, women recruited to full time jobs in that industry have lower level qualifications than males. One implication is that VET is not overcoming traditional gender-based patterns of occupational segregation in some industries.

Another important finding is that in some industries, (especially in Retailing), some or all of the income disparity for full time male and female TAFE graduates is explained by the longer hours being worked by males. About 29% of the surveyed male graduates were working 45 hours or more per week, more than double the proportion of female graduates, of whom 14% worked these hours.

This finding of course raises a whole raft of other equity-related issues. Is the current trend for over-full time work, with 29% of all males employed working 49 hours or more, compared with less than 10% of all females, emerging as a de facto form of gender

discrimination in employment, with the outcome for TAFE graduates merely a reflection of the wider labour market?

The most striking difference in the profiles of male and female TAFE graduates occurred in the field of study. The predominance of females in the Business /administration/economics field appears to reflect the continuing gender segregation in the occupations related to this field. More than one quarter of all females enrolled in VET streams 2100-4500 are found in this field of study. More details of the findings are available in the other paper I referred to earlier.

Stage two of the research will focus on factors predisposing females to select from a narrow range of field of study options, thereby streaming themselves into occupations that are more poorly paid, apparently because there is a ready supply of suitably qualified female TAFE graduates.

Apart from some specific research projects on occupational gender segregation and migrant unemployment I managed in the early 1990s and writing a paper on access and equity principles for the Inter-governmental committee on the implementation of MAATS, most of my work in equity issues has revolved around the development of performance measures, policy development and strategic planning.

I would like to raise one particular experience I had during the mid-90s. For many people the growth of economic rationalism has been the nemesis of many efforts to achieve greater equity in many parts of our society. My view is that in many cases this is true. For example, the decimation of the national public employment service, to be largely replaced by a motley collection of incentive driven entrepreneurs has not been for the public good. Nevertheless, in my view, some of the forces that have driven these changes can have a positive impact on equity.

One controversial issue in VET has been the contracting out of some VET provision. In NSW this process began in 1994 and grew up to 1997 when about \$25 million was available for competitive tendering (or about 3% of annual recurrent expenditure). A regular criticism of tendering out of VET provision has been that only the public provider, TAFE, can satisfactorily address the needs of equity target groups. The NSW programs, known initially as the Pilot Private Provider Program, (PPPP) and subsequently as the Contracted Training Provision Program, (CTP), incorporated specific targets for providers to address equity groups. In 1995 and 1996 evaluations of these programs undertaken within the then Office of BVET revealed that both participation rates and outcomes for the targeted equity groups had, in most cases, been more than satisfactorily met by private training providers.

Contracting out and competitive tendering in VET therefore do not necessarily mean that equity objectives will be compromised. The achievement of more equitable outcomes does however require that governments actively target equity groups and regularly evaluate whether those targets are being met. In turn, it is necessary for governments to develop a

more open attitude in reporting on their equity performance. Governments also need to have the flexibility to ensure that those providers that can deliver targeted outcomes are funded in future.

A benefit of the move towards competitive tendering has been the development of more sophistication in the collection of VET data and the development of more meaningful performance indicators. If funding decisions need to be made on the basis of demonstrated performance in relation to a range of indicators that include equity performance, we have, I believe, a sounder basis for improving the delivery of VET services to equity target groups. Of course, the capacity to collect better data is no guarantee that governments will implement equitable policies.

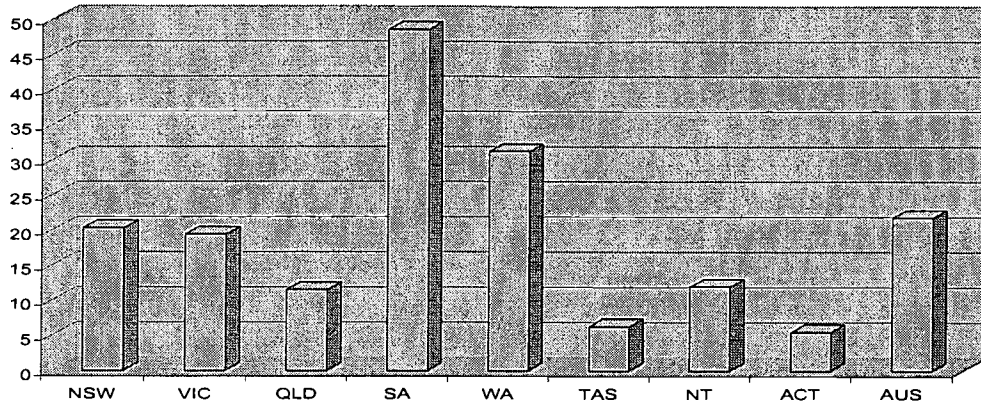
HOW SHOULD EQUITY BE UNDERSTOOD?

In my view equity is essentially about removing unfair barriers to reasonable aspirations. This definition implies that equity requires action or intervention by someone. It also requires the setting of values in relation to what are unfair barriers and what are reasonable aspirations. It follows that what is equitable will change over time as social values change. Equity policies therefore need to be constantly debated and constantly revised. Such debate requires a strong commitment by government to the collection and publication of meaningful data and a public process of informed debate on those data.

Therefore a necessary concomitant of this definition is that valid and robust measures need to be in place to ensure that equity debate is well informed. In VET one of the major shortcomings of reporting on equity in participation and outcomes is that statistical data in AVETMISS is based on self-identification of membership of equity groups at enrolment.

Analysis of this data shows that responses to questions on such membership varies markedly between jurisdictions, showing that subtle differences in enrolment processes or other areas can significantly affect basic data. Data for indigenous status is shown in the following chart.

Students not reporting indigenous status, %, by jurisdiction



Improvements in data gathering to ensure better coverage of target groups within VET would therefore be desirable. This is more easily said than done and perhaps different approaches to identification of target groups need to be researched.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH?

My overall impression of the equity situation in VET is that the VET system itself has performed well in *enrolling* equity target groups. Most of the inequities that the VET system seeks to address are the result of social conditions outside the control of the sector. Inequities that the VET system can only partly address are evident in school and in the labour market. While solutions to these inequities largely lie outside the resources of the VET sector, research within VET can shed light on possible strategies to address some of these inequities.

In *gross* terms most equity groups are well represented in the VET system. In 1997 48% of students were females, of whom 28% were aged over 40. Of the roughly 80% of students who provided information on their indigenous status, 3.4% were of indigenous origin. More than 17% of students speak a language other than English at home. A low 4.3% reported a disability compared to 18% of the population having a disability, although this could again be, in part, a result of non-reporting, with 23% of students not answering the enrolment question on disability. Participation rates in non-metropolitan areas of Australia are higher than in capital cities, as are pass rates.

Within these gross statistics there are of course important inequities. I have already noted the gender differences in field of study that appear to reinforce gender segregation in the labour market. Only about one-third of female TAFE graduates were employed full time when surveyed in the 1998 Graduate Destination Survey, compared to about two-thirds of male graduates.

Unemployment rates for indigenous people continue grossly to exceed those of the non-indigenous work force. Geographical inequities in the labour markets of all parts of Australia see gross disparities in unemployment rates between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Within the major capital cities gross differences among regions in

standards of education, earnings and unemployment rates further highlight the geographical inequities that become self-reinforcing.

The more striking and immediate inequities it seems are not within the VET system but within the outcomes from VET. Nevertheless, the continuing shortcomings in the collection of enrolment data on equity target groups is an issue that requires attention in VET research. One specific question that might be addressed is why are there such pronounced variations between the states and territories in response rates to questions on membership of target groups. Can best practice enrolment procedures be deduced from an analysis of these variations?

Little is also known of the outcomes of VET for the various equity target groups. How do their labour force outcomes differ from other groups? Are their occupational and earnings outcomes significantly different from other groups? Do the gender differences in earnings extend to other target groups? Does VET provide social mobility to equity target groups? Do those in equity target groups have different course and field of study profiles to other groups? Are their outcomes consistent with those having similar course and field of study profiles?

Another set of equity issues I have not touched on in this paper relate to the specific area of apprenticeships and traineeships. I have never been optimistic about efforts to increase female participation in traditional apprenticeships, and I have seen many such campaigns in my time.

More important I think are the efforts by the Commonwealth to focus greater emphasis on work-place based training. Given the inequitable geographical distribution of work in Australia and the absence of adequate processes to assist relocation, this policy is inherently inequitable. I would advocate close scrutiny by the VET community of the equity performance of New Apprenticeships, in terms of outcomes for equity groups and the geographical distribution of participation.

Equity and VET: An antilogous¹⁷ project? A personal story of equity work in vocational education and training

Elaine Butler

INTRODUCTION

Since receiving the invitation to attend of seminar with other VET equity researchers, I have been both mulling over my work of the last 15 to 20 years, as well as worrying about *how* to write a 'personal position paper' that expounds (and exposes) my current views in relation to equity research in vocational education and training (VET). More specifically and as requested in the letter of invitation, the paper is to cover the nature of my work, my position on the way equity should be understood, and (as ever) priorities for future research. My first disclaimer - while the invitation focuses on equity research *per se*, I shall interpret 'research' in a broad way, to include the political-personal work such as the advocacy involved in equity work, rather than focus on more traditional 'academic' notions of research. Such a position produces a space for me to reflect in a personal way on my equity-related activities, and especially those in the broad field of 'VET'. For this paper then, I shall use the term 'equity work' in a deliberate attempt to challenge the restrictive and unhelpful theory/practice, research/teaching, policy/implementation binaries. The next disclaimer is that this will not be an 'academic' paper as such; more it is a reflection and a conversation with my self and with any reader/s.

While I often contemplate the possibility and perhaps even relief of 'doing' equity related work from a simplistic 'no nonsense' approach, de-decked with one or even two dimensional diagrams, flow charts, dot points and formulaic solutions that are so sought after by those closest to and apparently most influential in policy formulation, I also firmly believe that, while such approaches perhaps offer some specific short term benefits, that in the main those committed to notions of democracy, social justice and so equity have a powerful intellectual and emotional investment in sustainable long term change. Certainly, this is my position. In short, I have and continue to argue for and work towards a central premise- that equity should be the central organising feature of any polity, institution, policy, structure, system and practice. While I strongly believe that the 'mechanics' of working from such a stance are neither difficult nor impracticable¹⁸, at this particular time it would appear that a lack of political will (or courage) to act, and protection of institutionalised advantage continue to win the day.

Given this culture, 'equity' is positioned as a slippery, illusory notion, embedded in and so constrained by its ideological framings and popular mythologies. Equity work, then, be it

¹⁷ 'Antilogy- n, ... a contradiction in terms...(as ANTI--, -LOGY)' ; in Allen, R.E. (ed), (1990)The Concise Oxford Dictionary, Eighth edition. Oxford, Clarendon Press p.46

¹⁸ Indeed, I argue that if we are to establish the foundations for more inclusive, participative and democratic futures in this country, such a paradigm shift is both critical and urgently required.

theoretical and/or practical, becomes a site of contestation, of evolving theories and practices; of assumptions, values and beliefs that often are not 'teased out' or discussed enough. Equity is complex, deeply implicated in our shared and separate human histories and daily lives, highly political and so hotly contested. Equity work crosses artificial boundaries constructed between the economic, social, cultural, political; between public and private; institutional and sectoral boundaries; disciplinary boundaries; boundaries between theoretical 'knowing' and the knowledge practices of everyday life. Nowhere is this more evident than in the area encompassed by "VET"- work, and work related learning, be it education, training or incidental learning.

APPROACHING EQUITY WORK IN VET

As a so-called 'baby-boomer', my experiences have been shaped by the profound shifts that have taken place in Australia through the 1960s and 1970s, including women's 'liberation', challenges to issues around migration and the formulating of 'multicultural' policies, recognition of our history of white invasion, colonisation and degradation of indigenous Australians; the 1970s mining boom and 1980s elevation of 'corporate cowboys' to pseudo-icon/national hero status, through to the more 'knowing' but troubled 1990s. My early interest in and approaches to equity work were motivated first by voluntary community work experiences as a teenager, then later by (ongoing) experiences of paid work. I quickly developed a personal-political interest in the position and treatment of women in particular in relation to paid work and also work-related training¹⁹, but also was very aware of those noticeably framed as 'Other' by those occupying positions of influence in the 'world' of commerce and industry.

At first, my practices were far from 'theorised', let alone informed by any theories. Indeed, it was not until the late 1970's that I left the world of high (and low) finance with the deliberate goal of becoming an educator, to work with adults at community level. At first my equity related work focussed on pedagogical and curriculum matters, then widened to those of access, participation and decision making for students. This in turn resulted in me taking a reflexive stance to my own knowledge practices and albeit belatedly, a recognition of my complicity within the very practices I was seeking to transform (Butler 1995). This recognition was the impetus behind my continuing appreciation of the need to consider the complexities of context and location; regimes of power and governance, with the assistance of theoretical frameworks to both develop practice and to 'test' my understandings and my work.

It is interesting to note that the time span of the above activities also coincides with the release of the influential Kangan Report 'TAFE in Australia' (1974) through to the ACTU/TDC 1987 report 'Australia Reconstructed' to the tumultuous changes that have occurred in the provision of vocational education and training in the country since the introduction of National Training Reform Agenda that was part of a micro economic reform strategy to position Australia as a 'globalising' and competitive nation. Despite

¹⁹ My early paid work was in the masculinised occupations of chartered accountancy, then stock & sharebroking and money market. Like a number of my women friends, I was one of the early groups of post-war women who were 'allowed' to continue working after marriage. I was also refused permission to study at the Australian Securities Institute on the basis of my gender and perceived role in the office.

these changes one thing has proved both elusive to change and so profoundly resilient - the masculinised culture of technical education-TAFE-VET including the close allegiance to a trades-based and economic view of industry and so 'work' that remains as a dominant if outdated discourse in the foundational assumptions and so very shaping of VET in Australia.

Within these understandings, my approach to equity work in VET has been a weaving together of a number of deliberate positionings discussed briefly below.

Working both in the 'centre' and at the 'margins' of VET reform agendas

This decision has been subject to much discussion with colleagues and other friends, especially regarding the 'dangers' of being co-opted by the sheer pace and magnitude of the changes within VET, and the potential to be either pushed into a reactive uncritical position and/or seduced by the rhetoric of the spin-doctors, if not the funds for commissioned 'research'. While somewhat contradictory and at times very uncomfortable, such a position offers the potential to both critique and (hopefully) inform policy especially in equity related issues, and focus directly on the day to day realities, issues and needs of workers and potential VET learners.

Adopting an educative approach to equity research

The research projects I have undertaken have all included both overt and/or covert educative strategies, to disseminate as widely as possible and in everyday language, information about VET policies, structures and agencies, provision and access, with the intent to de-mystify the whole and its parts as much as possible, given the never-ending changes and ceaseless proliferation of acronyms that have accompanied the top-down VET change agenda. While this is often an 'invisible' part of equity work in my research activities, my learning experience has resulted in an acute awareness of the breadth of confusion or lack of any information about the VET strategies of the 1990s, especially but certainly far from exclusively within so-called 'equity groups'.

Adopting a collaborative and participative approach to equity research

Much of my work in this area continues to be in partnership with one or more other co-researchers. This approach not only assists in building a critical mass of researchers with an interest in VET/equity issues, but also assists in challenging understandings about VET and equity; theory building in a community of advocate/scholars; extending the potential for linking theory/practice, whether in policy work, curriculum, pedagogical areas or equity practices. It facilitates the crossing of 'divides' between universities, TAFE, workplaces, unions, community settings; between academics, teachers and trainers, students and workers. It offers the potential to 'insert other voices' directly into research findings; it enhances the sharing of information, building of networks and, most importantly in equity work, can go some way towards preventing unnecessary duplication or 'reinventing the wheel'.

Seeking to share findings as widely as possible, and to include where ever possible, potential for practical outcomes

While the position explained in the previous paragraph also links directly with this endeavour, I strongly believe that equity work in VET especially does need to ground

itself, and to contribute to practical outcomes where ever possible, no matter how small they may seem. The sharing of findings, insights, concerns and issues also strengthens equity networks, and assists in building links with wider social movements with similar agendas in different portfolios or areas. This in itself is both a political and a practical outcome.

'State of the art' knowledge approach ?

Given the commitment I have to equity work, I endeavour to keep up to date as much possible with the literatures that relate to this field, including theoretical approaches, other research and projects, VET policy shifts, trends and issues in the field, both nationally, in states and territories and abroad and the day-to-day practices in work-related learning sites, industrial sites and workplaces. The above also includes following related events in print and electronic media, and on radio²⁰. This ongoing investment facilitates another of my preferred ways of thinking and working- that of contextualising the equity work I do, taking into consideration macro as well as micro issues, regardless of the specific focus or location of the project.

Taking risks

Inevitably equity work in VET as elsewhere involves risk, given its marginal status and the discursive practices that seek to 'discipline' equity. There are a number of ways in which informed risk taking is important. One practical example of this is using my (relatively safe) location within a university to speak out (with agreement) on behalf of the increasing number of those who are not in a position so to do²¹, in the cause of equity. Another more abstract example is embedded in the nature of equity research itself. At the 1999 AVETRA national conference comment was made about the tendency for VET research to be commissioned within constraining and/or reactive frameworks. This is especially the case for VET equity research.

Most equity related research is poorly funded and often seeks to implement new policies or reinforce existing practices that may not be in the best interests of equity (ref Butler & Ferrier forthcoming). It may also be framed and offered for tender within a 'guess the correct answer' research approach or an approach that defines the answer but seeks the problem to justify it. Equity based research in VET fills a number of purposes. For example, like 'mainstream' research it seeks to provide information (eg barriers, issues, 'best practice' and so on), and it endeavours to contribute to a knowledge base about equity and about VET. However it also aims to inform and influence equity related outcomes within a wide field of activities from institutional design, legislative and policy frameworks to organisational and educative practices. As such, funded equity (research) work inevitably encounters the tension between 'acceptable' reporting and vested political/personal interest, given the positioning of equity in VET. Often the choice here is between 'safe' research strategies and so findings to avoid dismissal of critique and/or findings that challenge the very nature of the VET reforms, or the researcher can choose not to 'walk the walk and talk the talk' of the dominant discourses, in the knowledge that

²⁰ The downside of this is my barely adequate 'filing' and storage system!

²¹ The number of people in this constrained position continues to grow, with public servants (some of whom now refer to themselves as government servants) being a good example.

findings may well not be palatable either to decision makers or to those with a vested interest in equity.

My present approach to this dilemma is one of careful and informed decision making around each respective research work; a weighing up of the potential consequences with colleagues and others, prior to the research endeavour and where ever possible, seeking critical readings at draft report stage. However, given what I perceive as an increasingly minimalist and disinterested approach to equity in VET (despite all the rhetoric to the contrary), I now feel even more strongly about speaking out, not only about the findings of any particular research report, but more recently, about the inadequacy of the foundational equity frameworks within VET. While I would like to describe my approach as 'strategic pragmatism', I am also all too aware of the potential to lose hard fought for ground, which does indeed make such an approach a risky business.

To seek out and listen to critique of my work; and to offer constructive open feedback to other equity workers when approached

The former approach is one that I believe is necessary, not only to 'keep me honest', but also to assist me to maintain intellectual and ethical integrity in and through my work. While I often act as my own harshest critic, and although it is often an uncomfortable position in which to put myself, I do attempt to seek out feedback from those I know will be 'tough' but true. Such feedback has not only helped me to grow, but has also taught me more about giving feedback to others, when approached. It has also contributed to my appreciation of the work invested in equity by others, whether or not I concur with their position. Finally, it provides a very good rehearsal for meeting and dialogue with those unsympathetic to equity work!

UNDERSTANDING EQUITY IN VET

Rather than repeat at length my position on how equity 'should be understood', along with the strengths and weaknesses of current VET policy, I offer the following synopsis, which can be supplemented with selected readings from the appended bibliography by those interested²².

The modernist-liberal notion of 'equity' is highly problematic, and under stress from many directions- global (il)logics, market-oriented individualising ideologies, theories in disarray, and run away or quicksilver capitalism, to name but a few. However, a reading of the contemporary 'mood' indicates a shift to seeking of social goals to redress the inequity that many are experiencing in their daily lives, along with pessimistic views of uncertain and risky futures. Now, perhaps more now than ever, we need new understandings of, and frameworks for 'equity' and for democracy, and we need them urgently. At the same time, and as indicated earlier, to give away hard won ground is fraught with danger. Further, given the pace of change in VET, as in other institutions, it is not possible to take 'time-out', to undertake the intellectual-political work required. This situation finds me working within the old frameworks²³ while being highly aware of their shortcomings, and at the same time seeking to conceptualise more robust and mature ways to proceed. On an individual basis, this is lonely work, and too slow. A collective and sustained effort from a broad base of diverse 'equity workers' in VET and elsewhere is required, as well as our individual contributions. This then is a precis of much of my recent thinking and writing in relation to what I perceive as the equity dilemma.

Given that the emergent future appears to be highly oriented to knowledge, and new ways of working and knowing, I strongly believe that VET has a central role to play in how these futures are shaped for and by many Australians. Earlier in this paper I described VET in Australia as being based on an outmoded but enduring masculinised culture as well as a narrow but politically driven understanding of 'work'. It is of course possible to

²² I especially refer anyone interested in VET policy related to equity, and (gender) equity research gaps to Butler & Ferrier (1999 forthcoming).

²³ By 'old' frameworks, I refer specifically to modernist liberal framings of the term 'equity', our distributive rather than substantive approach to justice, complaints based legislative approaches and the established mechanism of 'doing' equity through the technology of disadvantaged/target/equity groups that 'categorise' and so homogenise people.

point to many ways in which VET now accommodates 'difference', including women, but it is less easy to ascertain how much of this is due to deliberate policy strategy and political will, and how much has happened as a result of broader social changes, some of which were also mentioned briefly at the beginning of the paper. I do not embrace new VET policy as inclusive; it is both highly market driven, and, like much present government policy, based on neo-liberal ways of ordering and 'managing' the world. The coming together of an enduring masculinised culture and a marketised commodified system does not auger well for equity, let alone the citizen-consumers being 'manufactured' to people it. This then, brings me to the title for this paper. Is working for equity in VET a contradiction in terms, or is it perhaps a life project? How long is the long haul? Where and how do we go from here? And what will be the consequences of decisions made, whether collective or individual? Watch this space...

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Regrouping equity

Barry Golding and Veronica Volkoff

NATURE OF THE WORK

The authors' major equity-related research has been conducted jointly. It comprises four main studies: two conducted for the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and two undertaken with National Research and Evaluation Committee (NREC) competitive grant funding, in addition to related individual research by both authors.

Longitudinal study of access, participation and outcomes by group

The first equity research project was a national, longitudinal study of access, participation and outcomes from vocational education and training (VET) (Golding and Volkoff 1998). In-progress studies, reports and joint papers were produced by the authors between 1997 and 1998. These chart the development of the background and ideas evident in the final report and as listed in the references.

This equity-focussed research has potential significance for a number of reasons. It is

- focussed on student experiences of VET as they relate to equity
- longitudinal, rather than a single snapshot in time and therefore has the capacity to capture evidence of changing perceptions and reflections on experience
- inclusive of providers beyond training and further education (TAFE): rich quantitative and qualitative data are available for both 1996 and 1997 for a diverse group of 235 individuals in TAFE, community owned and managed (adult and community education- ACE) providers, private (commercial training providers, industry or enterprise-based training) provider and corrections education providers
- national: including providers in six regions across Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory
- deliberately inclusive of a wide range of equity groups (women, Indigenous peoples, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, people with a disability, people living in rural and isolated areas, people who are long-term unemployed, people with low literacy skills)
- sensitive to context for individual learners, who are also family members and carers, workers (voluntary or paid) and community members
- predicated on the understanding of group overlap with the potential compounding of disadvantage: that is, people in VET are not simply women or Aboriginal or rural, and that a recognition that the disadvantages associated with membership of each group can be additive
- designed in a way which anticipates that many VET learners are moving within and between education and training sectors

Stocktake of recent literature on five groups in VET

Parallel to the longitudinal project, Golding, Volkoff and Ferrier (1997) undertook a stocktake of equity reports and literature in vocational education and training in Australia

for ANTA as an extension on an earlier review by Marshall and McGrath (1997). It scanned and summarised VET-related equity research and reports since 1990 for five ANTA nominated groups: women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with a disability, people from non-English speaking backgrounds and residents in rural and remote communities.

The stocktake was significant in that it pre-empted some themes explored in later research. In particular, it

- considered common themes for all groups (pp.55-61)
- identified two important disadvantaged groups beyond those nominated by ANTA: in particular unemployed people and people with low functional skills in English language, literacy and numeracy. Both these target groups exhibit a high level of overlap with several of the ANTA-nominated groups as well as with people in custody.
- highlighted problems with equity measurement criteria
- questioned the widespread assumption that approaches to access and equity are independent of VET provider type
- drew attention to intra-group diversity (eg by region or by cultural background)
- raised questions about the role advantage to further education and training plays for some groups (such as for those people highly educated people in work) as the flip side of disadvantage (such as for those with low literacy and/or who are unemployed)
- identified a number of key disadvantaging factors limiting access, participation and outcomes within but beyond VET, such as poverty and socio-economic status; physical, geographic and social isolation; social, racial and cultural stereotyping and attitudes; employer and employee attitudes; inaccessible information; institutional barriers; transition difficulties; program inflexibility; program irrelevance; lack of a culturally appropriate learning environment, as well as fees and charges

Literature review of VET for people from a non-English speaking background

The third joint, equity-related research was conducted during early 1998. It was a review of research conducted in Australia on vocational education and training for people from a non-English speaking background (Volkoff and Golding 1998). The review was distinctive in that it used the available literature to

- emphasise the important influences of intra-group diversity of non-English speaking people (by birthplace, age, language and culture, as well as by migration category, settlement location, literacy, education, occupation and work)
- separate VET participation effects for non-English speaking people from outcome effects
- tease out a wide range influences on non-English speaking peoples' participation and outcomes
- identify the effect of current policies, including those outside of the VET sector, which impact on participation and outcomes for people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

VET in community owned and managed providers

A national study of the delivery of vocational education by adult community education (ACE) providers was the fourth joint, equity related research (Volkoff, Golding and Jenkin 1999). The authors were joined by an additional research partner providing this project with a tri-sectoral base: university, TAFE and ACE. This research built on approaches established during the longitudinal study. In particular, it

- included providers in three states (Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia)
- focussed on learner experiences and included 656 survey responses and transcripts from 255 client interviews
- sought to include interviewees across a wide range of equity target groups
- explored the role of learner background and context in provider choice, and
- included TAFE as well as ACE learners in the sample.

Individual research

Both authors contribute equity-related perspectives derived from and contributing to other individual studies, projects and research.

Barry Golding has recently researched in four other, related fields with equity implications in VET, including

- inter-sectoral movement and recognition between the university and TAFE sectors (Golding 1999a, 1999b, 1999c), focussing in part on the equity implications of a previously unknown and unexpectedly large flow of former university students into TAFE in the 1990s in Australia
- on-line learning for Indigenous peoples in Australia for the Indigenous Open Learning Project (see OLA 1999), as part of a strategy by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to redress geographic isolation, develop culturally appropriate learning materials, access learning materials on-line and learn about information technologies
- Indigenous VET research and national policy development for the secretariat of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Training Advisory Council (ATSIPTAC 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c)
- ongoing research into rural and remote VET for the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia, focussing on community-embedded forms of VET and their role in building social capital and sustaining regional communities.

The ATSIPTAC work has included collaboration and assistance with research papers on Indigenous responses to new apprenticeships and traineeships, VET for Indigenous people in custody as well as national Indigenous VET policies. It has been overtly inclusive of and sensitive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander political, pedagogical and stakeholder perspectives within an Indigenous authorisation environment.

In addition to the joint studies, Veronica Volkoff has independently conducted research in conjunction with an AusAID, capacity building in education project in South Africa. This work, conducted jointly with Jane Perry, has focussed on the challenges of transformation of distance education to enhance its capacity to redress previous inequities and meet the needs of disadvantaged learners, particularly those in rural areas (Volkoff and Perry 1997; Perry and Volkoff 1997). It was conducted in close collaboration with the distance educators who participated in the project.

THE WAY IN WHICH EQUITY HAS BEEN UNDERSTOOD

Equity is seen as an ideal state in which the abilities, hopes and potential of all people, individuals, groups and communities are developed, realised and achieved. Equity, in a VET context, aims to create that state by matching and supporting vocational and educational aspirations with learning opportunities appropriate to individuals, groups and communities.

The joint research referred to above has been premised on the assumption that improved learning opportunities resulting in enhancement of equity and the removal or inequity can be achieved through:

- identifying and addressing the key factors predisposing individuals, groups and communities to disadvantage
- identifying and addressing factors associated with VET itself which exacerbate inequity
- increased understanding, through research, into the nature of disadvantage and inequity
- government policies and funding to address disadvantage and inequity
- increasing individual, community and lifelong learning options
- involvement of disadvantaged individual and stakeholder groups in solutions to inequity.

While the research has focussed on groups, inequity, and the disadvantaging factors associated with VET, inequity has been seen in each of these studies as something that may

- be related to membership of one or more groups
- differ by sub-group
- differ by VET sub-sector
- or may not be directly associated with VET (eg it may be related to family, work, income or location)
- manifest itself singly or in combination through access, participation, output or outcome effects
- be ongoing, transitory or recurring
- not necessarily be a one-dimensional, simple, 'point in time' measure
- relate to self-perceptions (eg self-esteem, self-image, self-motivation, self-learning), quite apart from personal skills or vocational or qualifications.

Studies undertaken of equity in VET have therefore anticipated that equity, as the ideal state, and inequity as the common reality, are usefully researched by explorations which search for evidence of inequity as it has changed over a lifetime of previous learning

- anticipate inequity at different stages in the VET journey
- sample and explore the diversity of choices of VET and less formal or accredited community provision

- anticipate inequitable limitations imposed on VET provider choice by such factors as an ability to pay, cultural and home background as well as geographic, regional, physical and social isolation
- are inclusive of VET context, location and learning style
- acknowledge individual difference and complexities
- are both person as well as 'VET client' focussed.
- Most of our research approaches have used grounded theory. Phenomena have been identified, classified, conceptualised and modelled from individual and group experiences and perceptions in order to *derive* policies, rather than using policy as a starting point. For this reason, our research tends to reflect equity (or inequity) as experienced by learners and community members, rather than as predicted by government policy. Research techniques employed have tended to triangulate between
- quantitative data (from existing enrolment or survey data, and questionnaires administered for particular research projects)
- individual accounts from focus group interview data
- policy and research literature and group stakeholder perspectives.

LIMITS AND STRENGTHS OF CURRENT VET POLICY

Our research points to six main policy concerns. They include a need to

- overtly acknowledge and address inequity as it manifests itself in a wide variety of forms and locations for individuals, groups and communities
- refocus on the need for adequately funded, initial and recurrent public education and training, in a variety of forms (TAFE, labour market programs, adult literacy and basic education) accessible to a wide range of groups
- recognise the value of lifelong learning in all its forms, including in community contexts
- ensure that the solutions to inequity, like the issues associated with its causes, are multi-dimensional and addressed through collaborative action on a range of fronts (Commonwealth, State, region, community, individual, stakeholder groups) and by a range of means (research, action, policy, funding) rather than one action on a single front through a single source
- recognise the debilitating effects of multiple disadvantage and inequity within and between groups, particularly those associated with poverty, low skills and long term unemployment
- acknowledge the role advantage plays in inequity (such as those associated with work, gender, university education, income, socio-economic status)

PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Our research has identified shortcomings of research by group which does not also look across and within groups, between and within sectors, along lifetimes or which do not acknowledge stakeholder perspectives. There is therefore a priority for research to be undertaken which better addresses these four needs.

There is therefore a need for research to explore the effects of the diversity which exists within groups. It is clear that within groups of women, people from non-English speaking backgrounds and people who live in rural and isolated areas in particular, there is an immense diversity in relation to many of the factors which indicate or correlate with disadvantage in its many forms. Variations in employment and social and economic status, level and quality of previous education, attitudes towards education and training, family responsibilities and expectations, access to information about education and training options and levels of confidence and self-esteem contribute to the very different individual and group circumstances of current as well as potential VET participants.

By contrast, the immediate effects of low skills, and particularly low literacy skills on successful access, participation and outcomes of education and training are very clear in our research. The evidence is even stronger that the combined effects of low skills and long term unemployment act to severely disadvantage individuals in relation to education and training, whatever their membership of other groups may be. This disadvantage acts in different but cumulative ways for individuals experiencing more than one type of disadvantage as a pre-program effect, as well as limiting equity by adversely affecting access, participation and outcomes.

Three new groups only obliquely referred to in ANTA's *Equity 2001* have been identified as priority groups for targeting by ANTA. They are long term unemployed people, people with limited skills (literacy, numeracy and social) and people in custody. The first two groups were identified as targeted groups in *Common and agreed national goals for vocational education and training in Australia* (DEET 1991) and later by *Towards a Skilled Australia* (ANTA 1994). The specific needs of young and unemployed people were not recommended at that time for inclusion in the ANTA Review (Taylor 1996) as a specific target group, because a range of Commonwealth policies and programs were already in place (p.150). That situation would appear to have changed (Dusseldorp 1999).

People in any one of these three groups are more likely to have

- very low levels of previous school education, and for the experience of that education to have been unsatisfactory
- very limited ability to access and achieve direct vocational outcomes from one post-school education and training course
- very limited opportunities to participate in employer initiated training
- a high risk of being systematically excluded from VET and the workforce in the long term unless their specific needs are targeted and addressed
- a greater likelihood of also belonging to one of the other two groups, as well as to some other groups already targeted by ANTA
- a high risk of experiencing long term social and economic disadvantage without targeted assistance.

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Equity: VET for the good of the nation

Ian Falk

ABOUT EQUITY

Equity is an important concept that allows us to examine the consequences of the “walls around VET” (Scollay, 1999). This paper makes explicit the socio-cultural ideological bases currently informing VET policy to show the direct equity consequences for actual and potential VET stakeholders.

Equity is defined as “The quality of being fair and impartial” (Macquarie Everyday Dictionary, 1990, p. 222). Fair means “Free from bias, dishonesty or injustice” (p. 234), and impartial means “...unbiased, just” (p. 333). In other words, fair and impartial mean approximately the same thing. Freedom from bias, dishonesty and injustice seem such common sense goals, along with achieving a democratic society, yet equity needs to be explicitly addressed in policy - it is apparently not so common sense that it is common.

But you cannot have “equity”, you can only have equity *about something*. Equity, like so many other English terms, is a nominalisation of a generalisation. It has to be situated in order to have meaning at a practical level. So in this paper, I am discussing equity in relation to VET. VET itself is situated in a socio-cultural context, for example, historically VET stems from a white, male, Anglo-Saxon, economics, managerialist, big industry framework. It is features of the socio-cultural context such as these that start to muddy the water - or they seem to muddy the water, and the reader’s response is often - well it’s all too hard, too contentious, too apparently “ideological”, so I’ll just stick with “equity=equal”. Often, it is the researcher who, in pointing out that something is ideological, gets tarred with the ideological brush.

The underlying problem with the term “equity”, and one we all call on from time to time, is that it is like the word “equal”, which is often taken to mean “the same”. It is transparent to everyone that not all people are the same, and it is this simple confusion that has taken equity out of the realm of “common sense” and put it in, often, the too-hard basket. Because of the all-pervading view that we in Australia live on a society that is mainly inhabited by the one kind of like-minded people who, for all intents and purposes have the same (there it is again!) aspirations for self, family and country, we divide the population into two groups: “Mainstream” and “Other”. “Mainstream” is usually taken to be the majority, while “Other” consists of “minority groups”. Minority groups, while important, do not constitute the majority of the population. In democracy, the majority rules. In fact it is this misconception that Mainstream+Majority=right, and that if we get one policy for the Mainstream, we’ll be getting it right for the majority, that informs a large proportion of government policy now and in the past, and the present ANTA conception of equity is no exception. Let me explain.

I suppose you have all tried adding up the populations of nominated equity groups and comparing that with the overall population? Of course, there are overlaps, and it is important not to exaggerate

here. Golding, Volkoff and Ferrier (1997) estimate that two thirds of ANTA's potential clients are in designated equity groups. Let's have a try, using ANTA's equity groupings (ibid pp. 12 ff):

Women	52%
Indigenous	2%
Disabled people	15% of working age people
NESB	14%
Literacy & numeracy	31% (based on ANTA's quoted ABS 1996 6.2 million)
Rural & isolated	30%

Simplistically, and even allowing for multiple memberships, this still adds up to significantly more than 50%, so calling into question the naive conception of "mainstream" based on simple majority principles - a point Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope, as well as Golding, Volkoff and Ferrier, have been making for some years now.

Add to this the argument that equity groups are only likely to improve their position by positive yet sensitive and collaborative intervention, and there is a sound case for funding over and above the equity=equal funding formula. On a level playing field, this would entitle the Indigenous population, for example, to some 2% of mainstream and 2% of equity funds because that is the percent of the Indigenous population. However, the playing field is anything but even to begin with. It is because equity is not easy, because it is contested and because the socio-cultural context *is* ideological that established policy orientations should always be re-examined in the light of the socio-culturally situated meanings of the words, rather than in the light of policy definitions. Workshops such as this one are brought into existence to create a space to pause and reflect on how policy and practice is or is not meeting the "common sense" challenges of equity.

Aspects of the present socio-cultural framework within which the dominant global ideologies can be seen to have influence, and the ways in which they impact on VET, are summarised in the table at Appendix A. Readers are cautioned that this table does not provide a historical view of the socio-cultural context, and therefore misses the ideologies of VET related to its particular gender, ethnic and socio-economic character.

The paper is set out in four main sections:

- My position on the way equity should be understood and a framework for understanding it;
- That's all very well, but what can we do *now*? Some possible short-term fixes for VET policy;
- Priorities for longer-term research: *Will the existing model (skills-for-industry) deliver the hoped for outcomes?*
- Appendices: (a) Table relating socio-economic trends to VET needs, (b) listing of CRLRA work on equity;

I will incorporate both my own views and research in these areas, as well as bring to it the views and research of those in the CRLRA who have been able to contribute to this paper.

POSITION ON THE WAY EQUITY SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD

The themes of the existing VET context can be gauged from the ANTA document, *A Bridge to the Future*. The ANTA Mission is:

To ensure that the skills of the Australian labour force are sufficient to support internationally competitive commerce and industry and to provide individuals with opportunities to optimise their potential.

The themes are:

- VET is about the national interest (“Australian”);
- VET is about serving the stakeholder of VET which is industry (“...to support...commerce and industry”);
- VET is about “...skills of the labour force (ital mine) to support industry
- VET is about economics (“...competitive commerce”); and
- VET is about providing “...individuals with opportunities to optimise their potential”

Two matters are not immediately clear. The first is, Who is the labour force? Officially (ABS), the labour force is anyone over 15 who is in employment or who is actively seeking employment. ANTA’s Mission cannot mean this in terms of the present only, since this would rule out planning and preparing our national skill resources for future needs, so “labour force” must mean those who might be in employment at some point in the (at least near) future. Given that VET deals with post-compulsory age groups, and that many of that group may seek employment at some time in the future, what then is the difference between *labour force* and *population over 15 years old*? The second unclear matter is the meaning of “...and to provide individuals with opportunities to optimise their potential”. How would providing individuals with opportunities to optimise their potential differ from preparing the population over 15 for present and future work readiness? How does “individuals” differ from “labour market”?

Any general statement aimed at capturing these themes would reflect the way in which individuals and their capacities (skills, potentials) are useful to industry in internationally competitive scenarios which further the assumption of national wellbeing in some way.

It would seem important - if not crucial - to be clear about the nature of “industry”, and its contribution to the nation, since industry is assumed to be the agent to transform the individual skills into a national advancement. Yet from other work we know that there are two issues in relation to industry that need to be understood if it is to be said that their role is to contribute to the national wellbeing: One is that the term “industry” is a difficult one to get hold of. The Macquarie Dictionary defines industry as “1. a particular branch of trade or manufacture. 2. any large-scale business activity. 3 manufacture or trade as a whole ...” Since there are no longer any designated industry groups in Australia, this provides a starting point. The second is that there are questions and qualifications about the value of industry to any nation’s wellbeing, and about accepting a universal generality that goes “the more industry there is, the better it is”.

First. "industry" is an amorphous and often meaningless term unless situated (Rod McDonald, John Stevenson and Stephen Billett have all noted this, though my apologies for not having tracked down the specific references as yet. It is a point supported by Falk (1998) who notes that geographic communities have the right and power to be involved in their own planning and development, and do in fact act as an engine room of vocational creation. Industries and associated vocational learning at the local level are often unrecognised as such, and so are not part of the VET system. The message is clear - small business is recognised as not being serviced well by VET. With 50% (there go those numbers again!) of the Australian workforce in small business, there is an equity issue here for this sector. It needs to be said that this 50% of the workforce would not be cross members with other "equity" groups, except perhaps women, to any significant degree.

Small businesses prefer to recruit workers who already have the skills they need (CRLRA, 1999). Workers in small businesses have to move from business to business to move up career ladders. The onus is on the small business worker to participate in and pay for lifelong learning. Kilpatrick and Crowley (forthcoming), in a recent study of learning and training in small businesses, recommend that:

The implications of low small business participation in training on policy goals for the education and training of the workforce as a whole should be further investigated. If training, especially by courses, does not deliver sufficient benefits to justify widespread small business investment in training, then consideration should be given to who pays for the cost of training the small business workforce. (p.43)

Second is the matter of the unfettered assumption that the more [big] industry there is, the better it is for the national wellbeing. Economies of scale by big industry allow investment in research and development. In these days of the information economy, however, there is a complex relationship between large and small firms that provides efficiencies. Middle sized firms are sandwiched between small and large. In terms of employment opportunities and associated skills, small-medium firms have a huge role. In terms of production, large firms contribute most. Clearly, in VEET our concern is primarily on the skills for employment side, and small business's role is enormous here.

Another view is provided by commentators such as Saul (1996) and Theobald (1997) who make the point that the large multinationals who engage in takeover syndrome to increase their profits are responsible for a massive decrease in the availability of jobs. The outcome of their actions, in its sole accountability framework to "shareholders", works in favour of ever increasing retrenchments from restructuring, global re-positioning (figuratively and literally). The outcome is that jobs are permanently lost. Along with the declarations of key financial figures around the world, such as the ex-head of Australia's Reserve Bank, the boss of the World Bank, and others, it is clear that nations and their policy response units must adopt increasingly different strategies in their battle to do justice both to their political bosses. Jozefa Sobski (1999), reflecting on a comparative international VET scenario concludes that "Our emphasis on industry leadership rather than on social partnership, however, is in need of review given that it owes more to policy rhetoric rather than practical reality" (p. 27).

Stemming from the definitional issues, the first point to be made is "equity for what?" What is the situation that we are considering in relation to equity? In the case of VET, there are three main groups of people for whom equity is a potential issue: (a) those within and officially recognised as

VET clients by the system, (b) those who are recognised VET client groups, including designated equity groups, and who therefore should be within the VET system of provision at present but who are not, and (c) those who are presently not considered to be “part of the VET system” but who arguably should be entitled to be considered as part of it. For those within the system the questions will relate to matters of their “equitable” representation in courses and provision. For those not within the system the matter is more complex: Who *should* access VET? Why aren’t they? Why not? Is it a question of participation, or is it a question of entitlement? Should a social justice notion prevail, or should a modified local solutions for local inclusion model be favoured?

Those within the system and those who are not

Equity issues for those in the system are currently being addressed through the ANTA through its recognised equity group model, collaborative planning approach, professional development programs (what are these, by the way? – eg. Best practice in Indigenous Training, best practice in training for disabled people - etc) and progressive modification of strategic development of the equity program.

Groups and individuals recognised as having an entitlement to be in the system but who are not represented in sufficient numbers are often those embraced by a “participation” approach. Standard equity groups are identified and their participation rates are measured against demographic statistics. Good examples of these are found in the Appendices to the ANTA (1998) paper *Achieving Equitable Outcomes*. Thoughtful and clear summaries are presented about the groups reported on.

But what of those not in the system, not reported on in this way, but seem to fall in the cracks between policy and rhetoric? The main and obvious groups falling into this category are:

The unemployed

Recognised universally as a “problem” for Australia because of the changing nature of work and its simple availability, the unemployed are not presently recognised as an equity group or for explicit training needs.

Small business

Small business continues to be one of the key groups here. The Council of Small Business of Australia concludes that 95% of businesses in Australia are small - higher in regional Australia - employing around half the workforce, and accounting for 40% of GNP. (Council of Small Business of Australia COSBOA1997 *Jobs in our Regions*). Yet Kilpatrick & Crowley (forthcoming) find that small business does not have a voice in VET provision. Although small businesses in the traditional trades areas continue to use the VET system to train apprentices and in some cases trainees, small business owners and managers do not look to the VET system for their own on-going learning, or for the post-initial skills development of their employees. The low rate of participation in training, especially by owners, and the preference for informal learning methods revealed in this study are consistent with a suspicion of more formalised training among many small business owners, and a perception that training policy was irrelevant. Small businesses tend to prefer to learn using practices such as on-the-job learning and training from suppliers and seminars run by known, usually industry, organisations. In theory this fits well with the current approach of training packages and user choice. In practice, few small businesses are taking advantage of the formal training system to have skills gained in other ways recognised, nor do they access the formal training system to guide them in learning or training choices. (pp.40-41)

People with literacy and numeracy needs

Those with insufficient literacy and numeracy skills for particular purposes are noted in the body of the ANTA paper (1998) pages 2, 15), these people are deleted from the crucial strategic and monitoring frameworks (pages 5-7). That is, they are known and documented, but not finally included for support. There are perhaps good reasons for this omission, but there is no explanation, and the fact remains that this group is unresourced through the VET policy area.

Those who are presently not considered to be "part of the VET system" but who arguably should be

Of course, the wider question underlying the latter point about people outside the system is related to the "walls around VET" with the term VET the perfect example: I have for many years been arguing that the term VET causes its own equity barriers by excluding groups by definition. This matter is not as trivial as it might at first appear, as I document in Falk (1998 and 1999) specifically. These groups are in two areas (a) much of what is called small, especially micro and home business such as market-stall operators and vocational clubs such as pottery, jewellery, embroidery and sewing (Falk & Harrison, 1998), vocational learning which is not 'accredited' often called informal vocational learning which is therefore dismissed as "not real VET", agricultural "extension" activities, many traditional Indigenous vocational learning areas and styles and "Community-" and "Regional Development"; and (b) the definitional implications of VET as large, historically male-dominated, 'training/large group' delivery, Anglo-Saxon industry model.

Actual or potential – or – actual and potential? Walls around VET

Pointing out that there are actual and potential stakeholders for VET delivery that may or may not presently be catered for or thought of is an important issue, especially in light of the ANTA Mission to address the national interest. However, this is often argued to be offset by policy imperatives related to political and resourcing requirements. Among these are the shrinking resource environment and the portfolio problem where buckets of funds for particular policy initiatives are bound against particular criteria and accountability measures. The real question for policy-makers is how to be even-handed and equitable in a political and changing environment. Longer term policy overhaul or radical change must be balanced against short-term priorities. The result is often one where policy edges are tampered with rather than real change made. As Loble (1999) states, "...a good policy...has to be balanced against what can be implemented realistically" p. 23).

Clearly, those being funded now are being privileged above those who are not. It is relatively easy to argue that "we cannot include other groups in VET because there simply isn't the resource base". Such an argument is iniquitous, especially if it is seen to continue privileging groups who are already well-off (such as much of big business). The difficult response is to avoid using actual or potential as a criteria for funding cut-off. False binaries such as this suggest by their construction that a matter can only be one thing or the other. The important equity consideration is to open up the policy-making options (sometimes characterised as the "walls around VET") to debate about actual and potential VET stakeholders. Here, the playing field is more level. Comes the time when the socio-cultural context, seen as ideological when viewed against the history of the industrial revolution,

big industry, male-dominated trades and big city agenda should be made transparent, and all potential stakeholders are given a chance to compete for VET resources.

Some possible short-term fixes for VET policy

I have already noted that current VET equity policy has some considerable impact through the policy and work so far done. There is a strong skeleton for further action provided in the ANTA Achieving Equitable Outcomes (1998) paper. There are some obvious areas in which constructive suggestions can be made about VET policy advancement in relation to equity.

- To re-examine the Conceptual and Strategic frameworks on pages 4-5 of ANTA's policy (1998) with a view to specifying more precisely which aspects of which models are drawn on. The reader of this document finds that equity is translated into three elements of a strategic framework, namely (a) structural inequities, (b) targeted responses, and (c) resource allocation (p. 6). A closer reading establishes that all these strategies are internal to the VET system. This in turn translates into Key Performance Measures of participation, outputs and outcomes, with a foreshadowed KPM of capacity of systemic response. There is no mention of equity in relation to inclusiveness around the definitional and structural barriers to participation in VET;
- To collaboratively extend the strategic framework for implementing equity reform with regions, communities, peak groups, policy officers across portfolios, practitioners and researchers. The existing problems I think are that there are two main equity groups omitted from the strategic framework – literacy and numeracy (while I understand special reasons for its omission, it is still a problem deleting from equity groups), and the pool of non-employed, including especially youth and those aged 40-45 plus who are retrenched or 'retired';
- To resource the strategic implementation more fully, since it seems that the equity area runs out of money quickly. The informing principle for budgetary allocation should include an explanatory section related to the false equation between equity and equality. The Conceptual and Strategic frameworks pages 4-5 of ANTA's policy (1998) appears to outline the possible approaches, but does not strategically implement these approaches in such a way that possibly excluded equity groups (included here are groups excluded by definition - for example, community and regional development and much of small business);
- To work more closely across portfolio boundaries to identify specific equity groups across the full range of policy areas, and to find out the circumstances that 'make' them equity cases. Good examples of this have occurred recently with the Rural Skills Forum between AFFA and ANTA. Further work could occur in the area of small business policy support, where interventions in informal learning and non-accredited training are left to government departments responsible for small business or development, and trade and industry bodies, while formal training is part of VET policy and education and training departments;
- To provide collaboratively designed professional development packages and information for small, medium and big business and community groups which clearly explains about the simple myths, legislative matters and management strategies in relation to equity groups;

PRIORITIES FOR LONGER-TERM RESEARCH:

Will the existing model (skills-for-industry) deliver the hoped for outcomes? The most important gap in VET research, policy and practice is still cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral work. The walls around VET are still big and strong, and characteristic of all closed systems, the common values and social cohesion lack externality and historicity (eg., Falk, September 1999). In fact, this is still the most frequent comment that enterprises make of VET (Falk, 1999). It is now well-established that equitable, successful and sustainable solutions to development needs must be collaboratively planned, developed, implemented and maintained at the local level (eg., Kilpatrick, et al, 1999; Walzer, 1996). State and national support to regional (urban and rural) development is important, but should be seen as a partnership rather than as a top-down mandate. All future planning and research, therefore, must be considered in this light – that establishing local solutions for identified local planning needs is the first and most important step in the provision of meaningful and sustainable VET solutions for Australia.

By bearing the above in mind, a research agenda can be mapped. The suggestions below are a start, and need to be supplemented by more specific topics in all areas:

- Conduct a cross-sectoral, cross-portfolio VET stakeholder analysis. There is a need to penetrate the walls around VET. A stakeholder analysis of actual and potential stakeholders for VET would need to use non-VET language to explain its purpose, since use of acronyms and related jargon automatically excludes potential players;
- Develop and evaluate systemic models of VET management and provision that are cross-sectoral, and therefore fulfil the requirement to be collaborative regional and community planning and provision solutions;
- Develop a macro VET model which would guide VET's impact on national socio-economic wellbeing;
- Establish implications of a regional VET planning model for State and national policy;

Appendix A: Table relating socio-economic trends to employment, education and training needs

SOCIO-ECON. TREND	SOCIAL MANIFESTATION	EFFECTS ON EDUCATION & TRAINING	IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION & TRAINING
1 Declining credibility of globalisation & economic rationalism theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public support for single-purpose and fringe political parties • failure of global markets to support economic predictions • failure of 'export or bust' to cure economic woes • Asian crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strengthened expectations on VET to shore up economic outputs • policy flux • widening gap between those who receive support for VET and those who do not 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • need for strengthened policy and funding support for an inclusive and public good thrust in VET • need for support for VET's role as a team player in achieving regional and national goals • Local responses to local conditions in a global framework • need for an actioned policy on participation and inclusiveness with RPL/RCC that works for all
2 Metro-centrism & Urban	• rural population decline	• thin markets	• delivery & provision

drift	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> youth decline volunteers decline government, health, education, commercial services decline rural poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> duplication of socio-economic problems in urban as well as rural areas financial problems of accessing provision and services, often manifest as transport or child care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> needs to change radically learning & delivery styles rise in use of paper-based, electronic delivery, telemedicine provide more appropriate rural VET training & prof. dev. of providers of learning and leadership review RPL/RCC to be equitable and achievable
3 Schooling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> for the 'mainstream' 'basic skills' emphasis higher accountability at school level centralised not regionalised less integrated with community negativity towards education and training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> large 'minority' disenfranchised large proportion school non-completion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> delivery & provision needs to be tailored locally learning & delivery styles entry-level training/re-training throughout life literacy & numeracy required through life
4 Revision of nation's literacy and numeracy needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> blame schools, blame welfare recipients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reallocate resources to schools (VET, literacy assessment programs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> intersects with advent of print-based Training Packages and unsupported learning modes
5 Nature of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> changing nature of work need to change jobs often skills get outdated quickly jobs disappearing (no work) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'broader but shallower' jobs new VET initiatives go to those already well off or employed (eg. VET in schools opportunities go mainly to white, middle class Anglo-Australians inappropriateness of existing VET supply 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> discriminate rise in use of electronic delivery, telemedicine entry-level training/re-training throughout life literacy & numeracy required through life RPL/RCC strengthened to support changed and changes in achieving seamless pathways broader educational component in training to facilitate transfer of skills to other jobs WORDING???
6 Unemployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> unemployed younger people unemployed older people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> purpose for training & education lacks meaning without redefinition blurred distinction between learning for work, Leisure, community (ACE/VET) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> learning & delivery styles entry-level training/re-training throughout life explicit training for work, leisure & community literacy & numeracy required through life provide more lifelong learning Review RPL/RCC
7 Policy/program environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> change of policy (eg. SIP, LMP, CES) top down rather than community driven 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> metro-centric (urban, metro-mainstream) model of service & program delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'big industry' model of funding, delivery & evaluation policy Chop/Change/Cut profile is self-defeating
8 Ageing population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> health time & leisure as a resource grey lobby groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> leisure & learning for life part-time work & contracts blurred distinction between learning for work, leisure, community (ACE/VET) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> learning & delivery styles entry-level training/re-training throughout life U-3A, School for seniors skill mix need for leadership development
9 Changing definitions of & expectations of community, environment & rurality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> responsiveness to change (closed or open) schooling leadership learning volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> much voc educ provision not recognised as such: eg. regional development, field days, extension, Landcare inappropriateness of some existing VET courses, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> delivery & provision needs to be tailored locally learning & delivery styles entry-level training/re-training throughout life RPL/RCC increased

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delivery blurred distinction between learning for work, leisure, community (ACE/VET) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • importance - needs review to work • explicit training for work, leisure & community • need community leadership development
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Appendix B: CRLRA work on equity

This Appendix lists the existing published work of the CRLRA under four headings – three headings from the previous section to help show how we have been addressing the immediate concerns around equity matters in Australia as identified in the Mission. The fourth heading to follow that will set out how we are addressing the longer term issue of working with policy-makers to ensure VET’s overall positive relevance and impact on social cohesion and the national socio-economic wellbeing.

- **Those within the system**

Falk, I. & Golding, B. (1999). A view from the Centre: Equity and VET in regional Australia. *Training Agenda: A Journal of Vocational Education and Training*. 7(1), pp. 6-7.

Falk, I. (1998). Formal learning versus real-life learning: Why V.E.T. in schools works. *Vocal: The Australian Journal of Vocational Education and Training in Schools*, (1)1, pp. 48-51.

- (b) **Those who should be within the system at present but who are not sufficiently**

Falk, I. (1998). Vocational education and training policy and reality. *Convergence: International Journal of Adult Education*, (31)3, pp. 38-49.

Falk, I. (1999). The convergence of vocational and adult education in learning communities. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, (23)7 (October 1999) USA: Taylor & Francis.

- Small business**

Kilpatrick, S. and Crowley, S. (forthcoming) *Learning and Training: Enhancing small business success*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide.

Kilpatrick, S. and Johns, S. (1999) *Managing Farming: How farmers learn*. RIRDC Publication No 99/31. Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, Canberra.

Kilpatrick, S. and Rosenblatt, T. (1998) Information vs Training: Issues in Farmer Learning. *Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension*. 5, 1, 39-51.

- People with literacy and numeracy needs**

Falk, I. & Kilpatrick, S. (July 1999). Numeracy, literacy, self-confidence and values: Chickens, eggs and “access”. Chapter in I. Falk & C. Hiller (Eds.) (Forthcoming mid-1999). *Language, culture and work: Teaching and training for diversity*. Melbourne: Language Australia.

Falk, I. & Hiller, C. (Eds.) (July 1999). *Language, culture and work: Teaching and training for diversity*. Canberra: National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia.

Falk, I. (Ed.) (1996). *Literacy, adults and diversity*. Canberra: National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia. With Penson, M.

Norton, M. & Falk, I. (1992). Adults and Reading Disability: A New Field of Inquiry. *International Journal of Disability, Development & Education*, (39), pp. 185-196.

- (c) **Those who are presently not considered to be “part of the VET system” but who arguably should be**

Falk, I. & Golding, B. (1999). A view from the Centre: Equity and VET in regional Australia. *Training Agenda: A Journal of Vocational Education and Training*. 7(1), pp. 6-7.

- Falk, I. (1998). *How does the meaning of 'vocation' influence access to V.E.T.?* In the proceedings for the national conference of the Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association (AVETRA), UTS, Sydney, 16-17 Feb. 1998.
- Falk, I. & Harrison, L. (1998). Community learning and social capital: "Just having a little chat". *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, (50)4, pp. 609-627. Triangle Journals: UK.
- Kilpatrick, S., Morgan, H. & Falk, I. (1998) Change, Visions and Values and Nonformal Education. *Australian Journal of Adult and Community Education*, (38)1, pp. 3-8.

• **VET, equity and lifelong learning: Impact on the national socio-economic wellbeing**

- Falk, I. & Harrison, L. (1999). Indicators of social capital: Social capital as the product of local interactive learning processes. *Learning Communities: International Journal of Vocational Learning*, (1)1.
- Falk, I. (Ed.) (Forthcoming December 1999). *Dead Centre: Integrated learning approaches to sustainable development*. South Australia: NCVER.
- Falk, I. (September 1999). The social battlefield: What does existing research on social capital mean for families? In I. Winter (Ed.) *Social capital and social policy in Australia*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Falk, I. (Ed.). (1998). *Learning communities, regional sustainability and the learning society. Volumes 1 and 2*. Launceston, Tasmania: Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia.
- Falk, I. (1998). You can take the \$ out of the \$ocial, but it doesn't make much 'cents': The learning community as a means of reconciliation. In F. Ferrier & D. Anderson (Eds.), *Different drums one beat: Economic and social goals in education and training*, pp. 146-158, Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).
- Falk, I. (1997). Community learning: Using learning to reconceptualise community wellbeing. In L. Mesiti & F. Vanclay (Eds.) *Sustainability and Social Research*, pp. 23-42. Wagga Wagga: Centre for Rural Social Research, Charles Sturt University.
- Falk, I. (1995). Evaluation of the quality agenda: A critical framework? *Critical Forum: International Journal of Adult Literacies and Learning*, (4)3, pp. 36-45.
- Falk, I. (1994). Collaborative negotiation and power: Vocational education, corporatism and social policy. In P. O'Connor (Ed.), *Thinking work: Volume One, Theoretical perspectives on workers' literacies*, pp. 216-234. Sydney: ALBSAC.
- Kilpatrick, S., Falk, I. and Harrison, L. (1998) Learning in Rural Communities: A response to rapid economic change. Rapid Economic Change and Lifelong Learning: A national conference, Centre for the Economics of Education and Training, Monash University, Melbourne, 31 August (forthcoming).

An overview of current equity research in the national program

Jennifer Gibb

This paper provides information about all the current and recent projects which relate to equity and which are being conducted

- for the National Research and Evaluation Committee (NREC)
- by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)

There are over 30 projects listed in this paper. In order to place them in context the paper includes a brief summary of

- Key definitions that relate to equity
- The national approach to equity in VET

The projects are organised according to whether they are consolidation studies or major studies and then they are listed under the following headings:

General equity

- Women
- Students with disabilities
- Indigenous students
- Young people
- Remote and rural students
- Students from non-English speaking backgrounds
- Students in correctional institutions.

The NREC funded studies are either consolidation studies or major studies which focus on a particular aspect of VET for these groups – such as support required in order to achieve optimal outcomes, learning technologies or small business.

The NCVER program of research concentrates mainly on outcomes for various groups of VET students (particularly apprentices and trainees). NCVER has also produced a series of statistical overviews which document the data on participation and module completions achieved by the various groups of students.

So far there has been no specific focus on groups of students who belong to more than one equity group or on common causes of disadvantage. There has been little research done on students in correctional institutions and those students with inadequate levels of literacy and numeracy.

DEFINITIONS

Definitions of some common terms used throughout the literature on specific client groups in VET taken from Stocktake of *Equity Reports and Literature in VET* (ANTA, 1997a) and *Achieving equitable outcomes: a supporting paper to Australia's National Strategy for VET 1998-2003* (ANTA, 1998c)

Equity

Equity can be viewed as a long-term goal, with improving access and participation as steps towards its achievement.

Notions of equity in education have been based on social justice ideals" the right of all people to share equally in the benefits of society. More recently, though a different conception of equity has appeared in the education literature. In this recent interpretation, equity is conceived as necessary for the development of human potential, which in turn is necessary for the achievement of economic success (quoted in ANTA, 1997, taken from Ferrier 1995)

Access

The quantitative definition of access to VET by group is the proportion of total VET commencers in a group.

The qualitative definition of access to VET covers the process associated with getting started in VET.

Participation

Quantitative definition: participation measures all students in a particular group expressed as a percentage of the total population within the same age group.

Qualitative definition: Participation refers to the action, perceptions and experiences of people during their education and training.

Outcomes

Outcomes relate to the question *Does VET benefit individual client groups?* They focus broadly on the resultant effects of participation in VET.

Quantitative measures include employment outcomes, earnings, and numbers of students returning to do further study.

Student and employer satisfaction surveys and the new student outcomes survey are used to investigate the actions, perceptions and experiences, complete or incomplete of students or their employers.

Outputs

Outputs generally focus on program outputs such as module or course completion, success or retention. Outputs can be considered in relation to the question *How many of the people who enroll actually complete the unit of study or module?*

Social justice approach to equity

(Source: ANTA (1998) *Achieving equitable outcomes: a supporting paper to Australia's National Strategy for VET 1998-2003*, ANTA, Brisbane)

A social justice framework focuses attention on the broader range of life experiences and circumstances as well as VET experience itself. There is recognition that economic, social, attitudinal, legislative and administrative factors may be impediments to equitable participation in VET. This approach to equity is based on a commitment to ensuring that the outcomes of education and training are not hindered by factors beyond the individual's control or influence. Within a social justice framework VET is viewed as a means through which to overcome social inequality and achieve an informed and just society... A social justice model supports government intervention and equity programs aimed at narrowing differences in education and training outcomes for specified groups. This approach allows for the specific and targeting of programs and resources while taking less account of the market and individual client needs.

Managing diversity approach to equity

(Source: ANTA (1998) *Achieving equitable outcomes: a supporting paper to Australia's National Strategy for VET 1998-2003*, ANTA, Brisbane)

Managing diversity stresses corporate responsibility to create and develop strategies and outcomes that are responsive to the needs of a diverse client base. . This approach to equity aims to optimise the investment in VET by encouraging a full diversity of clients. The VET system becomes a means by which the workforce and society at large can recognise and benefit from diversity. Managing diversity calls on the system to reflect the diversity of its client base in its structures, personnel and employment practices and in the VET context to adjust teaching, training, learning and assessment to encompass difference. Development of an ethos of inclusiveness, respect for difference and the inclusion of people from a range of client groups in decision making processes are major aspects of this approach. Managing diversity offers a positive response to changing workforce and population characteristics without targeting particular groups or identifying specific areas of disadvantage.

Individual client groups

In 1996 the Australian National Training Authority started to gather data on participation and attainment of individual client groups within VET.

These individual client groups were identified as:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Women

People from a non-English speaking background

People with a disability

People in rural and remote communities

ANTA (1996b and 1997a) provides data on participation and attainment based on ABS data, NCVER data and DEET data (1993 and 1994) as well as an annotated bibliography of reports published during the period 1990-1995.

ANTA (1997a) identified these 5 groups as the ANTA designated 'equity target groups' but noted that

There were other groups such as long term unemployed, those in corrections facilities, people with limited previous education and training

There are people who are members of more than one group and who therefore experience compounding disadvantage

Since 1996 (1996c, 1997b, 1998a) ANTA has included data on participation and outcomes in its annual report *Benchmarking VET – the Performance of the VET sector (volume 3)*. The groups it provided data for included women, men, regions as well as aboriginal and Torres strait islander peoples, people from non-English speaking backgrounds (country of birth and language spoken at home) and people with a disability.

PRIORITY AREAS FOR RESEARCH IN THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR VET

In 1997 NCVER published The National Research and Evaluation Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1997-2000 identified six key priority areas for research:

- Economic and social implications of VET
- Employment and the workforce
- Pathways from school to work
- Outcomes of the VET sector
- Future issues affecting the VET sector.

Four of these priority areas included a direct focus on participation in VET of groups such as

- Early school leavers
- Indigenous people
- Women
- People from rural/non-metropolitan areas
- People whose first language is not English
- People with disabilities

The themes that focused on these equity groups within these four priority areas were:

Economic and social implications of VET: how participation of the groups has changed over time and what factors drive these changes; this priority area also included a focus on the involvement of the adult community education sector in VET.

Pathways from school to work: how effective apprenticeship and traineeship arrangements are in meeting the needs of different groups of young Australians.

Outcomes of VET: outcomes being achieved by different groups of trainees/students

Quality of provision of VET: comprehensive examination of different learning styles and pedagogies with particular emphasis on developing more effective training strategies to meet the needs of different groups of Australians such as indigenous Australians, people from ethnic backgrounds and educationally disadvantaged students.

Achieving equitable outcomes

In 1998 the Australian National Training Authority published its National Strategy for VET 1998-2003 which identified five key objectives:

- Equipping Australians for the world of work
- Enhancing mobility in the labour market
- Achieving equitable outcomes in VET
- Increasing investment in training
- Maximising the value of public vocational education and training expenditure.

ANTA (1998b) describes the outcome of the objective *achieving equitable outcomes* as Increased and improved access to and outcomes from vocational education and training in identified areas of disadvantage, including those areas highlighted in this strategy. (p. 16)

Specific priorities

Specific priorities to address areas of disadvantage include:

- Increasing participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in VET, particularly higher award programs, improved retention and completion rates and improved employment outcomes.
- Increasing participation, retention and completion rate in VET for people with a disability, particularly in higher level and employment based training.
- Expansion of structured, nationally recognised training opportunities to areas where high numbers of women are employed and increased participation by women in training for emerging areas of unemployment
- Expansion of the range of programs undertaken by people in rural and remote communities, including programs that take advantage of computer technology.
- Promotion of programs which link vocational outcomes with language and literacy training to clients from non-English speaking backgrounds, particularly to those in communities with high unemployment.

In 1998 ANTA also published a supporting paper to The National Strategy for VET 1998-2003. (*Achieving Equitable Outcomes*) which provides up-to-date information on the current position of specific groups in VET, to emphasise that consistent strategic action around equity is necessary and to propose how the new accountability and planning mechanisms for VET can be utilised to support the achievement of VET.

In this paper a new client group was included in the list of equity groups – people without adequate literacy and numeracy skills. This paper also acknowledged the range of approaches to equity policy in the VET sector and identified the two most commonly used as social justice and managing diversity.

Strategic approach to equity

According to the ANTA supporting paper (1998) a strategic approach to equity needs to incorporate three critical elements:

Overcoming or removing structural inequities such as student selection, staff recruitment, timetabling, delivery mechanisms

Implementation of targeted responses to equity issues – this approach focuses on solutions which assist in the achievement of the final goal – that it improved outcomes for a greater diversity of clients.

Introduction of resource allocation strategies and incentives which encourage responsiveness to client needs: within a market environment the factors that are critical in determining the extent to which equitable outcomes are achieved in VET will be the ability of clients to exercise market pressure and the role of government as purchasers of products and services.

Measuring performance of VET on equity

The supporting paper also discusses how to measure the performance of VET on equity. It notes that monitoring equity client groups is being expanded from the traditional focus on participation rates to include outputs such as module completions and outcomes such as employment, earnings and further study as well.

Monitoring of performance on equity will also focus on the capacity of the system to respond to the diversity of clients.

ISSUES FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

Issues for further consideration which emerge from the ANTA supporting paper: People without adequate literacy and numeracy skills is a group for whom little data currently has been gathered and analysed.

We need to investigate the implications for equity in VET of such factors as:

- Labour market status and terms of employment and what impact these have on access to training opportunities
- Capacity of clients to access flexible delivery services and support to pay for services not covered by government funding
- Capacity of clients to access information and make informed choice

Other policy developments

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Training Advisory Council is developing a National Strategy for VET for Indigenous People

The MCEETYA women's taskforce has developed a National Women's VET Strategy

The ANTA Disability Forum is developing a National Strategy for VET for people with a disability

Key documents

Australian National Training Authority (1998a) *Annual Report 1997 The performance of the Vet sector in 1997 (Volume 3)*, ANTA, Brisbane

Australian National Training Authority (1998b) *A Bridge to the Future: Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1998-2003*, ANTA, Brisbane

Australian National Training Authority (1998c) *Achieving equitable outcomes: a supporting paper to Australia's National Strategy for VET 1998-2003*, ANTA, Brisbane

Australian National Training Authority (1997a) *Stocktake of Equity Reports and Literature in VET*, ANTA, Brisbane

Australian National Training Authority (1997b) *Annual Report 1996 The performance of the Vet sector in 1996 (Volume 3)*, ANTA, Brisbane

Australian National Training Authority (1996a) *An approach to achieving access and equity in VET: issues paper*, ANTA, Brisbane

Australian National Training Authority (1996b) *Participation and Attainment of Individual Client Groups within VET*, ANTA, Brisbane

Australian National Training Authority (1996c) *Annual Report 1995 The performance of the Vet sector in 1995 (Volume 3)*, ANTA, Brisbane

Consolidation studies

During the period 1997-98 the main focus of equity studies funded through the National VET Research and Evaluation Program have been consolidation studies.

The aim of each consolidation study is to review the literature related to a specific area of research as well as current practice in the area, including any new policy initiatives and developments. The focus of each study is a critical literature review of Australian research since 1990 in the area. The studies aim to explain the major issues revealed by the literature, summarise the major findings and identify areas for further research. The studies which have been funded are listed below.

Women work and VET (NR 7028)

Authors: Elaine Butler, Fran Ferrier

This critical review of literature is organised into four main sections:

Locating VET – context and controversies: this section locates VET within the wider social, economic and political landscape and considers the position of women in the workforce

Women and the culture and history of VET – this section reviews data on women's participation and experiences in VET

Women equity and VET – this section investigates the relationships between women as students of VET and VET approaches to and understandings of the concept of equity.

Policy, research findings and gaps – this section presents an overview of the systemic approach to women, presents major findings and identifies potential research gaps.

Status: being prepared for printing

Access to post-secondary vocational education and training for people with disabilities (NR 7012)

Author: Elizabeth Kendell, Griffith University

The aim of this study is to examine the available literature concerning access and equity for people with disabilities in relation to post-secondary vocational education and training.

The review shows that in comparison to people without disabilities, people with disabilities continue to have difficulty accessing post-secondary school training or education. The review also deals with barriers and success factors and discussed these from the perspectives of students with disabilities, service providers and policy-makers and planners.

Status: being prepared for printing

Alternative pathways to indigenous development (NR 7010)

Author: Bob Boughton

This paper by Bob Boughton reports on a research project which set out to analyse recent research and policy documents on indigenous peoples' development needs and aspirations. The research aimed to assess the extent to which current developments in vocational education and training research and policy were sufficiently informed by this separate but related body of literature. A particular focus was the work of indigenous community-controlled organisations, and the research methodology involved close collaboration with the directors of the Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers (FIAEP).

Status: printed in 1998

Impediments to the employment of young people (NR 7015)

Author: Mark Wooden

This review identified four major impediments to higher youth employment:

The inability to maintain rates of economic growth sufficient to reduce unemployment without inducing inflationary pressures

Changes in the composition of demand for labour favouring more highly skilled workers

Systems for delivery of VET which remain poorly adapted to users' needs

Wages structures that prevent market for youth labour from clearing.

The main conclusion that is drawn from the review of literature is that despite the widespread consensus that there are insufficient employment opportunities for young people, we still do not know enough about the factors that impede employment.

Status: printed in 1998

VET in rural and remote Australia (NR 7011)

Authors: Sue Kilpatrick and Rowena Bell

The aim of this project is to review the literature and reports published or produced since 1990 which are partially or exclusively related to VET in rural/non-metropolitan Australia. The authors note that much of the literature relates to curriculum or delivery and not much relates to access, equity and training outcomes.

Status: printed in 1998

VET for people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NR 7027)

Authors: Veronica Volkoff and Barry Golding

VET for people from non-English speaking backgrounds is becoming increasingly important in Australia as the variety and origins of people from such backgrounds change and as NESB people within and outside the workplace are affected by ongoing workplace restructuring and change. This review of literature

Teases out the complexity within a simple NESB definition and effect of constantly changing migration patterns on learner diversity and potential VET clients in Australia

Identifies trends in participation in VET as well as a wide range of influences, beyond language spoken at home on NESB participation in VET

Located NESB participation in a national education and training policy context

Summarises conclusive, inconclusive and contested evidence from the literature and draws out areas for further research.

Status: printed in 1998

VET for students in correctional institutions (NR 8017)

Author: R. Semmens & J. Oldfield

This project reviews the Australian and overseas literature related to the provision of vocational education and training programs in adult and juvenile correctional institutions.

The authors note that research on VET programs for people in correctional institutions in Australia has taken place on a smaller scale than in the United States or Canada and the research has tended to be qualitative rather than quantitative. A theme that is reflected in some small studies in Australia is that VET does improve access to employment and lower recidivism but few studies identify how VET assists as there are many variables which affect why prisoners participate in programs, how they respond, the style of training and the support networks available.

Status: being prepared for printing

MAJOR PROJECTS

At present the National VET Research and Evaluation Branch has a number of major projects nearing completion. These projects are listed below. In addition NCVET through its core research, commercial services and statistical services divisions are conducting projects which relate to specific groups of VET clients. These too are listed below.

The vocational essence of ACE (NR 7023)

Authors: Veronica Volkoff, Barry Golding and Julie Jenkin

The aim of this project was to investigate the nature, extent, approaches and effectiveness of VET provision in ACE. In particular it:

Document and describes the extent and types of VET delivered by the VET sector

Identifies the strengths the ACE sector brings to this provision

Describes the challenges faced by the ACE sector in providing VET programs.

The report describes its findings in terms of ACE across the states, learners in ACE, vocational courses in ACE, learner's reasons for study, learner's reasons for choice of provider and learners projected outcomes.

This study is included in this list of equity projects because learners in ACE are generally older than learners in TAFE, are more likely to be women, are more likely to be unemployed and, if employed, are more likely to be working part-time.

Status: with marketing and publishing for final edit and layout prior to printing

Women

Women Training for Transitions (NR 5343)

Author: Mary Barrett

This report presents the views, stories and dilemmas of over 70 business owners, mainly women about the contribution of VET to their knowledge of how they run their businesses and how VET might be done differently and better.

Status: printed in 1997

(Ir)reconcilable Differences? (NR 5343)

Authors: Barbara Kempnich, Elaine Butler, Stephen Billett

This report investigates and discusses the literature on women business operators in order to augment the findings of research undertaken by Barrett (1997). An analysis of the literature of women small business operators and vocational education and training reveals a series of dilemmas for policy makers within VET:

Dilemmas with the environment in which the VET system is now located

Dilemmas relating to small business and its position within an increasingly industry driven set of policy agenda

Dilemmas relating to notions about equity both external to and within VET.

Status: with marketing and publishing for final edit and layout prior to printing

Income differences between male and female TAFE graduates (NR 8004)

Author: Tom Dumbrell

This study examines a number of aspects of the income gap between male and female TAFE graduates and identifies possible policy, operational and information options that might reduce the income back

Status: currently conducting case studies; analysis of data from graduate destination survey complete

Students with a disability

Outcome study of entry level VET on young people with disabilities (NR 7032)

Author: Bruce McAdam

This project investigates whether practices associated with the introduction of competency-based training and assessment are having a positive effect on people with disabilities. The project reports on the extent to which young people with disabilities are participating in entry level VET programs and whether they are completing the programs and gaining employment.

Status: second draft being written and project has changed in focus

Learning support needs of students with psychiatric disabilities (NR 6070)

Author: Patricia McLean, Jana Andrews

The aim of this study was to investigate the learning support needs of post-secondary students with a psychiatric disability with a view to maximising student retention rates. The project provides an insight into best practice support programs and discusses the implications for staff training. The project resulted in three products:

Project report

Resource kit for disability support staff

Resource kit for students

Status: with marketing and publishing for final edit and layout prior to printing

New and emerging technologies and their application in the VET sector for deaf and hard of hearing students (NR 8005)

Authors: Lorna Lawford

The aim of this project is to identify and review the appropriateness of the learning technologies currently being used with deaf and hard of hearing students and to identify barriers to the effective use of these technologies. It is envisaged that the project will produce advice on best practice models for use of new technologies to these students.

Status: work just started

Indigenous students

VET Pathways for Indigenous people (NR 7033)

Authors: Deborah Durnan and Bob Boughton, FAIEP

This project investigates the nature of the backgrounds and aspirations of student who enroll in the community-controlled sector, the kinds of educational choices they are making and the pathways they are taking from formal and non-formal community programs into work.

Status: final draft almost ready

Young people

Early School Leavers at Risk (NR 6197)

Authors: John McIntyre, John Freeland, Bernice Melville, Cristina Schwenke
This project explores the question of whether initial vocational education and training and associated support services assist early school leavers to negotiate an effective transition from school to adult roles. The gap between provision and demand for VET and associated services and possible barriers to full access and utilisation of available programs and services by 'at risk' early school leavers is examined with a view to identifying policy and administrative changes which could improve access.

Status: final draft almost ready

Students in rural and remote Australia

VET in small rural school communities (NR 7026)

Authors: Maureen Chiswell, Country Education Project

The project investigates the issues of pathways for young people living in rural communities in order to identify the conditions which will ensure optimal outcomes for them. The aim of the research is to identify factors that assist in cooperative and collaborative action between rural school, industry and TAFE which can be used in rural areas to support models of VET program implementation that are appropriate to the circumstances of the rural community.

Status: final draft almost ready

NCVER PROJECTS

NCVER has a number of projects in progress and recently completed that relate to equity in general as well as ones which relate to specific groups of VET clients. The core research projects focus primarily on outcomes of VET.

The statistical publications take the form of an overview. The overview series present information about specific group of students, the courses they undertook, the module outcomes they achieved as well as some information taken from the graduate destination survey. The overview is presented in the form of tables of data and some commentary and is drawn from the National VET statistics collection and National Graduate Destination Surveys.

General equity

An overview: Australian Personal Enrichment Education and Training Programs 1997 (statistical publication)

This publication provides statistical data and commentary about recreation, leisure and personal enrichment education and training activity in Australia in 1997.

Status: published in 1999

ACE: some issues (OP 192)

Edited by: A. Campbell and P. Curtin

This publication contains four issues papers related to supply and demand in ACE, community managed ACE, lifelong learning and widening participation.

Status: at the printers

Australian VET 1997: Commuter distances an overview (statistical publication)

This statistical overview analyses patterns in 1997 VET data of students commuting behavior. It relates client profiles and commuter distances (from place of residence to training provider location). It also includes an analysis of people studying by correspondence.

Status: work in progress at present

Australian VET 1997: Socioeconomic aspects: an overview (statistical publication)

This statistical overview analyses the 1997 VET data using socio-economic indicators.

Status: work in progress at present

Demographic factors influencing likelihood of success in VET (CP 9705)

Author: Katrina Ball

This project examines how effective apprenticeship and training arrangements are in meeting the needs of different groups of Australians including early school leavers, indigenous, rural and non-metropolitan youth, young people with disabilities, young people from non-English speaking backgrounds and other young people in economically-depressed localities.

Status: in progress at present

Outcomes achieved by VET students (CP 9803)

Authors: Katrina Ball and Oanh Pham

This project analyses the graduate destination survey data to assess the outcomes achieved by particular groups in the TAFE systems within the context of the courses that were studied.

Status: in progress at present

Curriculum and Careers

Authors: Katrina Ball and Stephen Lamb

The purpose of this project is to examine the education, training and employment pathways of students according to the curriculum choices they made while at school.

Status: to be published by ACER

Women

Women in VET 1996: an analysis of 1996 VET data summary report (statistical publication)

This summary on the participation of women in the VET sector in 1996 was commissioned by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs Vocational Education, Employment and Training Women's Taskforce.

Status: published in 1998

Students with a disability

Australian VET: Students with disabilities 1996 – an overview

This publication provides an overview of participation in VET of students with a disability in 1996. It contains tables of data and commentary on students, the courses they undertook, module outcomes they achieved and includes some information from the national Graduate Destination Survey of 1996 TAFE graduates.

Status: published in 1999

Indigenous students

Australian VET: Indigenous students 1996 – an overview (statistical publication)

This publication provides an overview of participation in VET of indigenous students in 1996. It contains tables of data and commentary on students, the courses they undertook, module outcomes they achieved and includes some information from the national Graduate Destination Survey of 1996 TAFE graduates.

Status: published in 1999

Improving learning outcomes for indigenous students in the TAFE sector (OP 197)

A joint project by NCVET and Yungorrendi Research Unit at Flinders University

This project aims to identify the organisational and operational arrangements within TAFE Institutes which are leading to better result for indigenous students. The project aims to find it if institutes which have supportive environments which accommodate the cultural and individual needs and aspirations of indigenous students are getting better results for those students in terms of successful completion of studies.

Status: work in progress

Making a difference: the impact of Australia's indigenous education and training policy

Authors: Chris Robinson and Lionel Bamblett

This report on the impact of Australia's indigenous education and training policy shows that a concerted national effort to make a real difference has resulted in improvements in participation in education and training amongst indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. The educational outcomes attained by indigenous students have also improved, although there is still a significant gap between outcomes achieved by indigenous and non-indigenous people.

Status: published in 1998 by NCVET

Young people

Australian VET: Young people 1997: an overview

This publication provides an overview of VET in 1997 as it related to young people aged 15-24 years. It contains commentary on the characteristics of students as well as the modules and courses they undertook.

Status: published in 1998

Participation and outcomes from VET 15-19 year olds (CP 9704)

Author: Katrina Ball

This project examines the pattern of participation of 15-19 year olds in apprenticeships, traineeships and other VET programs since 1990.

Status: chapter included in the Dusseldorf Skills Forum publication 'Today's Youth: the reality, the risk, the bottom line; published in 1998

Participation and outcomes from VET 20-34 year olds (CP 9710)

Author: Katrina Ball

This project examines the trend information for the past 20 years in patterns of participation in training, education and work for 20-24 year olds.

Status: chapter included in the Dusseldorp Skills Forum publication 'Australia's young adults: the deepening divide

Students in remote and rural Australia

Australian VET: Students from remote and rural Australia 1997: an overview

This publication provides an overview of participation in VET of students from remote and rural Australia in 1997. It contains tables of data and commentary on students, the courses they undertook, module outcomes they achieved and includes some information from the national Graduate Destination Survey of 1996 TAFE graduates.

Status: being prepared for printing

Students from non-English speaking background

Australian VET: Students from non-English speaking backgrounds 1996: an overview

This publication provides an overview of participation in VET of students from non-English speaking backgrounds in 1996. It contains tables of data and commentary on students, the courses they undertook, module outcomes they achieved and includes some information from the national Graduate Destination Survey of 1996 TAFE graduates. It also includes a brief profile of students from seven major language groups.

Status: published in 1999

SUMMARY

	Review of literature (NREC)	Statistics overviews (NCVER)	Major Projects (NREC and NCVER)
General		Overview – ACE 1997 data Overview – commuter distances 1997 data Overview – Socio-economic 1997 data	Vocational essence of ACE (NREC) ACE: some issues (NCVER) Demographic factors (NCVER) Outcomes achieved by VET students (NCVER) Curriculum and careers (NCVER)
Women	Women, work & VET	Summary 1996 data	Women training for transitions (NREC) Irreconcilable differences (NREC) Income differences between TAFE graduates (NREC)
Disability	Access to VET for people with disability	Overview – 1996 data	Outcome study – young people with a disability (NREC) Learning support needs of students with psychiatric disorder (NREC) Technologies and hard of hearing students (NREC)
Indigenous	Alternative pathways to indigenous development	Overview – 1996 data	VET pathways for indigenous people (NREC) Improving learning outcomes (NCVER)

			Making a difference (NCVER)
Young People	Impediments to employment of young people	Overview – 1997 data	Early school leavers at risk (NREC) Participation and outcomes 15-19 year olds (NCVER) Participation and outcomes 20-34 year olds (NCVER)
Rural	VET in remote and rural Australia	Overview – 1997 data	VET in small rural communities (NREC)
NESB	Vet for people from NESB	Overview – 1996 data	
Correctional Institutions	VET for students in correctional institutions		

Locality and community agency in VET research

John McIntyre

POSITION ON THE WAY EQUITY SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD

The best way to introduce my understanding of VET equity research is to describe something of my research biography. My interests have developed from a long association with TAFE in NSW virtually from the Kangan period until now. From the late 1970s I was training NSW TAFE teachers (and later community educators) at a time when TAFE was committed to a strong local and regionally responsive provision and favoured the community college model. As a result, I spent a lot of time teaching and supervising research on TAFE and the community and its access and equity role.

This interest in community agency was further developed by later research (from 1992 - 1997) on adult community education (ACE) in NSW. Though reports such as the *Vocational Scope of ACE* and *ACE Works* (McIntyre et al 1993, McIntyre et al 1995) explored questions of the vocational outcomes of ACE, there was a strong implied equity agenda regarding ACE's role in 'second chance' education for disadvantaged groups. The evidence was that this role was performed mainly by specific literacy or labour market programs and later, ANTA-funded VET courses rather than general adult education which are enjoyed by relatively advantaged clientele.

The reports devoted a lot of attention to the nature of community agency - half of *ACE Works* comprised case studies of local and regional ACE providers. My third report for the Board explored the linkages between the funding regime of NSW ACE and its impacts on organisations and their ability to perform an equity role. This research strengthened my interest in developing an understanding of the 'ecology of provision' as it affects the ability of a provider to achieve equitable outcomes.

Through this research I have come to a position on the limits of community agency. Though it is widely held that adult community education is inherently about equity, there is plenty of evidence that courses offered on a user-pays system limits this role, since it gives little incentive for ACE to achieve equity goals, unless state authorities deliberately target funding. Where ACE has achieved equity, it is primarily because providers have found other funding which is specifically equity targeted. The *Economics of ACE* showed the limiting effects on equity of ACE 'user-pays' funding regimes (McIntyre Brown and Ferrier 1996, McIntyre 1998).

ACE providers have to recover costs and make a surplus to survive financially (this applies to TAFE sections that are said to offer 'ACE courses' as well as bona fide ACE organisations). If they market to their strengths, they will target *relatively advantaged clientele* who live in large numbers in particular localities who demand and have the capacity to pay for the kinds of courses they want at a given price. The nature of these offerings will tend to reflect what these participants prefer. In contrast, disadvantaged

learners do not usually seek further education from providers or have the capacity to pay for it. Few localities have the required levels of affluence to support a healthy demand for general courses (eg most rural and outer-suburban providers) and few can fund equity objectives from generated surpluses, and in any case are unlikely to do so if this is not an expectation of the funding regime.

So what can be the equity role of ACE providers? A fourth ACE project on pathways for disadvantaged women from ACE to VET (McIntyre & Kimberley 1997) further clarified my understanding of the limits and possibilities of community agency in achieving equity. 'Pathway planning' has been held out a key to the equity role of ACE. The 'pathways' project showed how equity is a system and structural issue, where the thinking needs to go well beyond 'dispositional' barriers which tend to view non-participants as lacking 'what it takes'. The VET system by and large favours those who have 'what it takes' and who can take what is offered.

In contrast, it takes some effort for providers to develop ACE-VET pathways for disadvantaged people, who face high social and economic costs in participating in VET. These costs are minimised by a supportive learning environment which provides advice and childcare and which is near work or home, and some immediate returns from learning. As a result, recognition and resourcing are the main barriers to ACE taking a greater role in equity (see Bennink & Blackwell 1995, Sharp and Robertson 1996).

The research showed that ACE providers who are leading the way in pathway planning have well-developed models - for example, literacy based models, using accredited adult literacy programs, or 'integrated' models which bring together several components (entry point activities, literacy and numeracy courses, vocational education and training and work placement). They also include 'provider partnerships' for example, where a small ACE centre may act as a feeder for accredited courses or act as an extended campus of a larger regional TAFE institute. There is also a 'community development' model found in community centres who aim to provide a comprehensive social, educational and employment program.

Thus I am particularly interested in how community agencies can have a role to play in achieving equity in the VET system. In summary, my concept of equity in VET research has several aspects:

- Concepts of educational and economic inequality with which the older term 'disadvantage' was invested during the 1970s.
- 'Distributive justice' assumptions about equity which require that public resources should flow to disadvantaged persons or groups rather than advantaged clients of the VET system who already enjoy (by virtue of their educational qualifications or employment status) the benefits of access.
- A focus on equity of access, using participation research, while acknowledging other social theoretical perspectives re needed to understand the construction of social inequality.
- A focus on community agency, examining local provider equity strategies.

CURRENT WORK ON EQUITY RESEARCH

My current work is exploring local patterns of participation in TAFE and ACE. This approach asks what factors influence the choices that providers and participants make about course-taking and what clienteles use TAFE or ACE in a given locality. This work is an 'ecological' approach which analyses how patterns of participation in particular localities are produced by a complex interplay of factors. The social and cultural features of 'communities' are seen as important in creating or dampening demand and provision. There is an unequal distribution of opportunities to participate - communities, groups and individuals have unequal access to VET (see McIntyre forthcoming).

My current work is a postcode participation analysis of TAFE participation in Sydney (and later this year, of TAFE and ACE in Melbourne). This work is part of the RCVET's 1999 work program for ANTA. High and low TAFE participation postcodes are identified (without regard to which providers were servicing these areas) using one of several participation rates. Groups of postcodes are then compared in terms of social indicators of labour market participation, educational qualifications, household income, ethnicity and so on, in order to 'profile' or represent the characteristics of people living in an area.

Postcode 'locates' the client in terms of the *socio-economic profile of the area* and the pattern of VET participation in the area of residence. Student home postcode is the AVETMISS item that links 1996 TAFE client data to 1996 census data for postcodes. This is done using the census mapping software CData96 (ABS 1998). TAFE participation is literally mapped on to postcode profiles.

Several *participation rates* can be calculated from TAFE client data, including gross TAFE participation (the proportion of the area population aged over 15 participating in VET) and specific indices such as Stream 2 participation, vocational participation, employed participation, and low schooling participation, NESB and indigenous participation.

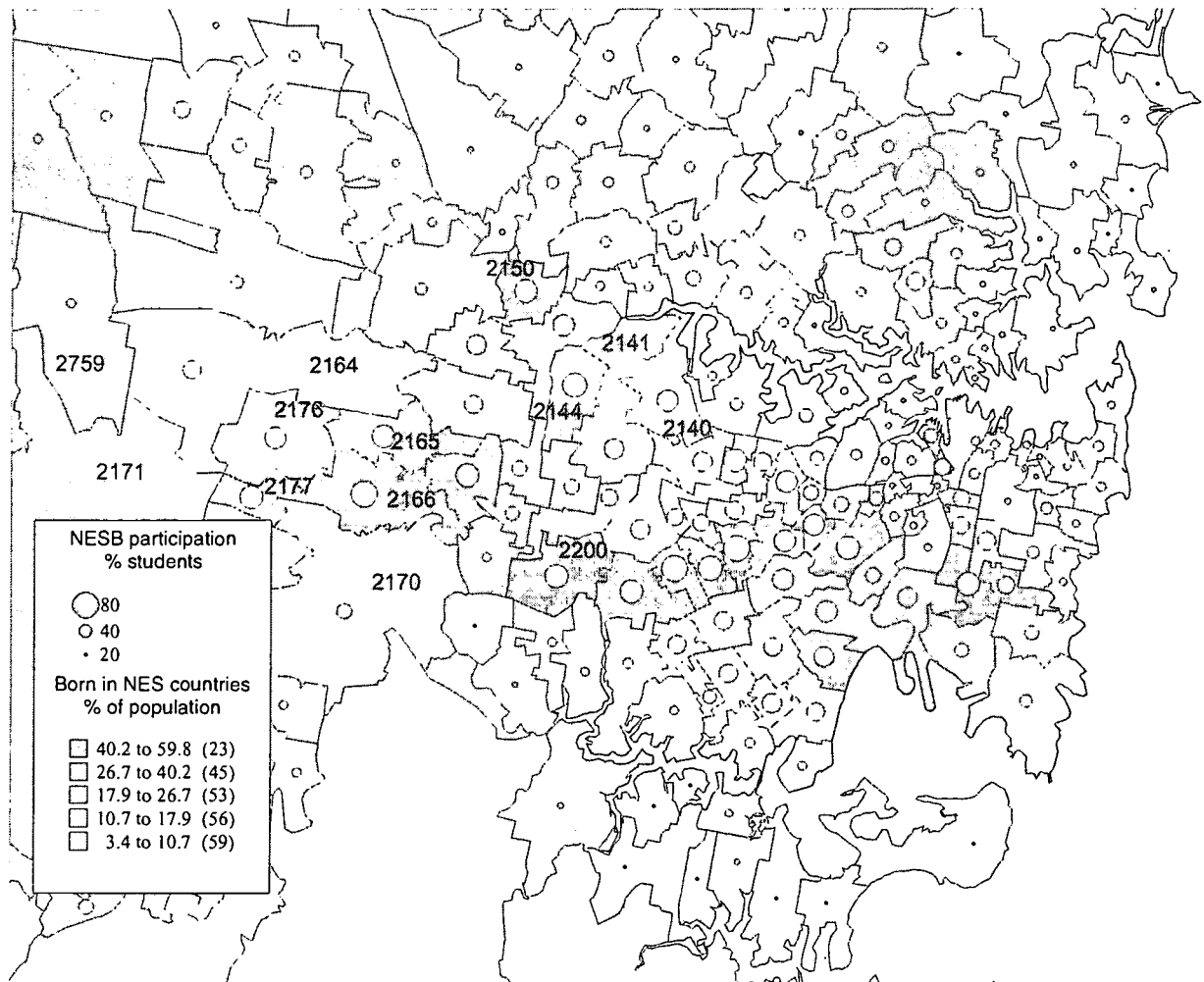
Local analysis makes working assumptions for testing equity in VET on the basis that if a postcode has large proportions of people with low educational levels, no qualifications, low labour force participation, high unemployment or low incomes, then it is reasonable to expect that the profile of VET participants from these areas ought to 'represent' such populations if VET providers are responding to disadvantage of this kind. Obviously, local providers have a key role in responding to local disadvantaged populations.

The primary equity focus of the study was the question of whether TAFE participation in Sydney (or Melbourne) postcodes was related to their employment and educational levels. A second question is to what extent particular equity groups known to be concentrated in a given postcode are represented among TAFE participants residing in that postcode. (No assumptions are made about where these residents attend TAFE).

To illustrate this, Figure 1 shows NESB TAFE participation (circles) mapped on to Sydney postcodes, with the darkest areas high on NESB indicators such as the proportion of persons born overseas in NES countries. The NESB populations of inner south-western

Sydney postcodes are strongly reflected in high NESB participation rates in those localities.

Figure 1. NESB participation in TAFE, Sydney postcodes, 1996.



Source: ABS CData96 and NSW DET statistical unit

The main findings of the Sydney study (McIntyre 1999) are:

- TAFE participation in Sydney is highest in the outer Sydney postcodes of outer western and south western suburbs, and lowest in the more affluent inner city suburbs which have high university participation. Postcode participation rates of various kinds correlate strongly with socio-economic indicators of education, occupation and income.
- The high participation postcodes in outer south-western and western Sydney include many areas regarded of relative disadvantage, in conventional terms, as indicated by relatively lower educational levels (post-school qualification held), 'blue collar' occupational profiles (eg higher proportions ASCO occupational major groups 7,8 and 9) and lower household incomes.

- What is true for general TAFE participation in a postcode (all TAFE clients as a proportion of the postcode population aged 15 and over) is reflected in other more specific rates of participation including: the vocational rate (stream 3000 and 4000 clients); the employed client rate, the unemployed client rate and the 'low schooling' rate. These more specific rates indicate to what extent relatively socio-economically disadvantaged (unemployed, those with low schooling levels) are participating.

Those postcodes which are high on social indicators of non-English speaking background have in general, very high NESB TAFE participation rates. Postcodes with relatively large populations of indigenous people also have high ATSI participation rates.

On the face of it, TAFE participation is highest in areas where there are relatively disadvantaged people are living. That is, people in the target equity groups living in these areas are participating in TAFE in significant numbers. This is to ask what providers are doing to bring this about, particularly what equity strategies they are following. Research also needs to know more about the exact nature of the participation of particular groups of clients. In inner western Sydney, what courses are being taken by the large numbers of NESB students? How is this participation distributed by age or gender or employment status?

Local participation analysis as outlined here is broadbrush and there is much analysis that can be carried out on a smaller scale, to examine the relative equity of access of communities to VET. Clearly, the analysis is metrocentric (indeed, south-east urban in scope) and there is an urgent need to examine the distribution of VET participation in rural and regional Australia.

PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It is clear that we cannot approach the future of VET equity research in Australia only in terms of our own preoccupations with whatever empirical research might be suggested by national VET policy. The glaring issue is the very poverty of equity policy, its complacency and conceptual inadequacy. This can be judged from various perspectives, but I would highlight the failure to acknowledge or resource the contribution of community agency to locally achieved equity (see McIntyre 1988).

Future directions for research might include the following:

- Developing more adequate equity policy frameworks. There is a need for a review of equity policy and its underpinnings. Policy requires not only a more sophisticated understanding of compound social educational disadvantage (which is concentrated in certain localities) but some recognition of the inequities generated by new economic conditions arising from globalisation and technologisation of work. How can policy move beyond the one-dimensional discourse of 'target equity group representation' (McIntyre forthcoming). Where is the debate within the national VET system about these issues?
- Pathway planning for equity groups. If research is right, local participation of equity groups is a very significant feature of TAFE provision, suggesting that equity is being achieved at the provider level - but how? How are these participation patterns related to ANTA's current emphasis on employment-based equity strategies, which are likely to

be achieved at the local level. To what extent is this happening through provider pathway planning and partnerships with industry? It is particularly important to establish to what extent providers are responding to compound disadvantage rather than nominal equity status. (The data on local NESB participation may reflect the success of highly motivated and relatively advantaged NESB students accessing TAFE).

- Local and regional studies of participation in VET. The geographical basis for participation is highly variable across and within localities in urban and rural areas. There is a need for holistic studies that examine participation patterns in different areas. These might be labour market areas, or they may focus on areas of high disadvantage as indicated by ABS indices or other measures as developed for VET policy purposes. One element of this analysis should be the equity strategies deployed by providers, including employment-based strategies.
- Provider comparisons. Future research might make comparisons of different kinds of providers, to examine the nature of the local equity clientele served. Regional studies might explore to what extent ACE neighbourhood houses and TAFE institutes perform complementary but different roles in achieving equity outcomes. Here a pathways perspective is important, because this is potentially the key role that local agencies can fulfil, for example, in bridging disadvantaged clients to employment and training. The role of community-based agencies is particularly worthy of further research.
- Statistical modelling of locality effects. On the basis of broad relationships established by postcode participation studies, it should be possible to carry out inferential statistical analysis (eg loglinear modelling) to assess the influence of home postcode on the probability of accessing TAFE courses of various kinds. Home postcode can be ranked in terms of various criteria, including relative disadvantage using the ABS SEIFA indices.

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Equity for training and employment: research questions from a policy perspective

Marion Norton

NATURE OF EQUITY RESEARCH CONDUCTED

Over the last two years, the Access and Equity Unit has been involved in managing research to find out how to increase the participation and outcomes for under-represented groups in vocational education, training and employment. The research has moved increasingly towards a community development approach, providing small communities with funds and support to enable them to identify their own needs and to propose their own solutions.

The *Vocational Training Access Project* funded three community development agencies who were working with individuals and equity support groups, to identify the perceived and real barriers for their clients, to vocational education and training. Despite geographical differences and some idiosyncratic needs, the overarching responses were common and supported previous research. The key barriers were:

- lack of information on the part of the individuals and their advocates, of what vocational education and training was, how it would affect their situation and where they find it;
- lack of information on the part of registered training organisations about the existence of the particular communities, their needs, and how they could effectively respond to these needs within existing funding models and;
- the reality that individuals and communities, at certain times, do not see vocational training as a priority, nor recognise it as a pathway to employment. If any change process is to occur in their participation and access to vocational education and training, the communities must be involved, from ground up, and have ownership of plans related to their needs.

The recommendations from the *Vocational Training Access Project* led to the *Community Training Identification Project* in 1998. Each of eight regions was invited to identify a community that was currently “out of the loop” for vocational education and training and was disadvantaged with high unemployment. Community leaders were contacted to gain their interest and permission to develop community training plans. These leaders were involved in decisions of how to identify a local contractor with appropriate skills and contacts, that is through advertisement, local expressions of interest, or a local departmental officer – and then participated on the selection panel, along with the regional departmental officer and the project manager.

The contractors' task was to work with the community to develop a community training plan – that is, to enlist support from key leaders, to identify the training needs of the community and to find out ways of overcoming barriers to participation and outcomes of training. The project resulted in nine training plans as an additional one was gained from a shire council which agreed to document work it was undertaking.

These plans have provided both detailed and general responses to training needs that will be addressed in the short, medium and long term (Appendix 1). As much as possible, the response will be to improve the match between the communities' needs and the "mainstream" provision rather than to continue to marginalise the groups with specific purpose funding.

Despite its intent in being grounded with the community, the project encountered several practical difficulties. Even small "communities" do not have the homogeneity or common sense of purpose that the word suggests. That is, the project has to work in and around personal politics and agendas. While in most cases, the community expected (and demanded) that a person from that community should conduct the project, additional issues such as the gender and age of the investigator affected their access to information and the importance of the project to the community. In some cases, there was suspicion about the government's motives in initiating the project: For example one section of a community complained: *We didn't say this was a problem. Why does the government say we have to have a training plan?* There is often more than one community leader who has to be consulted prior to entry to the community and the critical paths for consultation are found by default.

A further series of Community Training Plans is being developed this year. Because of the significant lack of knowledge of the communities about vocational education and training, the 1999 projects will include information sessions in conjunction with the training needs analysis. Regional Information Expos, designed with the assistance of local community contacts, will be held to address the information gap about what vocational education and training means for equity groups .

Other projects that are in progress or have been conducted by the Access and Equity Unit are summarised in Appendix 2. The research methodology includes action research to trial methods of delivery and evaluative research to test the effectiveness of funding models.

HOW SHOULD EQUITY BE UNDERSTOOD? LIMITS AND STRENGTHS OF CURRENT VET POLICY.

Vocational education and training has been recognised since the mid 1980s as a key component of microeconomic reform. The National Training Reform Agenda is firmly placed as an essential tool to secure Australia's economic position in the global marketplace. This is evident in the rationale for the first objective of *Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1998-2003, A Bridge to the Future* is: *To improve international competitiveness, to foster economic growth and to increase productivity, Australia must build its national stock of skills* and also in the first vision

statement: that industry *sees training as an investment in maintaining and improving enterprise and industry competitiveness.*

The objectives of the *National Strategy* indicate two types of policy drivers: those that are intended to make the economic system effective on the whole, that is to benefit everyone through economic sustainability, as the statements above suggest; and those that are meant to make it inclusive, that is to include everyone. The *National Strategy* asserts: *Australians will continue to expect that everyone has access to education and jobs, including those who are most disadvantaged. They will expect unemployment to decline.*

Whether these policy outcomes are contradictory or complementary in the long run is a matter of conjecture and yet to be proven. The data from within and without the vocational education and training sector is not sufficiently reliable and economic modeling is not sufficiently sophisticated to account for the complexity of interplay's between social and economic components. Nevertheless, it is clear that decisions made to achieve outputs for the overall economic system will have profound effects on the achievement of outputs related to the objective of inclusion.

One question that is not at all clear is whether the goal for inclusivity is both economic and social that is:

Is the goal for equity based on the expectation that it is more economically profitable to have people *in* the workforce as consumers and taxpayers rather than *outside* the workforce as recipients of minimal allowances; or

Is it a “community service obligation” for a fair and just society that argues that all should have the opportunity to gain the benefits from participating in the workforce.

The answer, of course, is probably “both”, although the latter technically falls outside of the domain of vocational education and training policy. However the relative weight of these two different rationales will affect the types of strategies taken to achieve the objectives for vocational education and training, how the inputs are counted and the analysis of data required for key performance measures. In fact, the output of achieving *efficiency of public dollar usage to generate skills output* could well be mutually exclusive to the objective of *achieving equitable outcomes in vocational education and training.*

The strength then of the current vocational education and training policy is that it recognises both dimensions. However, the weakness is that the vocational education and training system has not yet come to terms with how strategies towards *National Strategy* objectives 1, 2, 4, and 5 interact with objective 3: *Achieving equitable outcomes.* One of the key reasons for this is that while focusing on what industry wants and needs, the critical element of who is the learner, may be forgotten. Unless there is a clear understanding of the nature of the VET student, including those from the equity groups who could be the majority of potential students, the system may be trying to achieve conflicting objectives.

ROLE OF FUTURE RESEARCH

The above position raises many questions for research. Appendix 3 shows each *National Strategy* objective, its key performance measures and a few of the questions that would need to be answered related to equity issues.

The most difficult area of emerging research is an understanding of the post-industrial workplace, the nature of jobs, and where people with lower educational skills may fit. To some extent, the vocational education and training sector in its close relationship with industry, cannot only be a part of the debate, but can help to guide the outcome. For example, in the development of competency standards, to what extent have jobs been “credentialled up” to achieve efficiency and competitiveness?

That is, in industries that have traditionally employed thousands of early school-leavers and people without formally recognised qualifications, have the new competency standards demanded higher levels of ability than were previously necessary? Have jobs been designed so that there are no longer jobs at Certificate Level 1? Such a change may be made on the grounds that increased technology and export markets demand higher expertise of workers. If this is so, the objective of achieving equitable outcomes becomes harder to achieve. The number of people who are not able to enter the workforce will increase. If, however, the workplace can be designed not only to accommodate, but also benefit from a diverse range of employees including some with lower skills, equitable outcomes may be enhanced.

Research questions:

What jobs are still available and emerging for people needing to enter training at Certificate level 1? Is the training for these jobs, and mode of delivery, suited to the learners?

Can the “information age” workplace be reconstructed to include people with low educational skills in productive work?

How do learners acquire skills required on the job in the age of technology?

One of the major factors in fitting in with the new workforce is the increased level of literacy skills – an area that is still very poorly understood. When the literacy required for training is greater than the literacy required on the job, more people are excluded. Nearly half of Australian adults of working age have literacy skills at levels 1 and 2 on a scale of 5 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996) and the proportion of people who are unemployed with only level 1 and 2 skills, is much higher. If the workforce is designed to require higher than level 2 skills, there will be many people who are not able to enter training or maintain their position in the workforce. To some extent, these skills can be developed through programs such as the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program and through the integration of literacy into vocational training. However, many training packages do not clearly identify the level of literacy required for a job and do not specify to trainers the literacy skills that need to be taught.

Research question: Are workplace trainers and assessors able to identify the level of literacy competency required for a job and to teach the literacy competencies?

Most States in Australia have adopted *Managing for Outcomes* which requires departments to identify costs in achieving particular outcomes. Thus a budgetary input may be identified for achieving an increase in the participation of those under-represented in vocational education and training. What is not so easily calculated is the cost of not including that cohort. Hence, to make an informed decision on the relative merits of budget items, data is needed on the social and economic benefit of participation in vocational education and training.

Research question: *What are the social and economic costs of nonparticipation in the workforce of adults who are educationally disadvantaged?*

Vocational education and training policy contributes to an array of policy drivers which support the objective of *achieving equitable outcomes*. As a signatory to international covenants, Australia reports on strategies, actions and achievement of targets regarding human rights, equal employment opportunity, refugee placement, and racial discrimination. These reflect Australia's image as an egalitarian society and are supported by specific legislation and policies such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, Disability Discrimination Act (1992), Anti-discrimination legislation in each State, the National Integration Settlement Scheme, Racial Discrimination Act and the Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society.

This policy environment puts a responsibility on the vocational education and training sector to respond to objective 3. To achieve efficiency, that is effectiveness with the lowest cost, numerous questions arise at the systemic level, the community level and at the individual level.

Research Questions:

- Systemic:* What is the actual cost per outcome? What are the components of the cost? How can the cost be reduced without affecting KPM 5? How effective is learning for the new workforce for equity groups? Do learners actually gain transferable skills? Can cost-effective models of delivery such as self-paced learning, be used effectively for equity groups? For how long is it effective?
- Economic* How rigid is the profit motive? Which segments of industry are prepared to consider the "third bottom line" that is, their standing in the community and return on investment to the community? How effective is the not-for-profit sector in providing sustainable jobs and training for equity groups? Which purchasing mechanisms maximise goals of accountability and outcomes for equity groups?
- Individual* How are decisions made about training choices by members of equity groups? What information do individuals need and how will they absorb it? Who are their important advisers? How is the decision making affected by socio-cultural differences?

Group

What is the role of the "community" in supporting reluctant learners? What information does the community need and what form should it be in? What information does the community offer? What are the other priorities for the community? At what point does vocational education and training and employment become a part of their solution? How can vocational education and training fit within holistic approaches from multiple agencies? How can groups respond to government's shift to competitive purchasing of services?

Decisions regarding equity issues for vocational education and training are made at the operational, resourcing and strategic level on the best available information. Comprehensive data about how equity groups can achieve successful outcomes is needed to inform those decisions. The priority for equity research is to provide such data so that the VET system as a whole can respond.

APPENDIX 1: COMMUNITY TRAINING IDENTIFICATION PROJECT : MAIN FINDINGS

The Community Training Identification Project resulted in a total of nine (9) Community Training Plans. The following table depicts the community or equity group of focus for each Region:

Region	Equity Group
Far North Qld	People with a psychiatric disability in the Cairns District.
Northern & North West Qld	Australian South Sea Islanders in Townsville, Bowen and Ingham.
Central Qld	Australian South Sea Islanders in Mackay, Rockhampton and Gladstone.
Wide Bay Region	Rural and remote residents of Biggenden Shire.
Brisbane North	Deaf community in Brisbane's Northern suburbs.
Brisbane South	Rural and remote residents of North Stradbroke Island.
Gold Coast	Refugees from the former Yugoslavia.
South West Qld	Samoan community in the Ipswich Region.
Esk/Kilcoy Shires	Rural and remote residents located in Esk and Kilcoy Shires

Considering the diversity of the equity groups, there are barriers to accessing VET and immediate training needs that are common to all equity groups. These are:

Table 1: Findings common to all access & equity groups

<i>Barriers to accessing VET</i>	<i>Immediate Training Needs</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of knowledge of options (marketing material not reader friendly) and service providers not knowledgeable about VET so referral service is poor. • Courses not 'culture- friendly' (trainers from the equity group are needed to overcome language and cultural barriers) • Lack of appropriate courses (their modes and flexibility) and links to jobs • Poor language, literacy & numeracy skills • Lack of self-esteem/confidence/motivation • Lack of appropriate support/mentoring • Need for basic life skills and social skills • Lack of public transport or distance to travel to nearest training provider too great • Limited apprenticeships & traineeships in local area 	<p>Pre-VET courses and basic education such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VET Information Sessions including IR, WH&S, VET & employment options • English language, literacy and numeracy • Job start skills/Work access courses • Life skills courses & Personal Development courses (inc. self-esteem and confidence building courses; career planning and goal setting) • VET Preparatory & Pre-Vocational courses <p>Followed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information Technology, computing • Office Admin & Business Management • Nursing, Residential care, Aged care and Child care • Hospitality courses • Cert IV in Workplace Training/Assessment • Arts, Cultural, Sport & Recreation courses

APPENDIX 2

SUMMARY OF EQUITY RESEARCH AND RELATED PROJECTS 1998-99

Community Training Identification Project (1998 ANTA Equity Research funding)

Questions: What training does the community need? What are the barriers to training? How should it be delivered?

Project Outcomes: Community training plans were developed for people from former Yugoslavia (Gold Coast), Stradbroke Island, Esk Shire, Samoans (around Ipswich), Deaf people (Brisbane North), Biggenden, Australian South Sea Islanders (Central and North), and people with a psychiatric disability (Far North).

Virtual Literacy: Adult Literacy and New Technologies in Remote Communities

Questions: How can literacy programs be conducted in remote areas where there are no qualified teachers. Can a registered training organisation effectively conduct a literacy course 500 kilometres away by training volunteers using technology?

Project Outcomes: The report found that inadequacies of technology in remote areas and the lack of familiarity with the equipment by local people, make technological solutions to literacy training problematic and require an approach which coordinates all community facilities. Recommendations promoted the use of local volunteers, regular visits from professional staff and additional funding to cater for travel.

Women from a Non English Speaking Background in the Community Services and Health Industry Sector

Questions: How can the linguistic and cultural skills of women from a non-English Speaking background, be used in an area of skill shortage?

Project Outcomes: South East Queensland Ethnic Aged Care Services in partnership with a TAFE Institute, developed a model for training for bilingual health care workers which provides a pathway for many people from a non English speaking background who have no qualifications.

Small Business Skills for Rural and Regionally Isolated Women

Questions: What training is needed by rural women to run small businesses? How should training be delivered?

Project Outcomes: Case studies of two Small Business training programs conducted for rural women produced recommendations to guide future delivery. The study provided a description of the learners, their environment, aims and support needs including the need for preparatory courses.

Looking Ahead: Indigenous Communities' Access to Vocational Education and Training

Questions: What are the barriers for participation in vocational education and training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the urban area of South East Queensland?

Project Outcome: Through a community development model, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community worked through the process of developing an accredited curriculum and becoming a recognised training organisation. The case study shows the difficulties encountered in the process and how they were overcome.

An Evaluation of the delivery of Vocational Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programs

Questions: Is the purchasing model for the delivery of vocational language, literacy and numeracy effective in improving the language, literacy and numeracy skills of vocational students on the job?

Project Outcome: The report recommended significant changes in the purchasing model to improve outcomes from training organisations and to improve the relationship between the vocational course the student was undertaking and the literacy being taught.

CURRENT EQUITY RESEARCH PROJECTS

1999 Community Training Identification Project *(Completion by December 31 1999)*

Questions: What are the training needs of these communities? How can mainstream programs be inclusive? What information is required for the communities to make informed choices?

Project Description: The following communities have been identified for developing training plans: Migrants who have completed their Adult Migrant English Program entitlement (Brisbane South North & Far North), Laidley Shire, Deception Bay, Australian South Sea Islanders (Wide Bay). Regional EXPOs will provide information designed to respond to the needs of specific community groups.

Stepping Stones *(Completion by July 31 1999)*

Questions: Why are women achieving lower economic returns from VET? Why are substantially fewer women entering apprenticeships and courses leading to qualifications that result in higher remuneration?

Project Description: An investigation of how women are given information about employment and training opportunities and how they would like to be given such information, through a survey of 400 women and many related stakeholders. Information materials will be developed and trialed.

Timeline: To be completed by the end of July 1999.

Equity in Post-compulsory VET (*Completion by August 31 1999*)

Questions: Why are the take-up rates for students with a disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in school-based apprenticeships and traineeships so much lower than their population proportion?

Project Description: Documentation of successful and unsuccessful placement of students with a disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in post-compulsory VET will indicate policies, strategies, operational procedures and resourcing issues that will improve equitable outcomes for these groups.

An Evaluation of Training Packages for Students with a Disability (*Completion by August 31 1999*)

Questions: Are students with a disability able to benefit from the flexibility offered by training packages? What aspects of the training packages assist or limit trainers and assessors' ability to respond to need of students with a disability?

Project Description: An analysis of case studies of ten students with a disability will draw out effective and ineffective features of training packages and provide advice for training organisations on how to maximise their outcomes for students with a disability and to meet their obligations for reasonable adjustment.

An Evaluation of Provision for Students with a Disability with High Support Needs (*Completion by December 31 1999*)

Questions: Is the current tendering arrangement for provision for students with high support needs meeting its intended outcomes? Is the curriculum used appropriate for these students or is there a need for alternative curriculum?

Project Description: Interviews and surveys of training organisations, participants, employers, disability referral agencies and professionals, supported by evidence of outcomes of the participants, will be used as the basis for the evaluation.

A Review of the Tradeswomen on the Move Program (*Completion by June 1999*)

Questions: Does the Tradeswomen on the Move program achieve its objective of increasing the participation of women in non-traditional trades? How should the program adapt to meet changes in the workforce, in vocational training, and in the retention of boys and girls in post-compulsory education.

Project Description: Information gathered from individual interviews of participants, schools, career advisers, employers and young women in vocational training will be weighed up against statistical data of women's participation and views from other jurisdictions.

Delivering Literacy to Remote and Rural Communities (*Completion by August 1999*)

Questions: Following recommendations of previous studies that delivery to remote and isolated areas requires a human face, how can people with minimal education and training, be supported effectively as volunteer tutors by adult literacy teachers without professional development credentials?

Project Description: Using action research, the project is developing models for using technology linking professional mentors and remote and isolated communities

PROJECTS ON THE DRAWING BOARD (PENDING FUNDING)

- Case studies of the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Registered Training Organisations.
- Development of community training plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities using the Step-by-Step training package.
- Support for an ARC grant to investigate the difference between the literacy competencies required by a school student at school and at work doing a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship.
- A mapping of Adult Community Education in Queensland.
- The application of a literacy screening tool for apprenticeships and traineeships.
- Evaluation of CD Rom and video materials for improving literacy skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Objective 1: *Equipping Australians for the world of work*

Key Performance Measure	Questions	Outcomes	Questions
Stocks of VET skills against desired levels (inc expressed industry demand in the short term and also against international benchmarks in the longer term.	Will addressing industry demand continue gender segmentation of the workforce. What opportunities are there for women? What skills of mature age employees could be utilised to meet demand? What skills of migrants have been under-utilised?	Size of Australia's VET skills pool and how well industry needs and those of the economy are being met by the VET sector.	What emerging markets would suit the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities? What new technologies aid people with a disability to participate in the workplace? What skills of migrants (eg language, cultural knowledge, export markets) could be utilised to expand industry?
Employers' views on the relevance of skills acquired through VET	What language, literacy, numeracy and thinking skills does the employer think are needed for that job in the workplace? What reasonable accommodation can be made for someone with a disability?	Relevance of training in the workplace	Are literacy programs teaching skills relevant to the workplace? How are people with a disability effectively adapting to workplaces?
Student employment outcomes and prospects before and after participation in VET	What are the job prospects for employees with low educational attainment? Does the flexibility of training packages improve outcomes for equity groups?	Employment outcomes for students	What are the long term outcomes for work placement – benefits of pre-training, on-the-job training, off-site training, mentoring? What effect do marketing campaigns have on changing employers' willingness to employ people from equity groups?

Objective 2: *Enhancing mobility in the labour market*

Key Performance Measure	Questions	Outcomes	Questions
Skill outputs produced annually within the domain of formally recognised VET	Will the priorities for skills support or inhibit equitable outcomes?	Contribution of VET sector to Australia's skills pool and to labour mobility.	What facilities support clients with low educational skills to transfer their competencies to new environments, when jobs change.

Objective 3: *Achieving Equitable Outcomes*

Key Performance Measure	Questions	Outcomes	Questions
VET participation outputs and outcomes achieved by client groups (KPM 5)	<p>Is the data on participation reliable?</p> <p>What are the essential features of VET delivery for client groups to participate and achieve outcomes?</p> <p>What are the additional costs of delivery for client groups?</p> <p>Do State differences for equity groups reflect policy, resourcing, delivery differences or structural, demographic, and data definition differences.</p> <p>How does this data inform the system as a whole?</p>	How well the VET sector is servicing particular groups in the Australian community.	<p>Do client groups value VET as a means to employment?</p> <p>Does VET complement or contradict their community development goals?</p> <p>Does Registered Training Organisations' compliance with their own access and equity policies and legislation, as required by the Australian Recognition Framework improve outcomes for client groups?</p>

Objective 5: Maximising the value of public vocational education and training expenditure

Key Performance Measure	Questions	Outcomes	Questions
(Actual) public expenditure per publicly funded output (KPM 6)	<p>Is the cost per student contact hour an average or a maximum cost?</p> <p>Is student support included in the cost?</p> <p>What are the <u>real</u> costs of effective delivery for all client groups?</p>	Efficiency of public dollar usage to generate skills output.	<p>Would a higher cost per student contact hour yield higher skills outputs?</p> <p>Does the "efficiency" measure outweigh the "equity" measure?</p>
(Actual) public expenditure per total recognised output (KPM 7)	<p>How much is contributed from non-paid effort by industry, teachers, training organisations, government and community bodies?</p> <p>What is the real cost?</p>	Extent to which public funds leverage private investment in training.	How much leverage is achieved from adult community education and not-for-profit organisations.

Position paper
Rachel Robertson

BACKGROUND

My interest in undertaking equity research in the vocational education and training (VET) sector began in 1992 when I wrote a paper on competency based training (CBT) and its implications for women. Before that, most of my work was in the industrial relations and employment areas, and so my approach to VET is certainly influenced by that employment background. My interest in CBT resulted in a Masters Dissertation titled *Competency Standards, Women's Skills and Feminist Dilemmas*, completed in 1994. This is the only piece of academic research I have undertaken in the VET area. All my other research has been national or state government funded research, the result of tendering for research or project funds. These sorts of projects have their own dilemmas.

Some of the more recent projects I have been involved with (mainly working with Susan Barrera) include:

- *Adult Community Education Pathways to Vocational Education and Training* (1995, published 1996), a national project which explored evidence for the existence of pathways for students between adult community education (ACE) and vocational education and training (VET) and suggested ways to remove some of the barriers to such pathways.
- *Mapping the ACE Sector in WA and its relationship to VET* (1997, unpublished), a state based project which identified and described the ACE sector in WA and then built on the work of McIntyre and Kimberley (*Planning Pathways for Women from ACE to VET*) and Schofield (*Think Local and Compete*) to recommend ways to enhance the relationship between ACE and VET in WA.
- *A Recipe for Success: small business growth through training opportunities for women* (1996), a national project which aimed to identify the gaps in skills and knowledge of women small business operators which may influence their decision to take on employees and to design and pilot a training course to address these skills and knowledge gaps. Recommendations were made to make training more relevant and attractive to women small business operators and curriculum was developed and piloted in two states.
- *Workable Solutions* (1998, forthcoming), an ANTA funded national project to identify factors leading to successful training outcomes for the following client groups: women, Indigenous peoples, migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds and people with a disability.
- *Skills Recognition Framework* (1998, forthcoming), a state based project for the WA Department of Training to evaluate the impact, implementation and effectiveness of their Recognition of Prior Learning and Competency Based Assessment Frameworks and to develop a new integrated Skills Recognition Framework for VET in WA. While this does not fall under the category 'equity research', many of the issues around skills

recognition and RPL have particular implications for the so-called equity target groups, especially women and migrants.

What these and many other similar projects have in common, I think, are:

- the basic approach called for by the funder of the research
- some underlying assumptions about disadvantage, equity and 'equity target groups'
- some assumptions about how interventions can be made within the VET environment.

My thoughts below are not necessarily in response to these particular projects, but to the underlying premises of a range of equity projects. They also arise from my connections with trainers and educators at a grassroots level, and my involvement with women's groups and disability organisations.

APPROACH TO FUNDED EQUITY RESEARCH

The basic approach for such projects is usually a review of the literature, a series of consultations with 'key stakeholders', and the development of findings and a set of recommendations or 'suggestions' for future action/research. Not surprisingly, in many cases, those findings which involve critique and recommendations which call for systemic changes or significant resource redistribution are edited out of the final report or ensure that the report remains unpublished. Often this is done because a so-called negative report is considered to be unacceptable to the VET sector in general, not just to the key decision makers. One problem with this type of approach is that each report that is edited for publication is then used by other researchers in their work. In this way, the 'review of the literature' aspect of such projects have an iterative effect of reflecting the original research less and less.

The other problem here is the consultations with 'key stakeholders', which tend to be the same for many of these projects. Those stakeholders with the most time and resources to respond to such projects (eg reply to surveys, receive visits) tend to be those representing 'industry' (that is, large enterprises) and publicly funded registered training organisations. Those with least time and resources are representatives of those groups such projects aim to assist. In some cases, identified 'stakeholders' do not specifically include equity group members or equity experts. Since the clients of VET are considered to be industry not learners or potential learners, the consultations for such projects can bypass learners completely.

These points are very obvious ones, but surprisingly little government funded research addresses or avoids them. From a practical perspective, this means that equity research can actually result in an experience of loss for those groups it purports to assist – loss of time, loss of their own stories and realities, loss of their ideas for change. Of course, if the resulting reports (flawed as they are) were always implemented, this might be less of a problem!

Equity groups

It seems to me that the VET equity policies and strategies are based on a somewhat confused notion of equity, and one in need of further conceptual development. The VET

sector approach to equity seems to be one that is procedural (as opposed to substantive), that is, one that focuses on redistribution between individuals, and the criteria for distribution. Such an approach fails to challenge fundamental structures or systemic inequality. On the other hand, very little redistribution actually occurs within the VET system. Equity policies rarely call for the re-allocation of resources from one group to another, and more recently, even the targeting of resources to one particular group tends to be seen as unacceptable.

There have also been some interesting shifts in the use of terms around equity over the past ten years or so. The term 'access and equity' has tended to move towards simply 'equity', and then 'access and participation'. Now, equity is often conflated with 'access', which actually means 'opportunities to access'. The focus on opportunity to access VET is similar to the focus on Equal Opportunity legislation in Australia, which is based around the removal of discrimination through the mediation of complaints proving direct or indirect discrimination. However, opportunity to access VET addresses only a small aspect of the disadvantage that certain groups face.

Again, the way disadvantage is described and used in the VET sector is ambiguous and shifting. Does it refer to direct discrimination in accessing VET, differential experiences of VET, indirect discrimination leading to differential outcomes, gaps between population demographics and training demographics, industrial/occupational segmentation, socio-economic disadvantage, or employment related disadvantage?

Many researchers have pointed out the problems of naming disadvantaged groups or equity target groups, and in particular the issues of multiple disadvantage and the lack of homogeneity within the different groups or categories (especially the case for the group 'women'). In the *Workable Solutions* report, our response to these concerns was:

While noting these reservations, these categories do provide a way to discuss and address some of the ways in which the vocational training system can become more responsive to these large groups of clients and potential clients.

In this way, we continued to use the notion of target groups and subgroups, which has as its corollary the notion that there is a norm group. Many commentators have described this norm group as white, English speaking males with permanent employment in a trade. However, I would suggest that the norm student around which the VET system is built doesn't actually exist, but is a mythical norm, created, in a sense, for the purposes of managing the system. Like all mythical creatures, our belief in him survives against all evidence to the contrary.

Recently, there have been attempts to replace the notion of equity target groups with a focus on individuals within a managing diversity model. This approach seems to fit better with the movement towards user choice models of training, but does not appear to offer a position from which to question the how the system advantages some learners above others.

The other interesting facet of our obsession with researching, measuring and evaluating equity groups is that we actually know a lot of the information already. There is lots of knowledge in the Indigenous community about Indigenous peoples' preferred ways of learning. There are many published and unpublished reports about women's training preferences, employment experiences and their relationship to male-based industrial and employment hierarchies. In fact, there are many 'experts' in all the equity groups and subgroups – they just aren't able to make successful interventions in the VET sector.

Interventions in the VET sector

Because it is so difficult to make changes to complex systems such as the VET sector, equity projects have had a tendency to try to change the target groups rather than the system. The *Workable Solutions* project was an exception here in that it aimed to identify factors which supported positive VET outcomes for certain target groups and then suggest ways in which the wider VET system could adopt these factors. Many of the factors identified were systemic or structural in nature. However, by focusing on 'factors leading to success', the project was taking a best practice type of approach, which is limited by virtue of the fact that only those 'best practices' currently in action can be described. Most of these best practice examples are small scale, specifically funded, and continue to be hampered by systemic barriers (eg funding models). People in the field may be able to describe how they would like to see things work, but can't provide many examples of training which truly meets the needs of all equity groups because of (rather than in spite of) support at all levels of the VET system. In an increasingly deregulated and competitive system, I would have thought that the power of best practice examples in promoting equity is very limited. Simply marketing these examples better will not resolve the problem either.

The other aspect of intervening in the VET sector is employment. For many learners, VET outcomes are not an end in themselves, but rather a means to obtain employment or improved employment prospects. The nexus between VET and employment can be very weak at times, and those groups most likely to suffer as a result are the equity target groups. The separation between employment policy and labour market programs from VET policy and VET programs appears to be growing, making equity research more difficult and complex.

Rethinking Equity

It is, of course, easy to critique the current approach to equity but harder to suggest a more appropriate approach. However, I do believe that some work in rethinking equity and the kind of approaches taken to equity would be advantageous. This might involve:

- clear definitions and statements of intent
- the creation of systemic change
- the use of regulatory structures to genuinely promote equity (eg Quality Assurance systems, funding models, accountability requirements)
- a commitment to addressing inequitable resource allocation

- the introduction of those with equity expertise as key stakeholders within the VET sector, with equal voice to the other key stakeholders (industry, training providers, government)
- the recognition of learners and potential learners as clients for VET.

In other words, we need an approach which Elaine Butler describes as making equity a central organising feature of VET. This may seem naive, but it does raise the point that inequity (or advantage for some) appears to be the central organising feature of VET at present.

FUTURE RESEARCH

I think there are three main areas where future VET equity research should be focused.

- Global definitional and conceptual work. By this I mean work that can assist in the reframing of equity research and debate to avoid some of the problems associated with the current approaches. Some of this work has already been done (eg by Butler, and Golding and Volkoff) and could be usefully further developed to provide a better policy framework for equity and VET. Other global work would include the impacts of the changing labour market and demographics on equity and VET. Compared with other areas of social policy, research on the VET sector seems limited and short sighted.
- Research on how to address systemic inequalities. This type of research addresses specific systemic barriers such as funding models or measurement techniques. The impact of the interplay between the policy and practice levels of the VET sector also needs further consideration.
- Specific practice research. In such a fast changing system, there is a need for short term research to be undertaken on specific highly targeted practice issues. For example, research on how to incorporate equity into Training Package development and implementation, how to ensure changing Quality Assurance systems actually address equity outcomes, or how alternative pathways to qualifications can advantage groups unrepresented in certain industries. This type of research is often about consolidating existing knowledge and then transferring it to a different context. Such research needs to be commissioned at the development stages of any new policy of procedure rather than after the event.

However, before more research is commissioned, a commitment needs to be made to implement the recommendations of recent and forthcoming equity research, and to make this research available more widely and more readily.

Some observations on equity in VET

Kaye Schofield

NATURE OF WORK ON EQUITY

My work on equity, at least over the past five years, does not fall neatly into any specific research program. Rather, it can be grouped into two broad areas.

The first area, shaped by various roles I have within VET, involves a search for practical solutions to pressing policy and planning problems. For example.

- How can we develop and use funding formula and resource allocation models which will lead or drive us to more equitable provision by VET or adult and community education providers?
- There are many equity dilemmas surrounding the widespread adoption of new learning technologies and, in particular, on-line technologies. To what extent is the successful use of on-line technologies in VET culturally dependent? Are Indigenous Australian learners, for example, likely to be disadvantaged or advantaged by on-line learning methodologies?
- The 'youth at risk' issue is increasingly neglected within VET, a neglect exacerbated by the separation of the national employment portfolio from the national VET portfolio. What is and could be the role of the state vis a vis the role of the non-profit community sector in assisting those young people caught up in the constant 'milling and churning' of the youth labour market?

The second area of my work lies in the sphere of commissioned research. My colleague Robyn Dryen and I have been exploring the areas of performance indicators and equity for some time now. We are interested in the extent to which the increased use of performance indicators and measurement within VET at national, state and provider level can be used to advance the equity cause. Conversely, we are interested in how measuring progress against agreed indicators (such as increased retention and successful outcomes for [some] girls in upper secondary schooling) can generate a backlash against an equity agenda, especially a gender agenda.

In 1997 we produced a report *Equity Measures for Women in VET* for NCVER and conducted follow-on workshops for providers to assist them to use performance measurement to identify areas of equity strength and weaknesses and to use measurement to drive an equity agenda.

We have recently been commissioned by the Victorian Adult Community and Further Education Board to undertake a national project to produce a suite of performance indicators for use within the adult community education sector. This will incorporate commonly understood measures of target group equity but will also seek to identify measures of wider socio-cultural contributions in areas such as community development

and democratic citizenship which could, within a broader definition of equity, be incorporated under an equity umbrella.

HOW SHOULD EQUITY BE UNDERSTOOD?

I make two observations here.

First, in much of VET, 'equity' policy remains focussed on increasing the access of and participation of specific equity target groups, usually those defined in anti-discrimination legislation plus the unemployed (sometimes) and people in rural and isolated communities (often). To its great credit, the VET system at the national level at least has continued to identify equity for disadvantaged groups as a national priority. Equity is variously used in VET to mean procedural justice, equal treatment, equality of outcome and equality of opportunity.²⁴ However, 'equality of opportunity' is the currently preferred definition of equity in VET, although it does get used interchangeably with 'social justice' and 'diversity' in policy documents

Using 'equity' to mean 'equality of access and participation of specified target groups' to vocational education and training, (that is, equality of opportunity), and thus to the labour market, is consistent with

- liberal individualist formulations of the function of education in promoting individual labour market mobility
- human capital theories on the purposes of vocational education and training.
- an industrial age labour market where the principle organising elements are occupations and industries.

Quite apart from the question of whether this target group approach has actually delivered a greater equity in educational opportunities (c/f procedural justice, equal treatment or equality of outcomes), it seems to me that it may not be sustainable for much longer.

The Information Economy is re-shaping our conceptions of the labour market (see for example Charles Handy's work on core and periphery workers). The Information Economy is also emphasising individual obligation to learn as opposed to state or industry obligation to train, seen most recently in the training culture/learning culture debate.

Yet, at the same time, globalisation, most visible in the rise of the Information Economy, is generating strong debate in most Western liberal democratic countries, including Australia, about equity in a different sense of community, democratic participation, social cohesion and participatory citizenship.

In the UNESCO formulation, which seems to be on the ascendancy in VET via *Learning: The Treasure Within*, equal opportunities for target groups to 'learn to do' is no longer enough. Cultural issues, part of a nation-building agenda, are of increased interest, replacing perhaps the political issues which led to the rise of equity considerations in the 1970s.

²⁴ These distinctions are discussed in Winch, C. (1996), *Quality and Education*, The Journal of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain/Blackwell, Oxford

So, I think all this means that VET has to understand equity in a far broader sense than equal opportunity for target groups. It needs a formulation which goes beyond utilitarian and welfarist notions of VET to encompass the idea of learning, through VET, to belong to communities and learning how to change them through democratic processes.

Second, generally, I am struck by the absence of overt reference in VET policy to the role of VET in redressing socio-economic disadvantage, or as we used to say in the old days, those living in poverty. Rather, the nation-building and international competitiveness objectives have prevailed. This absence has permitted the rise of arguments for the need to develop policy instruments to increase individual investment in training, relative to industry or state investment. Buffeted by the simplistic rhetoric of 'a third way' and 'mutual obligation', and by often untested assumptions about the circumstances in which individuals are likely to take greater responsibility for initiating and financing their own learning, equity in the sense of the absence of poverty, looks shaky.

For the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (and perhaps for school education although I am not sure of this), much research has been done on the relationship between the level of the individual contribution or fee on the one hand and the successful participation of disadvantaged groups on the other. There is an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the price-sensitivity of higher education programs. The absence of this sort of data for publicly funded VET programs makes possible the wholesale transfer of higher education financing models and concepts to VET without any appreciation of, inter alia, the equity implications.

PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In the previous sections I have posed some questions which may be worthy of further consideration through research. Three other suggestions stand out to my mind.

- First is to explore more comprehensively the classic tensions between competition and equity in VET. At present we are somewhat caught in the headlights of traditional liberal/progressive discussion of the tension on the one hand and the neo-liberal perspective on the other. Even though Australian governments are treading softly for the moment on competition policy, and some jurisdictions are backing away from stridently pro-competitive policies in VET, nevertheless competition will not fade away into history.
- Second, we need to give far more attention to the implications of the Information Economy for equity in VET. As I noted earlier, I think we are still thinking and acting in industrial age terms and failing to come to grips with what the so-called Information Age might hold for a broader formulation of equity in VET.
- Third, the concept of equity as 'equality of opportunity' has led to a policy and planning focus on participation and access measures. As VET makes the transition to a performance management framework concerned with VET outcomes, the whole issue of 'equality of outcomes' for target groups will need to be considered and new measures of equity outcomes developed. This of course leaves to one side the philosophical inconsistencies in the conceptualisation of 'equality of outcomes'.



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