Building learning communities

Partnerships, social capital and VET performance

Janelle Allison
Scott Gorringe
Justine Lacey

Centre for Rural and Regional
Innovation – Queensland,
University of Queensland

A National Vocational Education and Training **Research**
and **Evaluation** Program **Report**

Need more information on vocational education and training?

Visit NCVER's website <http://www.ncver.edu.au>

✓ Access the latest research and statistics

✓ Download reports in full or in summary

✓ Purchase hard copy reports

✓ Search VOCED—a free international VET research database

✓ Catch the latest news on releases and events

✓ Access links to related sites

NCVER

Building learning communities
Partnerships, social capital and VET performance

Janelle Allison
Scott Gorringe
Justine Lacey
Centre for Rural and Regional Innovation – Queensland,
University of Queensland

Publisher's note

Additional information relating to this research is available in *Building learning communities: Partnerships, social capital and VET performance—Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <http://www.ncver.edu.au>.

Contents

Key messages

This research examines the impact of vocational education and training (VET), and its project-based activities and partnerships, on the development of sustainable communities in regional Australia. It finds that VET plays a critical role as the entry point to learning and builds considerable social and other forms of capital in regional communities. 'Building capital' means making the most of available resources and trying to generate more resources when required. Social capital refers to the network of relationships and skills which result from community and civic activities. This study points to new opportunities for integrating these assets into strategic regional development.

♦ Vocational education and training, VET partnerships and project-based training have created and mobilised social capital, as well as human, environmental, cultural and built (that is, physical) capital in regional Australia. These various types of capital are core requirements for sustainable regional development.

♦ Vocational education and training and VET partnerships play a critical role in creating individual and community confidence and are often the key entry points to learning and employment.

♦ There is a need for a more holistic approach to training, giving consideration to the continuing learning pathway along which an individual may travel, as opposed to focusing on discrete packages and modules. This is especially apparent in Indigenous communities where training can impose community obligations.

♦ There are excellent examples of VET leadership in regional development but, in general, vocational education and training and VET partnerships are not full participants in regional development plans and strategies. The changing regional landscapes will benefit from more input from the VET sector.

♦ VET has responded well to a growing consolidation of larger regional service centres, where the 'higher order' skills associated with new technologies and electronics are often required. Less well resolved is the role of VET in smaller centres. There is a need for effective regional delivery models which link these service centres.

Executive summary

The initial aim of this research project was to focus on two aspects of vocational education and training (VET) in regional Australia. First, there was a need to know about and understand more adequately the role of VET and VET partnerships in regional development. These partnerships are creative associations entered into by the VET sector with the community and/or business and/or other institutions. Their aim is to enable the region as a whole to 'build capacity': the power to make the most of available resources and to develop the ability to generate even more resources should they be required. VET partnerships contribute to developing and facilitating 'social capital': the network of relationships within a society that are built on trust, reciprocity and loyalty, and which can improve the efficiency of society by aiding coordinated action.

Second, there was a concern to identify indicators and performance measures to determine the impact of VET in regional Australia. To undertake this, VET (and indeed other organisations and agencies) need to know more about their activities in regions.

A considerable body of good data on the state of the regions exists in Australia. But these data more often reflect a broader regional scale and tend to focus on trends, such as whether regions are growing or declining and on the levels of available human capital. To assess the value of the role of VET in the regions, there is a need to add a qualitative dimension to the existing data. This study seeks to do this.

The underlying theme in this study is that a shift towards learning communities represents both a pragmatic *and* creative response to the needs of regional Australia. The concept of learning communities is pragmatic, because it involves both people and institutions with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective regional development in a knowledge economy and learning society. It thus provides a fundamental and sound approach for regional development in the current global context. Yet the concept also affords opportunities for creative associations and ways of responding to change. It suggests that the VET sector and VET partnerships can play a critical role in the development of these kinds of learning infrastructures and processes.

To produce qualitative data, case studies have been undertaken of 12 regions. The 12 regions were selected because they each exhibited a cross-section of the characteristics of declining, growing, stagnating, as well as differing levels of human capital. But they also exhibited interesting 'landscape' characteristics, such as 'amenity', 'irrigation', 'restructuring' and 'intercultural' (for definitions of these terms, see appendix 1). Although a particular region could exhibit more than one of these characteristics, this project used only one landscape characteristic to describe each region. This captured the kind of activity that was dominant in the landscape (for example, restructuring) or identified a point of difference (that is, intercultural) that would impact on the role of the VET sector in the region. By examining the role of VET through a landscape perspective, there was an opportunity to identify how the VET sector might engage more widely in the economic and social development of regions.

This study reveals some interesting opportunities and challenges for the VET sector. It is clear that VET and VET partnerships play an important role in the regions for building and maintaining capacity. While there are still some negative attitudes about VET vis-à-vis higher education, the VET sector emerges as a critical entry point, in terms of employment and skills development, for both school leavers and those re-entering the workforce. Within this context there have been key

findings, such as the increasing need for a holistic, whole-of-person approach to training rather than discrete packages and modules, although these individual components could be restructured to form appropriate learning pathways. This kind of training plays crucial roles in building confidence and social connections and connectedness—both for individuals and organisations.

In this regard there is a plethora of good stories illustrating how VET and VET partnerships have developed relevant and innovative learning environments. Quite literally, hundreds of inspiring 'learning fires' have been lit across regional Australia. These initiatives have several important effects. They have created an interest in learning in communities, they have developed leadership, creativity and innovative thinking among VET providers, and they have laid the foundations for a significant amount of social capital in regional Australia.

But they have done more. These projects are applied and hands-on. They make a visible difference to the landscape, often in the development or maintenance of locally needed infrastructure. As a consequence, the study reveals that VET has played a key role in the development of other forms of capital, such as human, environmental, built (that is, physical) and social capital. All these forms of capital add significant value to the community balance sheet and the assets to be mobilised for sustainable regional development.

However, the study also reveals that many of the VET providers, for a range of reasons—but often related to the need to stay competitive—have not fully understood or engaged with the multiple roles of regional landscapes. Specifically, there is not necessarily a full understanding of the economic base and therefore there is little alignment of local social and economic needs to training and skills development, although there are exceptions to this. Yet we would argue that these changes taking place in the regional landscapes, especially those associated with natural resources management, not only require a VET-related response, but also afford new opportunities for some regions.

Broadly, the study suggests that the many effective and successful initiatives and the nature of the VET partnerships have now developed the capacity within the VET sector to take a more strategic and regional approach to planning, delivery and investment. The experience, leadership and social capital are there, and it is time now to consolidate these activities to more explicitly benefit and complement regional development. There are one or two good examples of this identified within the study (for example, Cradle Coast, Orange), and other examples—such as the Regional Catchment Planning processes funded by the National Heritage Trust—which might provide models on how to proceed.

The study suggests that adopting a regional approach is all the more urgent, as there would seem to be broader changes likely in the patterns of service delivery and access across much of regional Australia. This study (along with other reports) suggests a consolidation of larger regional service centres. Often VET has responded well to this trend and supports the training needed in these centres for those higher-order skills often associated with new technologies and electronics. However, this raises questions in regard to the role of smaller centres and the small VET providers. Is a more coordinated approach with larger nodes and specialised local units the answer? Again the study revealed one or two good local/regional responses to these issues.

The study revealed that VET has responded well to the broader social issues especially apparent in regional centres, such as an ageing population and the growing number of retirees. VET has initiated a range of innovative partnerships and delivery systems across the health care sector. There is recognition of the need for shared community-based systems.

There are also some outstanding examples of the ways in which training is now being developed for Indigenous communities and in remote areas. In several regions the study identified Indigenous training delivered 'on country'. Often this training was linked to the broader natural resource management agenda and involved partnerships with the private and public sectors. All of these encountered new forms of social capital. It is clear that VET partnerships have enabled the creation of new and different learning environments (for example, mobile adult learning units, weekend schools, multi-partner campuses).

However, there was broad agreement that small and medium enterprises have not engaged well with training. Some suggested that VET, as a response to increased competition, has been too focused on big business.

The qualitative analysis of these 12 landscapes provides data which enrich the broader macro-descriptors of regions in Australia. However, the qualitative probing also affords an opportunity to structure, assess and then refine a set of indicators which provide some measure of the performance and impact of VET and VET partnerships. One of the criticisms of the evaluation of programs in regions and communities is that the impacts measured often give only the 'passive' effects, rather than demonstrating the longer-term sustainability and embeddedness of projects, initiatives and training.

Two sets of indicators were used for this study. The first set of indicators sought to gain a deeper understanding and an evaluation of the performance of the VET sector, as far as its role in partnerships is concerned. These included:

✧ *the nature of the collaboration and partnerships*, which seeks to look at the formal and informal agreements in place, types of partners, as well as issues of co-location

✧ *governance and management of partnerships*, which seeks to study how the memorandums of understanding or formal arrangements are set up and administered

✧ *types of learning environments created through the partnerships*, which particularly seeks to identify examples of 'Mode 2' learning (Burton-Clark 1998)—for example, applied knowledge such as community-based research/projects—and types of learning pathways

✧ *leadership and innovation*, which seeks to identify how the partnerships have developed and promoted new opportunities

✧ *connections with wider community*, which seeks to identify how social capital is generated, what benefits are generated, what networks are created

✧ *shared resources*, which seeks to identify how partnerships have enabled sharing of resources such as facilities, markets and people.

There was plenty of evidence of partnering among VET providers. Equally apparent were partnerships with industry and local government. Many of these partnerships were informal and highlight the importance of trust—it contributes to the development of capital and provides a framework for a more comprehensive coverage of services.

A second set of indicators sought to identify and measure VET performance in regional development, particularly in relation to the development of learning-based communities. These included:

✧ *knowledge and skills transfer*, which seeks to identify and map the ways in which VET contributes to the learning and education within the region

✧ *enterprise development*, which seeks to identify how the VET sector has either supported, enabled or spawned enterprise development

✧ *value-adding to local supply chains*, which seeks to identify the ways in which the VET sector is aware of, contributes to, and adds value to local industry supply chains

✧ *mobilising social and other forms of capital*, which can be defined as the results of the generation of capacity

✧ *civic engagement*, which includes working parties, committees and leadership roles in the community

✧ *innovation and creativity*, which seeks to identify ways in which VET has contributed to access to, and use of technology, and changing technology.

The strength of the impact is largely derived from the viability, longevity and resilience of the partnerships described above. VET partnerships have supported interesting local enterprise developments and enabled a range of innovative and creative responses to regional situations. But the impact of VET is best indicated by the generation of new forms of capital. The critical question which now emerges is how to mobilise these different forms of capital to ensure regional sustainability.

Context

Research purpose

The study was commissioned by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) with the aim of examining partnerships, social capital and the role of the vocational education and training (VET) sector in building learning communities in regions.

The initial call for this research project focused on two aspects of VET. First, there was a need to know about and understand more clearly the role of VET and VET partnerships in regional development; second, there was a concern to identify indictors and performance measures of the impact of VET in regional Australia.

In responding to this brief it was felt that, in the context of a knowledge economy and learning society, these concerns were not only related, but also formed the underlying components of learning communities. Both overseas (Longworth 1999; OECD 2000; Yarnit 2001) and Australian experience (Learning Towns Network[1]) point to the concept of learning communications as a useful multi-dimensional framework upon which to structure regional development.

To that end the research proposal has linked the two research issues as a means of identifying key components of a learning communities framework which might inform VET partnerships, assist in the development of social and other forms of capital, and support regional development.

The underlying argument in this study is that learning communities represent both a pragmatic *and* creative response to the needs of regional Australia. The concept of learning communities is pragmatic in that it involves both people and institutions who promote the interactive learning necessary for a knowledge economy and learning society. This concept also provides a fundamental and sound approach for regional development in the current global context. Yet it also affords opportunities for creative associations and creative ways of responding to change.

To achieve these kinds of responses, VET (and indeed other organisations and agencies) need to know more about regions. A considerable body of good data on the state of the regions exists in Australia. However, to assess the value of VET in the regions, there is a need to add a qualitative dimension to the facts. This study seeks to do this.

Policy and practice issues

In the course of this study we considered several policy and practice issues impacting on the research including:

✧ the plethora of registered training organisations, agencies and organisations involved in the VET sector and in VET partnerships

---

[1] For example, the Victorian Learning Towns Network has been established through state government funding of ten rural and regional Learning Town programs. Community-based adult education organisations play a lead role in developing lifelong learning into positive social and economic outcomes in each community. There is significant emphasis on active learning and building community, local government and industry partnerships.

♦ the lack of public/community understanding of technical and further education (TAFE) and registered training organisations

♦ the many funding sources and resources involved in VET and VET partnerships.

Issues identified in the literature

In evaluating the role and impact of VET and VET partnerships in regional Australia, several key strands of literature were reviewed

♦ regional development in the context of the changing global economy

♦ social capital and learning communities

♦ the changing role of post-secondary education in the knowledge economy and the implications of this for regional Australia.

There are also a host of other specific issues affecting and impacting upon regional Australia.

The shifting nature of the global economy, the emergence of flexible production systems and an emphasis upon knowledge workers has wrought significant additional changes upon regional Australia. Further, the need for sustainability amid a broader concern for natural resources management and a need for improvement in the condition of land and water resources in Australia (Campbell 2003) mean that viability in much of rural and regional Australia is now under serious review. Alongside a pervasive decline in population and loss of services, these emergent trends present additional challenges—as well as opportunities for new ways of structuring socioeconomic activity in regional settings.

Regional Australia is a complex mix of metropolitan and outer-metropolitan regions, rural regions (which may have mixed economic bases) and remoter regions, such as inland Australia. Of the latter two types of regions, many have experienced ongoing economic change coinciding with changes in primary production and, associated with this, has been population decline, loss of services and an ageing population.

The studies by Stimson et al. (2004) and the State of the Regions reports (Australian Local Government Association 2003) highlight that the picture is more complex again. There are regions in decline, regions stagnating, regions restructuring, regions holding their own, and some regions growing.

Many rural regions have had to adjust to highly competitive agricultural markets, technology change in agricultural practices and loss of labour. However, Barr (2003) and others point to an array of landscapes in rural Australia, including peri-urban landscapes, amenity landscapes, and agri-tourism landscapes, all of which now sit alongside 'traditional' broad-acre farming, pastoral regions, horticultural cropping and irrigation landscapes. Moreover, these landscapes are multi-functional. As Craig Shepherd notes: 'The "other" forms of rural industries and rural landscapes imply new and different skills and jobs. The changing types and use of technology, for example, requires different training and different support services' (Shepherd 2005).

The outer metropolitan regions often sit within the peri-urban zone. Some of these regions have little or no economic or productive activity, and the local population works elsewhere in the region (Spillar 1996). This means there is not only a leakage of skills but also a leakage of spending and income in the region. Other regions are 'old' manufacturing landscapes also affected by technological change. As with the rural regions, problems can arise from lack of access to services and jobs. It is interesting to note that, in the last decade, the design and development of new master planned communities (such as the Delfin Lend Lease's Springfield Lakes and Lensworth's North Lakes, two examples in Queensland) now require as much attention to the economic base and jobs provision as they do to the provision of hard infrastructure and community-based services.

✧ This recognises the importance of employment, education and others forms of capital in sustainable community development.

However, there are other trends now affecting regional Australia. Despite a decade of landcare, the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality and National Heritage Trust initiatives, the resource condition of Australia continues to decline (Campbell 2003). The ongoing degradation of land resources and loss of prime agricultural land are critical problems affecting much of rural and peri-urban Australia. Water resources and water allocation are now problems affecting all Australia. The emergence of the natural resources agenda requires a rethink in many regions over what constitutes sustainable livelihoods. The concept of ecosystem services, for example, implies new sets of skills; indeed, the whole natural resource management agenda suggests new land management skills and practices—all still emerging.

This will mean changes to current practices, but as importantly, it means the generation of capacity-building for new forms of activities.

 ✧ What emerges from this for regional Australia is that policy responses and regional initiatives, while seeking to provide a fair and just access to services for all Australians, also in some way need to reflect these regional differences and be able to respond accordingly. This is no less the case for the VET sector. One size does not fit all.

As can be seen in this brief overview, the future of regional Australia requires a considered look at issues of sustainable community development.

During the last decade the role of social capital in community development and community sustainability was emphasised (Putnam 1993; Woolcock 1998; Black & Hughes 2001). Indeed, as an acknowledgement of the importance of social capital for and in communities as a kind of socioeconomic 'glue' (Yarnit 2000), the Australian Bureau Statistics (ABS) commissioned a number of key studies to help define the nature and role of social capital.

 ✧ There is good evidence to suggest that mobilising social capital through a range of strategies (for example, partnerships, creative associations, networks, tapping into third sector/volunteer/ informal activities) adds significant depth to a community's 'balance sheet' (Falk & Kilpatrick 2000; Black & Hughes 2001; Allison & Nystrom 2002). However, along with social capital, these activities also encourage the growth of the human, infrastructure and physical capital of communities.

Embedded within these broader socioeconomic changes affecting regional Australia are a number of more specific trends relating to the changing production paradigm and the role of knowledge and learning. Production systems are flexible and dynamic. There are changes to the roles and types of information and knowledge needed in these systems.

The general context for this study is set by the contemporary transition from an industrial to a knowledge-based or learning economy and society (OECD 2000). While there remains considerable debate over the precise nature of the restructuring taking place, there is widespread agreement that the production and distribution of knowledge are increasingly significant processes in the determination of economic development and competitiveness.

This has enormous implications for organisations (that is, firms, educational organisations, research and development institutes, agencies of the state) as well as for individuals within education and the labour market. In short, the capacity to engage successfully in the learning processes would seem to be a critical determinant of sustainable development (OECD 2000, p.1).

Increasing interest and debate have been generated over how the emergence of new forms of knowledge-based activity is impacting on different cities and regions. The underlying argument is that 'learning communities' provide the human infrastructure and institutional mechanisms to foster the interactive learning now needed in the knowledge economy and learning society. The establishment of learning communities provides a fundamental and sound approach for regional development in the current global context, affording opportunities for creative associations and

ways of responding to change. Clearly too, this implies a consideration of more than narrowly defined economic issues. If learning regions are to provide the basis for sustainable development, they need to be viewed in the widest economic, social and environmental terms.

✧ Of central importance here is the idea that learning regions, especially those well attuned to the requirements of the learning economy, may be fostered through the development of appropriate intervention strategies.

Much of the literature on learning cities or learning regions has focused on the participation of individuals in some form of education (formal and informal) and the development of strategies to foster lifelong learning and an increase in the amount of 'learning' taking place among the population.

However the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2000) and others (Amin & Thrift 1995; Amin 1999; Wolfe & Gertler 2001) have identified that tacit knowledge (shared norms, values, trust) is as significant for business and development as is codified or formal knowledge. Lifelong learning is an integral part of these new production systems. All these trends point to the need for new kinds of learning environments (Landry & Matarasso 1998).

Further to this, Shoemaker et al. (2000, p.1) suggest that such environments will not incorporate only new knowledge, but also different and innovative knowledge infrastructures across all three levels of education: the secondary school sector, the vocational education sector, the higher education sector and beyond.

✧ Evidence suggests that all education sectors have had to and will need to continue to respond to these shifts in production and learning requirements of the knowledge economy. This requires new and different approaches, especially from the post-secondary education sector. It also points to the need for a different framework to more adequately understand the scale of the interrelationships and the level and types of learning required to support the development of sustainable learning communities.

Alongside these changes there is a growing imperative to re-position higher education institutions, not only in relation to one another, but also in relation to the community and the region. The flow-on effect of investment in education infrastructure into regions is well documented (Thanki 1999; Garlick 2002). However, Garlick (1998) argues that many of these flow-on effects, such as income multipliers, household spending, as well as construction, are 'passive' impacts. Garlick (2002) and others (Shoemaker et al. 2000; Allison & Keane 2001; Allison & Nystrom 2002; Goddard 1997) suggest that higher education institutions can play a far more critical role in regional and community development.

✧ Higher education institutions, through courses, jobs training, industry experience, partnerships with industry, technology transfer, shared resources and facilities can contribute much more to sustainable regional development. The critical issue is how to re-position higher education institutions. What are the services, structures and approaches which have the capacity to integrate the role of higher education institutions into the broader regional development agenda as well as providing leadership in shaping new and different approaches?

Shoemaker et al. (2000, p.8) suggest that a particularly potent way in which higher education institutions might contribute to sustainable regions is through new learning infrastructure. In effect, this means exploring the ways in which resources and capabilities might be configured and reconfigured to extend the reach of the institutions and to provide new avenues of engagement. These new forms of learning and learning infrastructure more often than not imply and require creative associations and partnerships.

Most educational institutions are now engaging in some form of cooperation with either other educational providers in the region or they are linked in some way to industry and business to extend learning opportunities. This ranges from the development of pathways from high school to TAFE institutes and/or university, or between VET and higher education for the establishment of joint partnerships in the provision of education and training. There are a number of recent

studies which document these cooperative arrangements (Sommerlad, Duke & Macdonald 1998; Shoemaker et al. 2000).

However, the current shifts in the knowledge economy and learning society suggest that these kinds of creative associations can be extended well beyond the relationships of higher education institutions to one another. Garlick (1998) and others (Goddard 1997; Burton-Clark 1998; Charles & Benneworth 2000; Shoemaker et al. 2000; Allison & Keane 2001) point to an array of partnerships, networks and joint ventures which expand local learning opportunities and lay down a far more comprehensive network of educational and learning services to support sustainable regional development.

◇ Given the wider reach of the VET sector and the types of creative associations which might be formed both within the higher education sector and with the wider community, it is timely to ask questions about the role and quality of these kinds of partnerships developed by the VET sector to date, as well as their impact and future possibilities.

Emerging issues

In reviewing the literature, and in the context of this research, the important issues form six main themes:

◇ the consolidation of some regional centres as key service delivery points reflecting the shifts in technology and information

◇ the multi-functionality of regional landscapes and the growing complexity of livelihoods in these landscapes

◇ the importance of social capital to provide service coverage and facilitate the growth of other forms of capital for regional development

◇ the important role of VET leadership in building and maintaining skills and capacity in regions

◇ the need for a much more strategic and coordinated approach to skills development, learning opportunities and service delivery in regions

◇ the need to understand the data pertaining to the intersection of Indigenous cultural knowledge and livelihoods and mainstream VET structures.

Research questions

In response to these concerns, this project addressed four key research questions:

◇ What is the role of VET, specifically VET partnerships, in regional development?

◇ What set of indicators evaluates the impact of VET and VET partnerships in relation to development across a range of different regional landscapes?

◇ What is an appropriate framework within which to locate VET to build a regional learning community?

◇ How can the research be conducted in a way that builds the capacity for communities to learn?

Methodology

Design of research

This study sought to consider the role of partnerships, social capital and the role of the VET sector in building learning communities. A qualitative study of 12 case study regions was undertaken. The 12 regions represent the landscape types selected because each exhibited a cross-section of characteristics—such as declining, growing and stagnating—as well as differing levels of human capital. They also exhibited interesting landscape characteristics, such as 'amenity', 'irrigation', 'restructuring', 'intercultural'. By examining the role of VET through a physical landscape perspective, there was an opportunity to identify how the VET sector might engage more widely in the economic and social development of regions.

These issues pointed to the need for a qualitative approach to the research. Several key aspects informed the methodology:

✧ a landscape focus

✧ the development of case studies to generate themes, patterns and insights to augment the facts

✧ adoption of the technique of 'yarning', a set of facilitated conversations to find out what happens on the ground.

A landscape focus

Recent work on rural and regional Australia by Barr (2003) and others (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation[2]) has adopted a 'landscape' approach. A similar approach was used in this research. Landscape, rather than regions, was adopted for several reasons. First, landscape captures the growing multi-functionality within and expectations of regions (Barr 2003). Second, landscape is a rich term which better captures the interplay of human and natural systems (Meinig 1979). Third, landscape allows the researcher to see the region through lenses other than 'declining', 'growing', or 'stagnating', which tend to be the common descriptors adopted. Finally, landscape conveys something of the ways in which regional differences are manifest (Spirn 1998). A landscape approach affords opportunities for a deeper analysis.

Case study regions

The focus of the research was to add 'flavour to the facts'. A solid body of work on the state of the regions in Australia already exists. This research seeks to add rich details of experience to these settings. For this research, the landscapes are our case studies. These case studies provide a number of insights.

The 12 regions were selected to reflect the variety of different regional patterns observed by Stimson et al. (2004) and others. Thus outer regions which were not performing well were selected (Elizabeth), but so too were outer-metropolitan areas which were performing well, albeit in

---

[2] The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation's Division of Sustainable Ecosystems has identified several of its programs in line with this landscape focus, such as their agricultural landscapes and tropical landscapes programs.

different landscapes and with different economic histories (such as Wollongong and Outer Western Sydney). South-west Western Australia is a region performing reasonably well and exhibits some transforming amenity landscape characteristics. Wide Bay-Burnett is an example of a coastal region not performing well, but is a landscape undergoing significant restructuring change from sugar, dairy and timber industries to amenity, tourism and retirement. The Cradle Coast (Tasmania), for example, exhibits vulnerability and loss of population, yet the landscape reveals opportunities and a strong collaborative regional development approach.

Thus the interplay of broader performance indicators and landscape characteristics have guided the selection of the regions as a way of revealing the experiences which enable communities to adapt and change.

The qualitative stories

Finding the flavour to add to the facts has been sought through a series of semi-structured interviews or facilitated conversations with people connected to VET activities and/or partnerships within the selected landscapes. The prompt questions used to facilitate the conversations were drawn from the indicators of partnerships and impacts on regional development (see appendix 2).

Interview respondents were selected using 'snowballing' techniques. Initial contact with the selected landscapes was made through VET and government agency contacts, and these people were then asked to suggest others who might be interviewed. Interview participants were contacted beforehand and provided with background information on the project.

Sample details

As outlined above, the selection of regions for this study was framed around the concept of landscapes. Several criteria were used in the selection of the landscape study sites.

First, the landscapes were selected to provide a cross-section of metropolitan, rural and remote experiences and service delivery.

Second, the selected landscapes provide examples of decline, restructuring, and growth in different geographical contexts. Often the name attached to the landscape reflected the issues and/or problems with which it was currently grappling.

Third, the landscapes selected also exhibited complexity and multi-functionality.

The selection of the landscapes was undertaken in collaboration with a concurrent study by Dr Steve Garlick of Regional Knowledge Works. It was reasoned that such an approach added to the richness of the findings and insights being sought by NCVER.

In all, 12 landscapes were visited and analysed:

✧ Restructuring rural landscape—Wide Bay-Burnett, Queensland

✧ Resource sucrose landscape—Burdekin Dry Tropics, Queensland

✧ Resource mining landscape—Mt Isa, Queensland

✧ Intercultural landscape—Alice Springs, Northern Territory

✧ Amenity/lifestyle landscape—Bunbury, Western Australia

✧ Manufacturing landscape—Northern Adelaide , South Australia

✧ Regenerating landscape—Cradle Coast, Tasmania

✧ Broad-acre farming landscape—Horsham, Victoria

✧ Irrigation landscape—Shepparton, Victoria

✧ Peri-urban landscape—Outer Western Sydney, New South Wales

✧ Manufacturing landscape—Wollongong, New South Wales

✧ Resilient landscape—Orange, New South Wales.

Table 1: Summary of the study landscapes

Region	Regional characteristics	Landscape characteristics	Justification
Wide Bay-Burnett, Queensland	Coastal regions; poor performance	**Restructuring landscape:** experienced issues with agricultural production (dairy, timber, sugar) shifting to tourism, retirement	Interesting to look at the responses as far as skills development is concerned
Burdekin Dry Tropics, Queensland	Mix with large regional centre of Townsville	**Resources landscape**: a mix of pastoral, large sugar production and an area with serious environmental issues affecting the reef	Affords an opportunity to look at the emergence of new natural resource management livelihoods
Mt Isa, North-west Queensland	Mining town in remote North West Queensland	**Resources landscape**: heavily reliant on mining industry in the past	Evidence of diversification and exploration of multi-functionality of the landscape
Alice Springs, Northern Territory	Geographically remote, high unemployment with limited employment opportunities	**Intercultural landscape**: offshore mining retains little income in the region; tourism and arts growth areas	Significant proportion of population is Indigenous and many speak Indigenous language as first language
South-west Western Australia	Major regional centre Bunbury, an old established port	**Amenity/lifestyle landscape**: resort and retirement area; currently fourth fastest growing region in Australia	Increasing population to the region reflected in growth and diversity of construction, community services and health
Northern Adelaide, South Australia	Manufacturing strongest economic base of any region within Australia; however region not favoured by government policies	**Manufacturing landscape**: established as an area to accommodate factory workers in manufacturing industry	Long-term reliance on manufacturing challenged with companies downsizing; recognition of social and human capital within the region
Cradle Coast, Tasmania	Region that has 'done it tough'; perceived social and educational difficulties	**Regenerating landscape**: urban strip on north-west coast of Tasmania; has been dominated by dairy farming; plantation forestry	Interesting and effective regional partnerships models (for example, Cradle Coast Authority)
Horsham, Victoria	Regional centre providing services for smaller surrounding communities	**Broad-acre farming landscape**: wheat and sheep country	Exploring community-driven training (for example, Birchip Group); linking industries along the supply chain through training
Shepparton, Victoria	Strong regional centre based on food processing; strong relationship with local production.	**Irrigation landscape:** agricultural area with intensive dairy and orchard production; also noted for food processing industries	Balancing competition and collaboration in the region to come up with innovative solutions
Outer Western Sydney, New South Wales	Existence of local employment and educational opportunities	**Peri-urban landscape**: multicultural and diverse built environment case study covering wide area	Exploring public–private partnerships and education precincts; embedding arrangements within the region
Wollongong, New South Wales	Successful regional service delivery	**Manufacturing landscape**: regional demographic reflects overall Australian demographic data	Educational infrastructure integrated into local economy
Orange, New South Wales	Important regional centre servicing surrounding area	**Manufacturing landscape**: developed under 1970s Commonwealth growth centre policies; also strong agricultural base	Exploring multi-functional layering of industries (i.e. regional diversity over and above core/base industries)

Selection of indicators and measures of performance

Two sets of indicators and measures of performance have been developed as a means to guide and frame this study on the role and impact of the VET sector in the regions.

The first set of indicators seeks to gain a deeper understanding and an evaluation of the performance of the VET sector as far as its role in partnerships is concerned. This is an important aspect as it contributes to the development of capital and provides a framework for a more comprehensive coverage of services.

In the first instance, a set of indicators was developed to guide the interviews and research into the VET sector. Broadly, these indicators are drawn from earlier work into the role of higher education institutions by Shoemaker et al. (2000). This work provides good background material. Drawing on this and other work on the higher education sector by Charles and Benneworth (2000), Garlick (2002) and Burton-Clark (1998) on the entrepreneurial university, the following indicators seem to provide useful insights into effective partnerships, how they work and why:

✧ *the nature of the collaboration and partnerships*, which seeks to look at the formal and informal agreements in place, types of partners, as well as issues of co-location

✧ *governance and management of partnerships*, which seeks to study how the memorandums of understanding or formal arrangements are set up and administered

✧ *types of learning environments created through the partnerships*, which particularly seeks to identify examples of 'Mode 2' learning (for example, applied knowledge such as community-based research/projects [Burton-Clark 1998]) and types of learning pathways

✧ *leadership and innovation*, which seeks to identify how the partnerships have developed and promoted new opportunities

✧ *connections with wider community*, which seeks to identify how social capital is generated, what benefits are generated, what networks are created

✧ *shared resources*, which seeks to identify how partnerships have enabled sharing of resources such as facilities, markets and people.

A second set of indicators sought to identify and measure VET performance in regional development, particularly in relation to the development of learning communities. The strength of the impact is largely derived from the viability, longevity and resilience of the partnerships described above.

Much of the background guidance for the development of these indicators comes from earlier work by Allison and Keane (2001) which studied the impact of higher education institutions on regional development. This study developed six dimensions along which impact might be described and measured. These dimensions resonate with similar studies by Garlick (2002) and Charles and Benneworth (2000), and the indicators selected for this study to guide the landscape investigations and interviews are an amalgam of the findings of these previous studies.

The studies by Allison and Keane (2001) and others have sought to achieve three things; first, identify a series of indicators which signal impact and change which is active rather than passive; that is, the impact and change is embedded into the community and there is a reasonable degree of assurance that the impacts enable sustainable development. Second, these indicators seek to give a more holistic community-based approach and move beyond narrow economic definitions. Third, the indicators seek to link to the kinds of intervention strategies encompassed by a learning communities approach.

The six indicators selected for this study are as follows:

✧ *knowledge and skills transfer*, which seeks to identify and map the ways in which VET contributes to the learning and education within the region

✧ *enterprise development*, which seeks to identify how the VET sector has either supported, enabled or spawned enterprise development

✧ *value-adding to local supply chains*, which seeks to identify the ways in which the VET sector is aware of, contributes to, and adds value to local industry supply chains

✧ *mobilising social and other forms of capital*, which can be defined as capacity made manifest

✧ *civic engagement*, which includes working parties, committees and leadership roles in the community

✧ *innovation and creativity*, which seeks to identify ways in which VET has contributed to access to and use of technology and changing technology.

Analysis techniques

The data in this research were drawn from two main sources.

First, there was a desktop analysis which consisted of compiling Census and State of the Regions data for the selected landscape sites. These data were organised to provide information on the population and socioeconomic characteristics of the regions. The data are included in the 'landscape profiles' and the accompanying statistics are provided in the 'landscape matrix', which can be found in the online support document at <http://www.ncver.edu.au>.

The second source of data was obtained from the interviews held within the selected landscapes. The interview data were transferred to CD-ROM to enable all the investigators on the project to listen to the interviews.

From these recordings, several data summaries were compiled.

✧ A summary of stand-out impressions and what people were saying was made.

✧ This summary was cross-checked by a second summary of key points.

✧ Interview data were then integrated with the statistical regional data to develop landscape profiles.

These data summaries were then used to enhance the indicators and measures of VET partnership performance and their impact on regional development. The indicators and associated thematic material are discussed within the body of the report, including vignettes which support the points being made. A small 'story booklet' of 'what works and why' supported by these vignettes could be a useful output publication from the study.

The data on indicators and measures of performance are also summarised in the landscape matrix; they were then analysed to draw out lessons and insights about the role of VET in regional development. These are discussed in the body of the report and are also supported with vignettes.

Finally, the data were interrogated to provide some overview of implications and possible approaches to regional development, regional delivery and the role of VET and VET partnerships in these approaches.

Limitations

In conducting the interviews and conversations within the landscapes, our investigators were limited in relation to the amount of time they could feasibly spend in each region; in general, three days per region was allocated to meet the project time lines. However, to make some attempt to address this problem, our investigators always arrived a day before commencing the scheduled interviews to allow them some time to experience the landscapes first hand and to make their own appraisal in light of the assembled statistical data.

Further to this, the time limits also meant our investigators could only conduct a limited number of interviews in each location. Our focus for this research centred on talking to key persons within the TAFE network, training providers (both government and private), local business and industry, secondary schools, Indigenous organisations and landcare/catchment organisations. Had we had more time to collect the regional data, then more extensive interviewing, incorporating local councillors, chambers of commerce, industry organisations and a more thorough discussion with catchment authorities might have been pursued.

Adding flavour to the facts

Overview of regional Australia

The background to this study is a macro spatial analysis of work, employment and skills in Australia's regions undertaken by Stimson et al. in 2004. This work, along with the annual State of the Regions reports produced by the Australian Local Government Association, provides a good analytically derived information base on the performance of communities. In the Stimson et al. report, two overriding conclusions are made.

✧ *Place does matter*: that is, where people live does affect diversity of job opportunities and overall level of labour market participation.

✧ *People skills do matter*: that is, levels of human capital are important in differentiating between places and their performance (Stimson et al. 2004, p.238).

These findings have important implications for organisations in the VET sector, which contributes a significant proportion of the skills and human capital development to regions.

Alongside these important conclusions, this and other studies demonstrate strong regional differences. As Stimson et al. outline (2004, p.239) the picture across regional Australia is not a universal one of doom and gloom. There are regional centres and regions performing well, and others which are holding their own. Equally, there are important differences. For example, some of the rapidly growing coastal communities have low levels of human capital, and there does seem to be a threshold population which fosters human capital growth; smaller regional centres and remote communities, however, are vulnerable.

These findings have significant policy implications. But it is important to look behind the macro picture.

Regional development

In looking beyond the broader macro analysis of declining, stagnant, and growing regions, it is possible to find examples of ways in which regions have responded to change.

The case studies have revealed a number of useful insights in regard to regional development.

✧ There is evidence of *regional service consolidation*. The rapid growth of information and technology means that the service needs in regional centres have become more sophisticated. It is no longer possible for the smaller centres to offer all of these high-level services. This is reflected in the kinds of VET services offered in the regional centres and tends to reinforce these trends. Shepparton and Orange are examples of this.

✧ The above trend (along with the national training modules) has led to *homogeneity of services* as well as standards. Consequently, it was often difficult to see how the VET sector fully responded to the local economy and local skills needs.

✧ Nevertheless, there are examples where the VET sector has provided *key services and training in response to regional economic change and restructuring*. The emergence of south-west Western Australia as an amenity landscape through agri-tourism and winemaking to complement the manufacturing and agriculture industries is one example. A similar but different example lies in the restructuring of dairy, sugar and forestry in Wide Bay-Burnett and the shift towards tourism and retirement. Here we saw examples of VET involvement in retail and aged care training.

✧ The study also yielded examples of *regions seeking to expand the diversity of their economic base*. Pastoralists in the Mt Isa region (Richmond), a region dominated by mining, had launched the small, but enterprising Red Claw (freshwater yabbies) initiative in an effort to expand their economic repertoire beyond cattle. Another example of diversifying within a region is the tulip-farming occurring on the Cradle Coast.

✧ There has been recognition of the need for *regional cooperation to enable development and change* to occur. This is the approach in the Cradle Coast where seven local governments, the VET sector, the University of Tasmania and industry have come together to form the Cradle Coast Authority.

Regional partnerships, Cradle Coast

The Cradle Coast Authority has established very effective and trusting partnerships between local government, government agencies, industry, and the community. It is a workable model which brings to life 'whole of government and community partnerships'. The Cradle Coast Authority is funded under the federal government's Sustainable Regions Program. Its purpose is to foster economic, social, and environmental sustainability for the whole Cradle Coast region. The federal government funding allocation has allowed the region to nominate key priorities for the region within the Cradle Coast Sustainable Regions Investment Plan.

✧ Another interesting example of the importance of *connections and links between training and community development* is found in the work of the Birchip Cropping Group in Horsham. The group acknowledged the critical relationship between their continued competitiveness and innovation, and the sustainability of the region where businesses are involved with grain cropping.

Regional collaboration for delivery of services

A number of different initiatives in the regions provided examples of the ways in which cooperation among VET providers had ensured a wider coverage of, and access to, local training services and skills development.

The study yielded examples of where the VET sector had sought to share resources and markets in an effort to give coverage and keep a range of services. These initiatives reflect that, in both the remote rural regions *and* outer metropolitan areas, transport and access remain problems.

Regional delivery, University of Ballarat

One of the key characteristics of the knowledge economy is the importance of networks and linkages either along the supply chain and or across sectors. The University of Ballarat, in collaboration with local VET providers, illustrates an effective regional delivery model. For 100 km west and 100 km north a bus collects young people to bring them to Ballarat for training. There is nothing new about this. But what is new and innovative is the networking of registered training organisations to meet their clients' needs. After some core training they get 'distributed around' and some will be off to the Agricultural College, others off to the Music Hub, some to a local registered training organisation and so on.

Responding to regional issues

There are other ways in which a closer look at specific regional landscapes reveals issues affecting the regions and which has implications for the VET sector.

✧ In the two outer-metropolitan area case studies the changes in the peri-urban and in particular the role and impact of horticulture were highlighted. The Virginia Horticultural Institute staff in Northern Adelaide have worked hard to provide ongoing training for local market gardeners, as well as hobby farmers seeking a 'rural lifestyle'.

✧ The emergence of the national agenda for natural resource management and regional catchment plans was seen as an important new development affecting regions. There are 56 catchment regions in Australia, all now required to produce catchment plans and manage the condition of land and water resources. There is a need for training, skills development and career paths in this sector.

In Orange, Western Institute of TAFE employs training partnership managers to build relationships to design, deliver and assess training for large companies. For example, they have structured training for Manildra Flour Mill. Manildra has earned a worldwide reputation as 'The Leader' in vital wheat gluten, native and modified wheat starches, specialty wheat proteins and alcohol.

✧ The Southern Gulf Catchment in north-west Queensland had recently entered into discussions with the VET sector to offer skills development in environmental management. In both the Burdekin and in Bunbury, collaboration between Indigenous groups and government agency staff, the VET sector and local landholders has led to the development of training programs which give Indigenous groups an opportunity to go 'on country' and gain skills in environmental management.

✧ The issue of ageing and concomitant health services has provoked a comprehensive VET response in most regions. The study revealed a range of interesting and different kinds of local responses to providing training. Good examples of cooperation and a holistic approach are found in Wide Bay-Burnett. In Horsham, cooperation between the university and the local VET provider has established nurse training, with links across the whole health sector. In some centres like Shepparton, large institutions, such as the hospital, provided important links for health care training.

✧ Most respondents in regions identified an ongoing concern for finding appropriate responses to the training needs of migrants, refugees and Indigenous people. For example, the VET sector in collaboration with manufacturing companies around Shepparton offered specialised training for newly arrived migrants from Iraq, Albania and Turkey. The Virginia Horticultural Institute in Northern Adelaide worked closely with Vietnamese market gardeners.

A very innovative group within this region, Learning Solutions, has linked capacity-building, hospitals and health care.

✧ The approach adopted in working with the Indigenous populations in Alice Springs was project-based, with training very much hands-on and linked to the provision of infrastructure. Other good examples of Indigenous initiatives which tapped into registered training organisation networks and shared resources were being undertaken by the Goulburn Valley Indigenous Employment Council and the Townsville Community Development Employment Project.

Summary

Within the regions, many excellent initiatives stand out. Specific, regionally focused activities include a regional service delivery model in Ballarat (servicing Horsham and surrounding district), the training partnership managers working with Manildra Flour Mill in Orange and the regional development authority on the Cradle Coast.

However, the level of *regional engagement* and the need to consider the *regional scale* were less evident. Much of the activity was sectoral and local.

This highlights a second concern: generally, the VET sector did not focus on ways to broaden the diversity of the economic base or mobilise resources to identify local assets and potential which could then be matched by skills development.

'That trust business'

One of the characteristic features in the emergence of the knowledge economy has been the importance of partnerships and networks. The links are important. In a time of information overload, partnerships ensure that information can be effectively shared. However, these kinds of linkages create other benefits: a range of tacit knowledge built up around trust, shared values and norms.

It is now widely acknowledged that this kind of trust is equally as important in social and economic terms as codified knowledge (Amin 1999).

The need to partner and network is now a widely accepted common practice. As outlined earlier, most educational institutions in Australia are engaging in some form of cooperation with other educational or training providers in their region. Shoemaker et al. (2000) articulate a range of the different kinds of approaches to partnerships.

Less well articulated are the types of partnerships and the kinds of benefits they bestow on a community or organisation. Partnerships and a range of creative associations not only provide more efficient delivery of services but also, through trust and shared values, build social capital. Social capital is often the glue which holds communities together.

The VET sector has been an important catalyst in creating and building partnerships and in generating social capital in regional Australia. Often this social capital has been created through VET sector efforts to establish learning pathways, the relationships needed for these linkages and networks with a range of education/training providers and with industry generating social capital. Additional social capital (and human and infrastructure capital) has been created because of the willingness of individual VET sector staff to look for innovative and creative ways to provide access to training. The examples below illustrate how this has been achieved.

Indicators and measures of VET performance in partnerships

In reviewing earlier studies on higher education institutional partnerships, and drawing upon the experiences of those in the case study regions, it is possible to identify several key indicators which provide some measure of the performance of VET in partnerships and VET partnerships in regional Australia. These insights have refined the selection of the indicators to the following:

✧ types of creative associations

✧ ways of sharing resources and markets

✧ new learning infrastructures/learning environments

✧ types of learning pathways

✧ leadership.

Types of creative associations

The VET contribution to partnerships can be assessed by evaluating the types of partnerships and creative associations in which VET is involved. In this context, the research has revealed a variety

of creative ways in which VET has linked to, and become a partner with, a wide array of VET providers, as well as other organisations.

In all regions there was evidence of partnerships, a willingness to engage in collaborative arrangements and a consideration of creative associations with other organisations.

✧ The predominant partnerships undertaken by the VET sector were with other VET stakeholders and with industry. Often these partnerships were shaped around 'on-the-job' experience, assessment, delivery, or a mix of these functions.

✧ Most often the partnerships sought to provide learning pathway links and connections to one or two other providers. There were good examples of partnerships formed to provide a holistic learning program (Alice Springs, Wesley Group in Wide Bay-Burnett) or a 'one-stop-shop' approach (Cradle Coast).

✧ Many of the VET providers spoke of the highly competitive environment in which they operated and the way this forced them to enter into partnerships.

✧ Training partnership managers were employed by Western Institute of TAFE in Orange to build relationships to design, deliver and assess training for large companies.

✧ The VET sector participated in several multi-partner campus arrangements, including Margaret River Campus (Western Australia), Nirimba Campus (Western Sydney), Charles Darwin University (Alice Springs) and Spinifex College (Mt Isa).

✧ The other distinguishing feature of the partnerships developed by and with the VET sector was the number without 'formal' agreements. Many were based on informal connections often forged by individuals who argued that it was a measure of trust and necessity in regions.

✧ Given the experience of partnerships, they could now cast more widely to build new and different connections.

Ways of sharing resources and markets

A second indicator and good measure of VET partnerships performance is derived by looking at the ways in which VET providers have partnered to share resources and/or markets to deliver services.

✧ At times, this shared resource model takes on the appearance of a 'value or supply chain', with different providers or other organisations (for example, local government) recognising that the best answer to service and coverage is to map the 'supply chain'. In this way, different providers are used to deliver at different points in the links along the chain. The study found good examples of this (for example, Cradle Coast, Horsham, Orange).

✧ In other cases, larger VET providers have realised the importance of recognising the needs of smaller centres and small centre providers, as well as recognising that each (that is, large centres and smaller satellite centres) provides a specialised service. As such, VET providers have used this knowledge in a collaborative way to share the market. There were some especially innovative responses here (for example, Cradle Coast, Horsham, and Shepparton).

✧ Other successful measures of partnerships are evidenced in the shared use of facilities, restaurants and hotels as part of the training programs. Several good examples were found along the Cradle Coast, in Orange and in Western Sydney.

New learning infrastructures/learning environments

By entering into partnership arrangements and tapping into a range of resources and markets, it is possible to create and develop new learning infrastructure and learning environments. These new infrastructures and environments enable a wider proportion of the community to engage in learning activities. This engagement may be the result of the location of learning activities or through access to different kinds of content and different approaches.

In this study we found numerous examples of ways in which VET partnerships had enabled, facilitated and created new learning infrastructure.

One particular aspect of the new learning environments created through VET partnerships is the access to 'Mode 2' learning (Burton-Clark 1998), project-based learning applied through hands-on activities linking 'theory with practice' (see landscape matrix in the support document). In the words of one of the respondents from the Birchip Cropping Group: 'When training was based in the paddock, there was always a better response'.

✧ VET partnerships enabled the development of a range of mobile learning resources such as the mobile hospitality training offered in Shepparton and the mobile adult learning units used in Alice Springs.

✧ In Alice Springs, Burdekin and Bunbury, VET partnerships facilitated a range of different types of 'on property' training.

✧ The Birchip Group's internet meetings illustrate how continued improvement in telecommunications pays economic dividends. The value of internet windows is that the participant is still speaking to a trainer, receiving and sharing ideas, and viewing material on their computer screen.

✧ In partnership with the University of Ballarat, the VET sector offered flexible access to training through the formation of a weekend school which used the physical infrastructure of the university.

New learning environments—Ford, University of Ballarat and VET in Schools

The story is not a new one. It's about young people building a hot rod car. It's about the Ford motor company being involved and donating V8 engine parts and expertise. This has been done in other places. Two things make this story stand out. First are the number of 'players' involved: Ford, University of Ballarat, VET in Schools, employers and the concurrent work placements. Second are the connections and immersion for each young person. It's that these young people write for hot rod magazines.

✧ Through partnerships there were numerous examples of learning projects where trainees worked on 'live' projects. These included the Rage Cage in Northern Adelaide, the Hot Rod project in Shepparton, with the opportunity to work in the pits at Bathurst, and the community care and maintenance program delivered by the Centre for Appropriate Technologies in Alice Springs.

✧ However, the study also highlighted difficulties in engaging with small and medium enterprises. The nature of small business means that it is difficult to send staff to or access training encompassed by the current training packages. In at least two regions, VET providers argued for more flexible use of training packages and modes of delivery.

Types of learning pathways

A fourth indicator, and linked to that of effective partnerships, is the new and different learning pathways developed. This is especially important to young school leavers. We found examples of VET providers with specialist interests who had partnered to provide a pathway between training and apprenticeships (Cradle Coast and Penrith City Council in Outer Western Sydney) or who had linked a range of providers to offer a holistic approach to training services (Wide Bay-Burnett, Alice Springs).

✧ The Rage Cage and Hot Rod examples not only created new learning environments, but also encouraged participants to see the process from beginning to end and to understand the different learning needs and requirements along the way.

✧ A strong view which emerged from discussions with Indigenous providers was the need for a 'whole person' approach; training began with the self and self-esteem. Thus the resources were assembled to provide this pathway through the stages of personal development (Townsville Community Development Employment Project, Alice Springs, Goulburn Valley).

Leadership

In all of the regions we were struck by the leadership role emerging from individuals in the VET network through developing partnerships among the providers and with the community.

A key finding is the importance of this community role and we would wholeheartedly support an examination of the role of leadership programs in promoting and nurturing these skills in the VET sector.

✧ Through the partnerships and trust developed with Indigenous community providers in Alice Springs and Bunbury, issues concerned with investigating recognition of prior learning of traditional knowledge have been raised.

✧ The study also revealed that the current education and training reform agendas in both Queensland (Education and Training Reforms for the Future) and Victoria (Local Learning and Employment Networks) had played a critical role in creating new opportunities for dialogue, not only between traditional VET providers and participants, but well beyond that.

Dimensions of impact

In the last decade more attention has been given to the role of higher education in regional development. In some instances this has involved a reappraisal of the role of universities, such as that undertaken by the Kellogg Foundation in regard to the American Land Grant universities[3]. In other instances it is attributable to the growth in importance of the knowledge infrastructure in the knowledge economy. Often the focus has been on the role of universities as part of the knowledge infrastructure in regional development (Burton-Clark 1998; Charles & Benneworth 2000; Boekema et al. 2000).

The case studies have been important because they have sought to highlight a number of aspects of economic and social development to which educational institutions can contribute in regional areas. These contributions to local development can take many forms, including the provision of courses, access to library or sporting facilities, or civic involvement. Other examples might include student- or community-based projects, undertaken in partnership.

It is clear from this study that VET activities, training and initiatives in regional Australia have made a significant contribution to the creation and building of social capital. In communities which have experienced change, interventions which mobilise social capital are important. Social capital, along with other forms of capital, is now seen as a critical part of any community's balance sheet. As we noted earlier, it is often the glue which holds communities together. But it is much more than this; it often constitutes a critical component of the community asset base. From this asset base a community manages and adapts to change.

Concurrently a number of significant changes are being considered in relation to the VET sector in general, and more specifically in regard to secondary and post-secondary education and training pathways. As we have seen in at least two states (Queensland and Victoria), this appraisal of the role of VET vis-a-vis school leavers, the community skills base and employment has created a wider space for discussion and a vehicle for change.

The generation of social capital and the creation of opportunities for negotiation and dialogue stand out as two important contributions of VET and VET 'partnershipping' to regional development.

In the broader literature, a range of indicators which measures the contribution of higher education institutions has been identified. These have been adapted and used to measure the performance of the VET sector in regional Australia. Given the changes ahead for vocational education and training, this is a timely review. In all, six dimensions of impact have been used in this study. They are:

✧ skills development and transfer

✧ enterprise development/support

✧ supply chain connections

✧ mobilising social and other forms of capital

---

[3] The Kellogg Foundation's study of State and Land Grant Universities in the United States existed from January 1996 to March 2000 in order to raise public awareness of the need for higher education reform (Byrne 2006). The study explicitly addressed the role of universities within learning societies and called for renewal of community/university partnerships.

❖ civic engagement

❖ innovation and creativity.

Skills development and transfer

Skills development and transfer refers to the development of skills in the local community. This may happen through involvement in training and through Mode 2 learning, where staff and students work on community-based projects. At times this may be in collaboration with the community.

This indicator is, of course, one of the key indicators of the performance of the VET sector and VET partnerships.

The study revealed that within the community there are a number of market sectors. Broadly, there was a strong emphasis on school leavers and the development of appropriate learning pathways towards employment and/or further education.

However, an equally important finding was the emphasis that community providers placed on VET in facilitating skills development later in life or as part of a career change or of workforce re-entry.

The Birchip Cropping Group, Horsham

This involved a collective of farmers adopting the view that rather than training, they should encourage and support **self-identified learning**. This approach would seem to embed the relationship between learning, training, adaptability, profitable production and sustainability.

In the study, we looked for examples of technology transfer associated with skills development (that is, where systems or equipment may be accessed by small business). In general we found few examples of technology transfer, as VET providers were less able to maintain cutting-edge technology. The more usual model was collaboration with an industry partner to enable trainees to access industry equipment and systems.

Enterprise development/support

This indicator seeks to identify ways in which VET and VET partnerships support the growth of business in the local economy. This indicator sets out to measure the level of understanding of, and engagement with, the landscape and its opportunities. VET and VET partnerships achieve this through skills development. With this indicator, however, we were seeking to identify other forms of support, particularly for small and medium enterprises.

Generally speaking, the study identified very little about a role for VET in enterprise development per se. Further, in most regions it was felt that small business was not yet a successful participant in VET training, a situation needing consideration. Some respondents pointed to lack of resources to support technology transfer and enterprise development.

Nevertheless, there were examples where partnerships had enabled the resources for enterprise development.

❖ The Nirimba Campus in Western Sydney, a multi-partner site with secondary schools, TAFE and university, had established a business incubator which was housing around 50 small enterprises.

❖ The Birchip Cropping Group in Horsham has taken a research-based approach and links its learning programs to grain production.

❖ A government registered training organisation in Bunbury providing construction training was using project-based construction of office dongas which were being sold. The profits of these sales funded the purchase of materials for further training projects.

In the Mt Isa region (Richmond), local landholders, local council and the Queensland Government are investigating the feasibility of a consortium—the Red Claw—to grow and distribute yabbies. This is an innovative and new use of a pastoral landscape.

◇ Also in Western Australia, the Department of Conservation and Land Management assists the development of spin-off cottage industries in Indigenous communities by encouraging stronger networking links. This has both economic and social benefits for the communities.

Supply chain connections

Through this indicator the study sought to locate ways in which VET and VET partnerships were aware of supply chains in the local community and had identified links or components of the supply where they might value-add.

Generally speaking, while the supply chain 'model' was used as an analogy to show how VET providers had established learning pathways and linked to target different needs and stages along the learning pathway, there was not a strong awareness of local supply chains and ways in which these could be targeted and value-added to contribute to regional development.

Mobilising social and other forms of capital

For the most part the study revealed that the VET sector plays a critical role in communities in mobilising *all forms of capital*. In many regions it was demonstrated that training acts as a social link, connecting and enabling people to engage, not just with learning, but with others—'training gives hope'.

The wide array of partnership arrangements had clearly generated considerable trust, collaboration and shared goals and objectives, all of which translate to social capital. Further, VET has played a significant role for mature learners as part of the 'return to learn' agenda of retraining and workforce re-entry.

Across all ages and markets it was generally felt that VET plays a critical role in building confidence about learning.

However, an equally important finding was that these VET partnerships, in generating social capital, had also increased the value of other forms of capital in the regions.

◇ The project-based activities highlighted in almost all the regions demonstrated ways in which the training initiatives and projects not only delivered the required training, but also in the process created and constructed *physical or built capital* and necessary infrastructure in the community. This was especially apparent in Alice Springs, but was also reflected in the Rage Cage example in Northern Adelaide.

◇ In Mt Isa the training initiatives being discussed with the Southern Gulf Catchment will not only build the necessary natural resource management (NRM) skills and awareness but, in the process, create and maintain *environmental capital*. This capital, in turn, has the potential to generate tourism and new economic investment.

◇ Similarly, the 'on country' and 'on property' initiatives under way in the Burdekin, Bunbury and Alice Springs will build *social capital, human capital and cultural capital*.

Charles Darwin University has established relationships with property owners whereby training in rural skills (that is, fencing, mustering) can be provided on the property.

Civic engagement

This indicator demonstrates the ways in which social capital is transferred and mobilised within communities. Broadly, the research demonstrated a substantial amount of civic engagement and a commitment to community development. Often this was driven by particular individuals.

In regions such as Northern Adelaide and Bunbury there was well-demonstrated effective collaboration between training providers, local authorities and the community. Civic engagement was also demonstrated in Queensland and Victoria where educational reform has created new opportunities and encouraged a number of community players to engage with VET in their region. It was noted that in some cases the personal relationships between individuals had later translated into organisational relationships.

However, in Alice Springs, due to the remote nature of the landscape and the lack of employment opportunities, training challenged the model that it can only be focused on economic or employment outcomes. In some cases, training provides skills that are necessary for new livelihoods in these remote landscapes.

Innovation and creativity

Regional development will depend a great deal on the adaptability and innovation of the community; there is evidence in this study of some highly innovative responses to community learning needs. This was evidenced in some of the delivery mechanisms, regional funding arrangements and partnerships, as well as in specific curriculum and learning environments.

✧ Public–private partnerships were identified as a successful model in Outer Western Sydney where Western Institute of TAFE identified that their pilot study with the Coca-Cola Company to deliver in-house manufacturing training had increased their ability to provide flexible and client-responsive training. Public–private partnerships were also evident in the Nirmiba Education Precinct, which includes a business incubator on-site and involves the private sector alongside public education facilities.

Mobile Adult Learning Unit, Alice Springs

In Alice Springs, there is a very strong focus on remote delivery and the mobile adult learning units are used by Charles Darwin University to deliver training into remote communities. The mobile adult learning unit is a customised classroom which travels on the back of a road train. This encompasses a more flexible and mobile approach to learning which fits community needs.

✧ Engaging with entrepreneurship and leadership was evidenced in the development of the innovative partnership between Spinifex College and the Southern Gulf Catchment Group in Mt Isa.

Barriers and impediments

The study documented outstanding examples of leadership and social capital developed through partnerships across the 12 case studies. Despite the stories of good practice and the impact of these partnerships and projects 'on the ground', there are barriers and impediments that affect outputs and outcomes. The types of issues raised by VET providers tended to coalesce around three themes: institutional barriers; funding models; and attitudes towards vocational education and training.

Institutional barriers

✧ VET providers expressed frustration with the lack of flexibility in training package delivery and are seeking the ability to respond more effectively to local conditions and needs.

✧ Often the institutional delivery/budget requirements hindered flexibility and creativity; VET providers felt they were not given sufficient room to explore innovative ideas and grasp opportunities to offer learning packages/modules in different settings and in different arrangements.

✧ There were concerns with the curriculum. Some VET providers felt that modularisation had resulted in some 'dumbing down' of curriculum components.

✧ There was a tension between the needs of small business and large business and a perception that it was easier and more profitable to establish links as much as possible with big business (that is, manufacturing firms, hospitals, large organisations).

✧ Within this context it was found that, in general, VET and VET partnerships have not yet fully engaged with small and medium enterprises in the regions. However, some of the barriers to engagement/involvement came from the nature of small and medium enterprises, lack of awareness and time to take on training.

✧ Small business in general felt left out. Training was costly and the training packages were perceived as insufficiently flexible.

✧ Collaboration across and between providers was often, out of necessity, based on the 'how' rather than the 'what'. Often the collaboration was driven by competition for a relatively small number of training dollars.

✧ Training imposes a range of cultural and community obligations on Indigenous participants. Often the implications of these community obligations are not fully understood by VET providers.

✧ Because of the role played by VET in communities, there is a critical need for leadership training for practitioners in the VET sector (for example, Australian Rural Leaders Program offered in the agricultural and natural resource management sectors).

Funding models

✧ In some cases it was felt there were many small towns competing with one another. While it was acknowledged that collaborative competition had focused VET provision, there was also a need to recognise the limits of the markets. Nevertheless, there were good examples of identifying

niche markets, cooperation to share the student market and pathways where different VET providers offered services along the pathways.

✧ An argument was put forward that the intense competition for the allocated VET dollars was limiting services.

✧ Respondents spoke of the plethora of funding sources and the need for a road map to the sources of funding and the means of applying for them.

Attitudinal barriers

✧ The study revealed there was still an attitudinal barrier as far as VET was concerned. It was seen as a second-best option to university.

✧ The VET choices for Indigenous participants (for example, Northern Territory) were generally lower-level qualifications (that is, certificate I and II level only) which suggests that training providers believe Indigenous students do not want/need, or are incapable of completing higher-level qualifications, or that Indigenous people themselves believe that they do not want/need, or are incapable of completing higher-level qualifications.

✧ Running parallel with these perceived limitations to skills attainment is the implication of pigeon-holing Indigenous clients into lower-paid and lower-profile employment areas (that is, cleaner, council labourer, general gardener etc.). While there may be an assumption that Indigenous students have a lower level of education prior to entry into VET, it was not clear that this was the main reason for these perceptions about the aspirations and abilities of Indigenous learners.

✧ What is clear is that the VET sector certainly must take the opportunity to engage with this issue and address these attitudinal barriers to learning within a broader educational context.

Framework for regional futures

The last decade has seen a consolidation of VET and VET partnerships as key components of the training and education framework in Australia. Further, numerous examples of partnerships between VET and secondary education are testimony to the learning pathway opportunities available through this cooperation.

This qualitative analysis of 12 different case studies also reveals many examples of the array of providers and players in the VET sector and the explicit links and partnerships now established between VET and industry. The study also reveals good examples of applied (Mode 2) learning projects which have made considerable impact upon community development.

When these are added to the firm foundations of national standards of curriculum and the well-established competency base, a strong argument can be made for the capacity of the structure to now embrace a more overtly regional approach.

Key components for a regional framework are suggested.

✧ There is room for more adventurous types of partnerships. While there are already good examples (such as the Cradle Coast; Southern Gulf Catchment in Mt Isa; Orange), we would argue that the *capacity, social capital and experience* now exists for the consideration of new and different kinds of partnerships.

✧ The *change agendas* in Queensland and Victoria have already been identified as opportunities and many respondents demonstrated how new and different activities had emerged.

✧ The study reveals that there are literally hundreds of good stories and examples of VET partnerships which led to projects that have made a difference. While the projects deliver learning and training, they also make an impact on local livelihoods. We would argue now for a *more strategic approach* which draws together these different forms of capital and regional capacity.

✧ We draw a parallel to the Decade of Landcare where hundreds of projects across the country worked to *shift attitudes* and bring about engagement. On reviewing this in 2003, the first national director of Landcare, Andrew Campbell, said it was time to 'pull together all the amazing stories, insights and findings from program activities' to consider more thoughtfully the way forward. The same applies to the VET experience.

✧ These many partnerships and projects need a strategic focus. We also feel they need to *link more appropriately to the regional landscapes* within which they are located. In general we found a fracture between freely engaging with and understanding the multi-functionality of the landscape and the opportunities this would provide.

✧ Despite many projects which demonstrated a significant impact, it is felt they lack an overall strategic focus in terms of regional development. We would argue the need for much *a stronger link to regional development.*

✧ A *community-based regional structure* seems appropriate for strengthening regional cooperation to enable development and change. One model is the Cradle Coast Authority.

✧ A *regional strategic planning* approach process which links to the local government and the region's aspirations for future resources would seem appropriate. Such an approach necessitates: the need to look at service delivery; links to other centres; an audit of resources and priorities; and targets which relate to the local social, economic and environmental conditions.

✧ Associated with the regional approach is a strong *emphasis on priorities and targets* which align with regional development. These are then matched by an investment strategy.

References

Allison, J & Keane, J 2001, 'Evaluating the role of the Sunshine Coast University (USC) in the regional economy', *Local Economy*, vol.16, no.2, pp.123–41.

Allison, J & Nystrom, S 2002, 'From smart state to learning communities: Learning festivals as a strategy to stimulate and foster learning communities', paper presented at OECD Conference *Learning cities/learning regions*, Melbourne, October.

Amin, A 1999, 'An institutionalist perspective on regional economic development', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol.23, no.2, pp.365–78.

Amin, A & Thrift, N 1995, 'Institutional issues for the European regions: From markets and plans to socioeconomics and powers of association', *Economy and Society*, vol.24, no.1, pp.41–66.

Australian Local Government Association 2003, *State of the regions 2003*, ALGA, Canberra.

Barr, N 2003, 'Future agricultural landscapes', *Australian Planner*, vol.40, no.2, pp.123–7.

Black, A & Hughes, P 2001, *The identification and analysis of indicators of community strength and outcomes*, Department of Family and Community Services, Canberra.

Boekema, F, Morgan, K, Bakkers, S & Rutten, R (eds) 2000, *Knowledge, innovation and economic growth: The theory and practice of learning regions*, Edward Elgar, Northampton, UK.

Burton-Clark, R 1998, *Creating entrepreneurial universities: Organisational pathways of transformation*, Pergamon Press, Oxford.

Byrne, J 2006, *Public higher education reform five years after the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land Grant Universities*, report to the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges and the WK Kellogg Foundation, viewed 23 March 2006, <http://www.nasulgc.org/Kellogg/KCFiveYearReport.pdf>.

Campbell, A 2003, 'Key to sustainability lies down on the farm', *Australian Financial Review*, 28 November, p8.

Charles, D & Benneworth, P 2000, *The regional contribution of higher education: A benchmarking approach to the evaluation of the regional impact of HEI*, Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies (CURDS), University of Newcastle-on-Tyne, United Kingdom.

Falk, I & Kilpatrick, S 2000, 'What is social capital? A study of interaction in a rural community', *Sociologia Ruralis*, vol.40, no.1, pp.87–110.

Garlick, S 1998, *Creative associations in special places: Enhancing the role of universities in building competitive regional economies*, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.

——2002, 'Universities and their regions: Knowledge contribution to regional economic development in Australia', PhD Thesis, Southern Cross University, Lismore.

Goddard, J 1997, *Universities and regional development: An overview*, CURDS website, viewed 30 September 2000, <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/~ncurds/univ/imhe-97.htm>.

Landry, C & Matarasso, F 1998, *The learning city-region: Approaching problems of the concept, its measurement and evaluation—A dithe universityssion and document*, Comedia, Stroud, Gloucs.

Longworth, N 1999, *Making lifelong learning work: Learning cities for a learning century*, Kogan Page, London.

Meinig, D 1979, *Interpretations of the ordinary landscape*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) 2000, *Learning regions and cities: Knowledge, learning and regional innovation systems*, OECD, Paris.

Putnam, R 1993, 'The prosperous community: Social capital and public life', *The American Prospect,* vol.13**,** Spring, pp.35–42.

Shepherd, C 2005, Radio National Broadcast, February.

Shoemaker, A, Allison, J, Gum, K, Harmoni, R, Lindfield, M, Nolan, M & Stedman, L 2000, *Multi-partner campuses: The future of Australian higher education?*, Evaluations and Investigations Programme, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.

Sommerlad, E, Duke, C & Macdonald, R 1998, *Universities and TAFE: Collaboration in the emerging world of 'universal higher education'*, Higher Education Council, Canberra, viewed 30 September 2000, <http://www.detya.gov.au/nbeet/publications/hec/overview.html>.

Spillar, M 1996, 'Integrating regional, local and sectoral planning', *Australian Planner,* vol.33, no.1, pp.16–19.

Spirn, A, 1998, *The language of landscape*, Yale University Press, New Haven.

Stimson, R, Baum, S, Mangan, J, Van Gellecum, Y, Shyy, T-K & Yigitcanlar, T 2004, *Analysing spatial patterns in the characteristics of work, employment and skills in Australia's capital cities and across its regional cities and towns: Modelling community opportunity and vulnerability*, prepared by the Centre for Research into Sustainable Urban and Regional Futures (CR-SURF) at the University of Queensland for ANTA, Brisbane.

Thanki, R 1999, 'How do we know the value of higher education to regional development?' *Regional Studies,* vol.33**,** no.1, pp.84–9.

Wolfe, D & Gertler, M 2001, 'Globalisation and economic restructuring in Ontario: From industrial heartland to learning region?', *European Planning Studies*, vol.9, no.5, pp.575–92.

Woolcock, M 1998, 'Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework', *Theory and Society*, vol.27, pp.151–208.

Yarnit, M 2000, *Towns, cities and regions in the learning age: A survey of learning communities*, Department for Education and Employment, London, viewed 16 March 2001, <http://www.ala.asn.au/learningcities/ LGAlearninglayout.pdf>.

Appendix 1: Glossary of terms

Amenity landscape

Also known as an amenity/lifestyle landscape. The term refers to regions which are characterised by attractive landscape features and climate and often experience an increasing population from 'sea changers' or retirees.

Irrigation landscape

Reflects the demands of intensive irrigation practices on the land, which also needs to take into account environmental sustainability and the emerging culture of water trading rights and restrictions.

Restructuring landscape

Refers to regions undergoing transition due to economic or industrial changes in the landscape. For example, deregulation of the dairy industry might create loss of income from this sector and a shift towards growing or developing other sources of economic capital within a region.

Intercultural landscape

Refers to a region in which there is a significant cultural intersection of language groups which has important socio-cultural effects within the community. The case cited in this report is that of Alice Springs, where 40% of the population is Indigenous, and 30% speak an Indigenous language as their first language.

Peri-urban landscape

Describes landscapes where there is competition for agricultural land. This may also involve concerns about the impact of increasing urbanisation on agricultural production, scenic amenity and environmental protection.

Agri-tourism

Reflects a growing industry where holiday-makers may participate in rural or regional production tours or experiences such as wine growing, fruit picking or horse riding, for example.

Appendix 2

CRRI-Q interview prompts and questions

Creative associations	Questions
Partnerships	1 Who are the people/organisations you work with to put VET into place? List the organisations you work with.
– *Types of collaboration*	2 What types of agreements, formal or otherwise, do you have with these people you work with? Are there multi-partner sites?
– *Partnership arrangements*	3 What do you think makes some of these arrangements interesting? What is their point of difference?
– *Multi-partner sites*	4 What do you know are the benefits? (for community, for TPs)
– *Benefits for community*	5 What could be the benefits? Usefulness etc. (for community, for TPs)
– *Benefits for training providers (TPs)*	
Governance	TAFE and training providers
– *Governance (decision-making)*	1 Describe your governance structure, board, management team etc.
– *Management*	2 Describe the relationships/partnerships you have with these organisations? Who funds, in-kind, supportive links, strong inter-personal etc.
– *Intra-connectedness*	3 What is different in these relationships? Do they change and why? How do you make decisions?
– *Inter-connectedness*	4 What about internal networks within your sector? How do you make decisions?
	5 Who manages VET partnerships? Are coordinators the best way to go?
	6 Who manages the day-to-day, staff, funds etc?
	Business and industry
	1 How many trainees have you taken on board?
	2 Are you involved in any committees/working parties relating to VET? What role do you play?
	3 Is the training providing the required skills? Is the curriculum suitable?
	4 What is the general community feeling about VET, how do you feel about VET?
	5 At the end of the training do the trainees end up with a full-time position in your industry? Do you keep track of them?
	6 At the end of the training do you believe the trainees are job-ready?
	7 Who funds the trainees, and, is it the best way to go?
	8 Does the present VET management structure work for you? What makes it work? What are the barriers? What are you doing to meet the various needs for yourself and your trainees?
	9 How easy is it for you to be responsive and innovative?

Creative associations	Questions
Connectedness – *Cultural connectedness* – *HEI/training providers and media connections* – *Personal and public expression* – *Sport*	1 What is the relationship between the local media and the VET sector? How is VET described/talked about? Has VET got a great reputation? How do people find out about VET? 2 How does VET meet the requirements of different cultural needs/values within this community in its present structure? 3 What is in place to value/include different cultural ways?
Learning Infrastructure – *Existing learning sites* – *Evidence of mode 1 learning* – *Evidence of mode 2 learning*	1 What kinds of innovative learning occur, and where? 2 What are the current learning infrastructure needs? 3 Do you think the curriculum/courses offered are relevant to local needs? 4 Where else do you think learning could occur? Is the learning infrastructure here? What would be needed? 5 What is VET's role in building social capital in communities (if answer is no role – why)?
Social wellbeing and health – *HEI/training providers contributions to social wellbeing and health.* – *Social strength*	1 What are the social strengths of this community? What makes this community strong? 2 How is the VET sector contributing to/involved with the social well-being of this community? e.g. through training, research, volunteers, health prevention/care, aged-care homes, housing, sport etc.
Lifelong learning and employability – *Knowledge transfer (higher education)* – *Skills transfer (projects)* – *Matching training to local economy (business—industry)*	1 What does 'lifelong learning' mean to you? 2 What assurances are in place to ensure that the training offered is matched to the needs of the regional economy? 3 How are SMEs involved in organised training? (How does the training relate globally? Are there other options?) 4 How easy is it for you to be innovative and responsive? Considering, policies, resources etc. 5 Where do you believe you have been responsive? Have you any examples of relationships that have grown out of VET? What is the impact of these responses? 6 How do you keep track of the graduates? Are they retained regionally in employment? Is it an issue? Has any enterprise started as a result of VET?
Engagement – *Working parties* – *Committees* – *Leadership roles*	1 How many committees/working parties, teams etc. exist? 2 Who are on these teams? (local leadership) 3 Is it part of your mandate to engage/encourage local leadership? 4 How do you work together? Who leads?
Knowledge and regeneration – *Enterprise development* – *Supply chain*	1 What areas of the supply chains is VET involved in? 2 Is this a policy that you look at supporting locally? 3 What role does VET play in maintaining existing enterprises?
Futures – *New kinds of learning environments* – *New kinds of economy* – *Drivers* – *Impediments*	1 What are the drivers in creating new learning environments/ enterprises? 2 What are the impediments? 3 What would you suggest would improve the delivery of VET in regional communities?

Support document details

Additional information relating to this research is available in *Building learning communities: Partnerships, social capital and VET performance—Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <http://www.ncver.edu.au>. The document contains:

✧ Restructuring Rural Landscape

✧ Resource Landscape

✧ Resource Mining Landscape

✧ Intercultural Landscape

✧ Amenity/Lifestyle Landscape

✧ Manufacturing Landscape

✧ Regenerating Landscape

✧ Broad Acre/Farming Landscape

✧ Irrigation Landscape

✧ Peri-Urban Landscape

✧ Manufacturing Landscape

✧ Resilient Landscape

✧ References

✧ Landscape Matrix

NCVER