FRAMEWORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ACE SOCIAL INCLUSION STRATEGY

Final report January 2011

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KEY POINT SUMMARY

This report presents a Framework for the development of an ACE Social Inclusion Strategy, as part of the work being undertaken by the national ACE Action Group. The aims of the Framework are to reinvigorate the efforts of ACE providers to engage people who are disadvantaged in vocationally-focused, community-supported learning, to provide formal education-to-work pathways and to achieve the goals of the 2008 Ministerial Declaration on ACE.

Key messages

- Planning for social inclusion in the workforce requires linking policy directions, principles, best practice strategies and provider capabilities.
- People who are disadvantaged should be encouraged to aspire to the national education attainment target for the working-age population of a senior secondary school certificate or VET Certificate III or above, as required by the 21st century labour market and to achieve sustainable jobs and incomes.
- The learning-to-work journey for many of those at risk of being socially excluded will require sustained effort over longer periods.
- Barriers to participation in education, the economy and society need to be addressed by considering all elements of the lives of disadvantaged clients and ensuring that outstanding needs are met.
- It is not the responsibility of ACE providers to deliver all of the services crucial to successfully engaging disadvantaged learners in training.
- A learner-focused multi-disciplinary approach, also referred to as a tailored wrap-around or whole-of-government services approach needs to be adopted. In this way ACE providers can establish what services they can deliver to those at risk of being socially excluded and develop partnerships to deliver other required services.
- Encouraging learners to persist and complete their personal learning-to-work journey is essential and this is an area where ACE providers could focus their efforts, in addition to providing relevant learning programs.
- Greater strategic collaboration between the ACE Action Group and the following groups could develop roles and promote resource allocations to ACE in the social inclusion agenda:
  - NVEAC on the Equity Blueprint
  - the developers of the Foundation Skills Development Strategy
  - those involved in social inclusion agreements in schools and higher education
- ACE provider level strategic collaborations across jurisdictions would be beneficial in the exchange of experiences and the sharing of good practice, tools and resources. This could lead to the development of better reporting practices to demonstrate the value added by ACE to the social inclusion agenda.
INTRODUCTION

This report is part of the work being undertaken by the national ACE Action Group to implement the 2008 Ministerial Declaration on ACE. The report presents a framework for the development of a Social Inclusion Strategy for the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector. The aim of the research underlying the report is to reinvigorate the efforts of ACE providers to engage people who are disadvantaged in vocationally-focused courses and supported learning and in pathways to further formal education, training and work. As can be seen in Figure 1 below, the Framework links the various elements of policy directions, principles, best practice strategies and provider capabilities. Each layer of the Framework is discussed in the subsequent sections of the report.

Figure 1: Framework layers

Policy position

The policy position assigned to ACE is to help achieve social inclusion in workforce development, in partnership with the national vocational education and training (VET) sector. This is to be achieved either through the VET arm of the ACE provider and/or referral to other VET providers. The key policies impacting on the ACE sector include:

- the 2008 Ministerial Declaration on ACE
- the National Social Inclusion Agenda
- the National Workforce Participation and Productivity Agenda
- the national VET sector equity policy which is under development
- current State and territory ACE policies
Principles

General principles to guide social inclusion program design are:

1. **Adopt a learner-centred focus** with the learner actively negotiating their learning-to-work pathway.
2. **Provide tailored wrap-around support services** with the whole-of-life circumstances of the learner taken into account and appropriate support services integrated with the education-to-employment program, to overcome identified barriers.
3. **Differentiate learners** who are disadvantaged into four levels of vulnerability with the more vulnerable given more comprehensive and focused support services and more time.
4. **Plan for learner persistence** as completing the personal learning-to-work journey is very important for the individual, the service provider and society in general.
5. **Partner** because partnering and joined-up servicing arrangements are essential if learners are to complete their learning-to-work journeys.

Practice strategies

The following good practice strategies, for achieving social inclusion in workforce development, are based on a detailed analysis of the research literature.

1. **Develop motivation for learning** by ensuring positive initial contact and building learning identities in initial stages of engagement.
2. **Overcome gaps in language, literacy and other foundation skills** as these gaps hamper effective educational, labour market and social participation.
3. **Aid learner progression** by building a career focus, competencies, options and education pathways, and offering employment assistance services.
4. **Encourage learners to persist** no matter how complex their personal learning journeys are, by developing an individual learning-to-work plan, a personal support plan and formalised one-on-one assistance programs.

Provider capability

The current capability of individual ACE providers to provide a bridge between the Social Inclusion Agenda and the National Workforce and Productivity Agenda is highly variable. The development of local-level social inclusion strategies requires a focus on personnel, networks and partnerships, resources and funding and performance reporting requirements.

ACE organisations need to have strong leadership with enthusiasm for the social inclusion agenda and staff with the necessary knowledge, skills and qualifications to work with disadvantaged learners. A diverse contribution is required to meet the multifaceted needs of disadvantaged Australians and partnering is one way of ensuring appropriate support services to support learner persistence.

The adequacy of funding levels for programs to support the engagement of disadvantaged people in learning has been raised on many occasions. The VET sector has assured intergovernmental funding arrangements into which NVEAC is seeking to
insert a new funding mechanism. This is the proposed *National Partnership on Equity in VET* that takes account of the true cost of delivery for disadvantaged learners. ACE providers who are VET providers will presumably benefit.

There are many ACE providers who already engage people who are socially and educationally disadvantaged, providing opportunities to access pathways to further formal education, training and/or jobs. Data collecting, to demonstrate the value-add for those at risk of being socially excluded, is a long-outstanding issue in the ACE sector. An expanded set of targets and measures is required that acknowledge small transitions and improved quality of life as important milestones for learners with low level initial skills.

**Uses for the Framework**

The purpose of the Framework for the development of an ACE Social Inclusion Strategy (see Figure 2) is to assist policy-makers and ACE providers to increase participation of socially excluded adults in learning that contributes to work skills and outcomes.

![Figure 2: Use of framework at national and local levels](image)

At the national level policy-makers could use the Framework to develop a national ACE Social Inclusion Strategy and to focus collaboration between the ACE Action Group and peak groups eg: NVEAC. The Social Inclusion Strategy could include:

- a [social inclusion toolkit](https://www.socialinclusion.gov.au) – presenting a bank of useful resources such as websites, research reports and templates, with some guidelines being provided by the Social Inclusion Toolkit published by the Australian Government (www.socialinclusion.gov.au)
- examples of good practice in ACE across the nation – providing a stronger evidence base on the contribution of the ACE sector to social inclusion in the workforce and for sharing good practice
- a social inclusion leadership program – focusing on developing innovative ideas in strategic areas eg: learner engagement and support, developing pathways, performance data and standards models

At the local level ACE providers could use the Social Inclusion Strategy to:
- review their social inclusion programs and plan improvement initiatives
- develop organisational social inclusion strategies
- work with partner organisations to map roles and responsibilities in linked-up solutions and wrap-around services required by those at risk of being socially excluded
- sharpen proposals when tendering for social inclusion funds

The role of a social inclusion strategy

An ACE Social inclusion Strategy (see Figure 3) would foreground aspects of working with disadvantaged learners in the contexts of training, education and employment through the four layers of the Framework. This would assist ACE providers to focus on questions to address policy directions, good practice principles, engagement strategies and capacity building. It would enable providers to develop their own Social inclusion Strategies that would be responsive to their learners and to their communities.
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<th>Framework layer</th>
<th>Local level</th>
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<td>Engage disadvantaged people in learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Do we have a Plan that commits us to working with disadvantaged people?</td>
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<td>Build foundations &amp; vocational skills</td>
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<td>▪ What foundation &amp; vocational courses do we have to address the needs of disadvantaged people?</td>
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<td>Aid learner progression to further formal education, training and employment</td>
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<td>▪ What services do we have to aid progression for disadvantaged people?</td>
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<td>Learner-centred focus</td>
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<td>▪ How do we identify which groups and individuals need extra support?</td>
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<td>Tailored wrap-around services</td>
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<td>▪ How do we identify services learners need?</td>
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<td>Realistic learning timeframes</td>
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<td>▪ What other services can we call on in the community?</td>
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<td>Differentiated learner focus</td>
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<td>▪ How do we determine a realistic pathway and timeline for our learners to achieve?</td>
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<td>Encouraging learners to persist</td>
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<td>▪ How do we support our learners to stay in training and to achieve?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing motivation for learning</td>
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<td>▪ How do we engage these learners?</td>
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<td>Ensuring positive initial contact</td>
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<td>▪ What foundation skills needs of these learners and how do we address them?</td>
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<td>Building identify as a learner</td>
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<td>▪ How do we determine learner pathways and assist with learner progression?</td>
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<td>Developing foundation skills</td>
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<td>▪ What strategies do we need in place to help learners complete their training with us?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aiding learner progression to further education, training and work</td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ What qualities and skills do we need in our staff to run successful social inclusion programs?</td>
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<td>Aiding learner persistence</td>
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<td>▪ What PD plan do we need to put in place?</td>
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<td>Development of personnel to engage with disadvantaged learners</td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ What partnerships do we have in place or we need to establish to support our learners?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development of networks and partnerships to provide appropriate services &amp; pathways</td>
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<td>▪ What resources do we have, or are likely to have at our disposal?</td>
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<td>Building capacity in line with available and prospective funding and resources</td>
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<td>▪ What resources/ funding could be available to us?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development of outcomes targets and measures appropriate to disadvantaged learners</td>
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**Figure 3: From framework to social inclusion strategy**
SECTION 1 POLICY

This section outlines the key policy directions impacting on the involvement of the ACE sector in social inclusion initiatives.

In the 2008 Ministerial Declaration on ACE, the sector is presented as the bridge between two national agendas – the National Social Inclusion Agenda and the National Workforce Participation and Productivity Agenda, in partnership with other vocational education and training (VET) providers (see Figure 4). The new VET social inclusion policy, which is under development, acknowledges the ACE sector as having the potential to help achieve social inclusion in workforce development. ACE providers also operate within various state and territory policies and regularity and funding systems as well as the overlaying national system.

The common theme of the policies is that people from disadvantaged backgrounds are a key resource for the required increase in Australia’s workforce participation rate and productivity. It is therefore essential to provide them with the capabilities, opportunities and resources to learn and obtain secure work and to overcome disadvantage. It is acknowledged that this requires sustained effort over a longer time period through appropriate joined-up programs that break down barriers to social and economic participation.

The nationally agreed educational attainment target is a VET Certificate III or a senior secondary school (Year 12) certificate but about 4 million adults have less than Year 12 or equivalent qualifications and skills and many of them are not participating in learning (ABS 2007). The ACE policy focus is on building the capability of ACE providers to engage people from disadvantaged backgrounds in supportive foundation skills programs and in pathways to further formal education and training and/or paid work.

2008 Ministerial Declaration on ACE

Ministers of all Australian governments committed to the Declaration on Adult and Community Education in 2008 (MCEETYA 2008). The Declaration commits governments to collaboration and partnerships with ACE providers to assist their efforts to achieve vocationally-focused outcomes for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. It outlines principles that the governments have agreed to adhere to:

- Acceptance of a stewardship role
- Development of enabling policy and program frameworks
- Encouragement of mutually beneficial collaboration and partnerships between ACE providers and other VET organisations
- National collaboration to maximise strategy and know-how development
Continuing support of the ACE community and citizenship building agenda

The 2008 Declaration on ACE acknowledges the unique position ACE occupies at the intersection of the community-welfare sector and the formal education-employment sector and seeks to develop its role as a bridge between the two. In policy terms, the Declaration positions ACE at the interface of the national social inclusion agenda and the national workforce participation and productivity agenda.

The Declaration acknowledges that the traditional offerings of ACE providers, ie: personal interest enrichment courses, contribute to social interaction and personal health and wellbeing. However it also acknowledges the value of ACE in basic skills and specific vocational skills development that contribute to employment prospects (Clemens 2003, Walstab et al 2005, Choy et al 2006, Bowman 2006, Bardon 2006).

The Declaration suggests strategies for ACE providers to consider, which are discussed in this report, and calls on ACE providers to:

- engage educationally disadvantaged people in learning
- build foundations and vocational skills
- aid learner progression to further formal education, training and employment

Social Inclusion Agenda

The wealth generated by high levels of economic growth in Australia, over the past decade, has not been enjoyed by all. Persistent disadvantage in Australia has given rise to a national social inclusion agenda to achieve a fairer Australia. Many Australians are still experiencing unemployment, low incomes, poor housing, poor health and disability, family breakdown, lack of access to and/or information on available services and a propensity for crime and other anti-social behaviours. They are experiencing social exclusion, a lack of resources, capabilities and opportunities to participate fully in society. Shut out is how the National People with Disabilities and Carer Council (2009) described the situation of their learners.

Dropping off the edge, a study by Tony Vinson (2007), marked an important point in Australian social research. It left no doubt of the significant extent of social disadvantage in Australia and of the durability of this disadvantage in the absence of sustained constructive interventions involving the education portfolio and linked with the work of other social and economic agencies.

The study contained a comprehensive analysis of a range of social variables for every population centre in Australia. It showed that the highly correlating variables of entrenched and geographically concentrated disadvantage in Australia are limited education, information and employment-related skills and low family income. Vinson referred to these variables as the generic dimensions of disadvantage, the connecting threads to other manifestations of disadvantage.

In combination they [the social indicators examined] tell the mundane but enduring story of the disadvantaged consequences of limited education, and associated lack of information retrieval and exchange skills, deficient labour market credentials, poor health and disabilities, low individual and family income and engagement in crime … Whatever other measures are necessary to combat the geographic concentration of disadvantage it is difficult to deny the centrality of limited education and its impact on the acquisition of economic and life skills in making and sustaining disadvantage in Australia.

(Vinson 2007: 96)


Dropping off the Edge impacted on the social policy of the incoming national government in late 2007. The study influenced the development of a national social inclusion agenda based on the model set by the Social Exclusion Unit in the UK from 1999 and followed by the Social Inclusion Board in South Australia since 2002. The social inclusion agenda, as outlined in the box below, and actions to date on the early priorities are set out in A Stronger and Fairer Australia (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2010).

### THE NATIONAL SOCIAL INCLUSION AGENDA

Social inclusion means building a nation in which all Australians have the opportunity and support they need to participate fully in the nation’s economic and community life, develop their own potential and be treated with dignity and respect.

**Objectives**

To ensure all Australians have the capabilities, opportunities and resources to:

- learn by participating in education and training
- work by participating in employment, voluntary work and in family and caring
- engage by connecting with people and local community resources
- have a voice and influence decisions that affect them

**Identified early priorities of the national social inclusion agenda**

- Address the incidence and needs of jobless families with children
- Deliver effective support to children at greatest risk of long-term disadvantage
- Focus on particular locations and communities to ensure programs and services are getting to the right places
- Address the incidence of homelessness
- Achieve employment for people living with a disability or mental illness
- Close the gap for Indigenous Australians

The social inclusion agenda marks three important shifts in the approach to deep-seated social problems (Catholic Social Services Australia 2010):

1. **A policy shift** to an agenda and not a specific problem focus and to longer-term initiatives

The social inclusion agenda raises the priority attached to severe social policy problems within an overarching framework. Social inclusion is used as an umbrella term underneath which sit a variety of objectives and individual programs and services. It recognises that, as the required reforms to provide life opportunities for those who are markedly disadvantaged are systemic in nature, it will take many years for real progress to be made.

2. **A shift in practice** to a multi-disciplinary approach from a silo portfolio approach.

The way forward to solving deep-seated social problems is to recognise barriers to social and economic participation and to develop appropriate holistic programs that break these barriers down. The broad administrative principle is joined-up solutions and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet has responsibility for driving the
Social Inclusion Agenda across the national government working with a Social Inclusion Board.

3 A shift in attitude from them to us

Another essential feature, just as important as reformed programs and services, is recognition that social inclusion work needs to be done with the disadvantaged and their aiding organisations. The National Compact: working together (Commonwealth of Australia 2010) is an attempt to give life to this renewed sense of partnership as part of the Social Inclusion Agenda. It sets out a framework for future cooperation and partnership between governments and the not-for-profit sector with an action plan to follow.

National Workforce Participation and Productivity Agenda

The 2008 Ministerial Declaration on ACE arguably is a specific example of the National Compact, with governments committing to partnering with the not-for-profit ACE sector to overcome the generic dimensions of disadvantage of limited education, information and employment-related skills and low-family income. ACE is seen as contributing to social inclusion in the National Workforce Participation and Productivity Agenda, which was referred to in its early days as the Human Capital Reform Agenda (COAG 2006). There are several Government initiatives that could inform and support the National Workforce and Participation Agenda objectives.

Objective 1 Increasing workforce participation rates

The ageing of the Australian population is shrinking the numbers of working-age people relative to dependants. Skills Australia\(^1\) has recommended lifting the workforce participation rate to 69% by 2025, a 4% increase over the 2010 level. This requires those currently excluded or marginal to the workforce to be a potential source of the increase by lifting the unacceptably low levels of adult language, literacy and numeracy among working-age Australians, which are key barriers to effective education and labour market and social participation (Skills Australia 2010). Current statistics (ABS 2008) show that:

- 43.5% of the working-age population has literacy skills levels below those required (Level 3 ACSF) for effective functioning in the workplace and modern life in general
- 15% are in the lowest literacy category (Level 1)
- 49.8% (almost half) have low numeracy skills
- just under 20% are in the lowest category

The National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development (COAG 2008) recognises the fundamental importance of LLN skills to improved workforce participation and productivity. The Agreement requires monitoring of the proportion of the working-age population at literacy levels 1, 2 and 3.

\(^1\) Skills Australia is the body responsible for providing advice on emerging and future workforce skills and workforce development needs to the Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.
The *Foundation Skills Package* in the recent federal budget seeks to tackle gaps in these skills by extending the existing Australian Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Program and Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) and including a new Community-based Service Development element. The Package will also fund the development of a national Foundation Skills Strategy.

Employment assistance services are also being improved for the disadvantaged to help lift the workforce participation rate. A new *Job Services Australia* has been designed to ensure disadvantaged job seekers receive services commensurate with their needs and includes an Innovation Fund for trialling innovative methods.

There is also a *Local Employment Coordinators* program for disadvantaged local communities and a *Family Centred Employment Project* to pilot ways to engage jobless families and increase their economic and social participation.

### Objective 2

**Increasing the level of skills in the workforce**

Greater levels of skills are also required in the workforce because of the increasing change to a knowledge-based economy. A range of evidence-based long-term education key performance targets have been set by COAG and the Commonwealth Government since 2006 to maintain and improve Australia’s economic competitiveness. However the targets, which are discussed below, will not be easy to achieve without sustained effort (Access Economics 2009).

#### Young people

- From 2010 all young people up to 17 years of age must be participating in education, training or work or a combination of these
- By 2015 90% of young people 20 to 24 years old to have achieved Year 12 or a Certificate II or above, up from 74% in 2007
- By 2020, 90% of young people 20 to 24 years old to have achieved Year 12 or a Certificate III or above

For young people, governments across Australia have agreed that the attainment of a senior secondary school (Year 12) certificate or equivalent qualification is the new minimum threshold level of education required to have good employment and life prospects. Young people without such qualifications are at risk of social as well as economic exclusion (Bowman forthcoming).

The equivalent education attainment to Year 12 certificate level differs between the two targets set for youth. A VET Certificate II is the equivalent target for 2015 and a Certificate III is the equivalent target for 2020. This is in line with recent empirical analysis that shows that the majority of senior secondary school (Year 12) certificates have learning outcomes at the same level as a VET certificate III (AQF Secretariat 2010). Certificate III is also the benchmark qualification for sustainable job outcomes and good wages. Certificate II qualifications, while they may yield job outcomes, are best seen for most young people as stepping stones to higher level qualifications to ensure job
security (Stanwick 2006). This also applies to people who are disadvantaged (Karmel et al 2009).

The Compact with Young Australians is delivered under the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions, which consolidates previously funded programs into four new elements from 2010 to strengthen the education, training opportunities and support for young people.

Two of the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions elements target students at risk of disengaging from school. The School Business Community Partnership Brokers aim to broaden youth opportunities to include workplace learning and the Youth Connection Services aim to provide an improved safety net of support services. The other elements focus on learning pathways, career development and mentoring. States and territories have individual implementation plans. A specific seven-year (from 1 January 2009) support program for schools in low socio-economic status areas has also been established within the National Partnership Agreement.

Higher-level VET

- By 2020 halve the proportion of Australians 20 to 64 years without a Certificate III level qualification
- By 2020 double the number of higher level VET diploma and advanced diploma completions

A VET Certificate III or above is also the desired level of education attainment for the working-age population because this is the critical skills level needed in the Australian workforce of the future (CEET 2006).

People who do not have a Certificate III level qualification are 18% less likely to be in the workforce than people that do. If they are in the workforce, they are 1.6 times more likely to be unemployed. Moreover, they are more likely to be marginalised in other ways (Commonwealth of Australia 2010).

The National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development (COAG 2008) aspires to achieving the higher-level VET targets by 2020. The National Partnership Agreement on Productivity Places Program is a key initiative.

Higher-level education

- By 2020 20% of students in universities, to be from low socio-economic backgrounds, up from 15% in 2007
- By 2025, Australians 25 to 34 years of age with a degree to be 40%, up from 32% in 2008

The critical skill needs in the Australian workforce of the future extend to the university level (CEET 2006). After the latest review of the Australian higher education system (Commonwealth of Australia 2009), targets have been set at the university level, including people from low socio-economic backgrounds.
A National Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program has commenced to address Australia’s historically poor record in increasing participation by low SES students. The HEPP replaces the Higher Education Equity Support Program (DEEWR 2010).

Other targets

There are also specific targets for Indigenous people in The National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Economic Participation (COAG 2009) and people with disabilities in The National Partnership Agreement for Disability (COAG 2009).

National VET Social Inclusion Policy

The National VET Equity Group Advisory Council (NVEAC) has been asked by the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE) to provide advice on the reform needed to ensure learners who experience disadvantage achieve improved outcomes from vocational education and training and higher education.

NVEAC has prepared a draft VET Equity Blueprint that if adopted will become the policy statement on social inclusion and bring the VET sector alongside the schools and university education sectors, which are already progressing visible social inclusion agendas. The Blueprint argues for systemic VET reform in five fundamental areas, outlined in Table 1, to embed equity into the DNA of the VET system.

The ACE sector is acknowledged in the Blueprint as contributing significantly to social inclusion in education and work agendas and as having an important future role, but to be outside the remit of NVEAC. NVEAC wishes to work side by side with those who can help achieve social inclusion in vocational education and training.

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<th>Sustainable investment</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A new funding mechanism that takes account of the true cost of delivery for disadvantaged learners that is greater than the unit cost to achieve similar outcomes for other learners</td>
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<td>A National Partnership on Equity in VET mechanism akin to the National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Economic Participation</td>
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<th>Measuring and reporting performance</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>An expanded set of targets and measures to acknowledge that, for learners with low initial skills, small transitions and improved quality of life are important milestone outcomes towards the ultimate goals of qualifications and employment</td>
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<th>Building VET workforce capacity and capability</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Lifting the expectations of the VET workforce with regard to disadvantaged learners</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lifting the skills of the VET workforce working with disadvantaged learners though whole-of-organisation strategies to be developed in light of outcomes of the Productivity Commission's enquiry into the VET workforce due in early 2011</td>
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<th>Enhanced support for foundation skills development</th>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Identifying and disseminating successful approaches and models to foundation skills development for different groups with different levels of need and options for building VET workforce capability and capacity to deliver foundations skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Using research findings to fashion NVEAC advice on the National Foundation Skills Strategy</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Wrap-around service models to enable a quality learning experience</td>
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<td>Sustainable partnerships to create pathways for the learners to move forward</td>
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<td>Listening to the learner for continuous improvement through feedback</td>
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<td>Knowledge sharing so good practice is replicated and drives policy and practice changes</td>
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Table 1: Proposed reforms to comprise national VET social inclusion policy
State and territory ACE policies

ACE providers operate within various state and territory policy, regularity and funding systems as well as the overlaying national system. It is up to state and territory governments to ensure they are operating consistently with the 2008 National Declaration on ACE. Whilst in aggregate ACE activities have evolved, this evolution has been unequal at the state and territory level and also at individual ACE provider level.

For many years, adult and community education primarily delivered courses for hobbies, and personal interest enrichment. This has changed in the past three decades. First came the introduction of adult basic education in ACE courses designed to provide basic language and living skills to help people participate in and contribute to society. As it became apparent that students were applying adult and community education skills to employment, the sector began to offer specific vocational education and training courses, creating VET ACE. (Walstab et al 2005: 17)

The ACE systems in Victoria and New South Wales have encouraged providers to become accredited ACE-VET providers. In the other states and territories ACE systems have been focused on non-accredited personal interest and basic education activities. Following the 2008 Ministerial Declaration on ACE, all State and Territory ACE policies have a greater focus on vocational activities for the educationally disadvantaged, as outlined in Table 2 at the end of this section.

Where do the policies position ACE?

Current policies position ACE as part of the social inclusion strategy for the national workforce productivity and participation agenda. The focus is on community-based and supported learning to develop core literacy skills and employability skills and pathways provision to further formal education and training or direct to work.

Pathways provision to further formal education and training could be through the VET arm of the ACE provider and/or referral to other VET providers. Pathways to work require partnerships with potential employers and employment service providers. ACE sector social inclusion initiatives should aim to contribute to the target of the working-age population having a VET Certificate III or above.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>ACE Policy Document</th>
<th>Main aims</th>
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| **New South Wales**  
*Community Education in NSW: a statement by the NSW Government on Direction* (2007)  
www.ace.nsw.gov.au  
| Recognises the strengths of community education providers (Community Colleges) in forming community partnerships, supporting skills development in regional economies and finding flexible and adaptive approaches to education and training. ACE programs are not referred to but include general adult education, literacy and numeracy, accredited VET and specific social inclusion in VET projects. |
| **Victoria**  
*A Stronger ACFE-Delivering Skills for Victoria* (2009)  
www.acfe.vic.au  
| Acknowledges the strong track record of ACE providers in engaging the educationally disadvantaged and providing pathways to formal education and training and working both internally through the VET arm of the ACE provider and through referral to other VET providers and reemphasises this direction. |
| **Queensland**  
*ACE –toward Q2* (2009)  
| Contains contextualised actions to realise commitment to the national Declaration including increasing accredited and non-accredited community literacy activities to be recognised by VET providers in creating further education and training pathways. |
| **Western Australia**  
www.det.wa.edu.au/accessequity/docs/ace_strategy  
| Announces that from 2009 ACE in WA will encompass:  
- accredited formal courses for those looking for pathways to re-enter or re-engage with education, training and employment  
- non-accredited learning activities which contribute to personal skills and knowledge and encourage social participation |
| **South Australia**  
*Strategic review of SA Works ACE program* (2010)  
(unpublished)  
| Focuses on:  
- increasing literacy and numeracy programs in ACE through increased funding  
- allowing personal interest learning to continue as part of the engagement strategy for the disadvantaged  
- ACE providers partnering with VET providers to provide pathways for Job Services Australia and other clients |
| **Tasmania**  
*Learning & Information Network Centre vision* (2009)  
www.education.tas.gov.au/comm unityknowledgenetwork  
| Includes community learning to develop core literacy skills, employability skills and pathways to further education, training and work as well as programs to assist older Tasmanians to remain active and engaged in community life. Community learning is integrated with public libraries and information technology access in Community Knowledge Network Services |
| **Australian Capital Territory**  
www.det.act.gov.au/ Adult & Community Education  
| Encourages innovative community-based learning outside conventional educational structures and increasing linkages to formal vocational education through partnerships between ACE and VET providers |
| **Northern Territory**  
*No explicit policy*  
| Supports ACE-type activities in a major way although ACE is not recognised as a discrete sector of education and training |

**Table 2: Current state and territory ACE policies**
SECTION 2 PRINCIPLES

This section presents good practice principles for working with those at risk of being socially excluded. The principles provide a guide to how ACE providers can approach social inclusion program design and delivery.

Principles designed by the Australian Social Inclusion Board are presented followed by a tailored set of these principles for working with socially excluded groups to enhance education, training and employment outcomes.

General principles of the Australian Social Inclusion Board

A set of eight principles (Commonwealth of Australia 2010), outlined in Table 3, has been designed by the Australian Social Inclusion Board to help guide governments, community organisations and businesses in their work with disadvantaged Australians and in working with each other to ensure the best access to capabilities, opportunities and resources.

1. Build on strengths
2. Intervene early if possible
3. Develop tailored services
4. Build partnerships
5. Build joined-up service solutions
6. Use evidence
7. Use location approaches
8. Plan for sustainability

Table 3: Principles for social inclusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Build on strengths</td>
<td>Respect and support a strong positive view, not a deficit view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Intervene early if possible</td>
<td>Head off problems as well as tackling presenting problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Develop tailored services</td>
<td>Find ways to meet each person’s different needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Build partnerships</td>
<td>A diverse contribution is required to build social inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Build joined-up service solutions</td>
<td>Any one agency can only go so far in meeting the multifaceted needs of disadvantaged people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Use evidence</td>
<td>Find out what works and build on it in policy and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Use location approaches</td>
<td>Solutions must fit with local circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Plan for sustainability</td>
<td>Do things to help individuals deal better with their problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Major principles for achieving social inclusion in education

There are five overarching best practice principles recurring in the social inclusion in education and employment literature. The intent of these principles is workforce participation and productivity through social inclusion.

Principle 1 Learner-centred focus

Those at risk of being socially excluded are fellow Australians who are experiencing disadvantage and who have not had the resources or opportunities to create the life they want. These learners have limited formal education, information skills and employment-related skills, the indicators that define all other manifestations of disadvantage (Vinson 2007). They need the type of supportive learning environments which ACE providers are well positioned to offer to assist their inclusion in the national workforce productivity and participation agenda.

The distinctive learner-centred pedagogy required and provided by ACE has been captured in research by Sanguetti (2004) and Fernbach
(2007) argues that this is the key to success for all education providers who wish to engage disadvantaged learners.

Learner-centred pedagogy is based on the notion that a respectful engaging approach is required which places the learner at the centre and negotiates a learning program that builds on their strengths and life contexts. Table 4 outlines a responsive pedagogic framework adapted from Sanguinetti, Waterhouse and Maunders (2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles of ACE pedagogy</th>
<th>Dimensions of ACE pedagogy</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on learners &amp; their needs</td>
<td>Teacher - Is engaged with learners and their learning on a personal level</td>
<td>Place - Is developmental - starting from where learners are at and consciously helping progression</td>
<td>Curriculum - Prioritises learner needs through creative assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching - Is largely, but not exclusively, experiential</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous learning for work and life</td>
<td></td>
<td>Place - Embodies collective values – commitment to education, community service and the sector itself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building learning on and within real-life context</td>
<td>Teacher - Is able to improvise and take risks</td>
<td>Place - Is community-owned &amp; is engaged in community building locally</td>
<td>Curriculum - Is oriented towards generic skills for employment, life and further study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing power – empowering people and communities</td>
<td>Teacher - Is aware of power relations</td>
<td>Place - Led by managements committed to enabling learning and staff needs</td>
<td>Curriculum - Is negotiated wherever possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many roads to learning</td>
<td>Teacher - Is patient and able to trust in the learning process</td>
<td>Place - Creates a sense of belonging</td>
<td>Curriculum - Pens pathways through accredited, non-accredited and enrichment programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Learner responsive pedagogical framework

Principle 2  Tailored wrap-around services

Completing the personal learning-to-work journey is very important and requires the development of persistence or resilience among disadvantaged learners. People who are educationally disadvantaged can face a suite of emotional, social, educational (starting level), financial and other barriers to undertaking a learning program. They can be facing several of these issues. One in every twenty Australians aged 18 to 64 years is experiencing three or more detailed manifestations of disadvantage (Commonwealth of Australia 2010: 6).

To overcome barriers to participation in learning and work a whole-of-life conceptual approach is required. All elements of people’s lives that can act as barriers need to be considered and outstanding needs met.

Single agencies can go only so far in meeting the multifaceted needs of disadvantaged Australians. It is not the responsibility of the learning provider to deliver all of the needed services. A multi-disciplinary approach is required, as outlined in Figure 5.
This is also referred to as a tailored *wrap-around*, *linked-up* or *whole-of-government* services approach. Collaboration is required across portfolios and sectors to bring together all the needed resources. Importantly, a commitment to working in this way must be aided by establishing protocols and agreements. Four types of wrap-around services support are:

1. **Educational support** – such as literacy support is likely to be required for disadvantaged learners to achieve positive outcomes. This might require a practitioner team approach.
2. **Personal support** – disadvantaged learners need to have access to social and cultural support and pastoral care if this is missing in their lives.
3. **Economic support** – disadvantaged students need to have financial support to pay for the learning program and/or in-kind transport and childcare support to enable access.
4. **Employment attainment support** – getting a job after completing a learning program can require advocacy services and being connecting up with employment agencies and individual enterprises to help learners achieve desired job outcomes.

**Principle 3  Realistic learning timeframes**

To contribute to social inclusion in workforce participation and productivity, ACE providers need to proactively engage people who are
educationally disadvantaged and set them on a learning journey that builds the personal, social and economic aspects of their lives. There are four critical milestone steps in the learning journey of the disadvantaged in education (Bowman 2007, SA ACE 2008) which are outlined in Figure 6.

**Figure 6: Four critical steps in the learning journey**

In setting realistic timeframes it is important to note that:

- moving from not engaged with learning to engaged with learning can require proactive outreach engagement strategies for some people
- some people may require several learning engagements before undertaking more directed learning for employment purposes (Dymock 2007a, Dawe 2004)
- building foundation skills is often part of the process of building identity and confidence as a learner because gaps in these skills limit effective participation in formal vocational education and training and work

**Principle 4 A differentiated learner focus**

An individual learner focus is required, with learning and supports structured around individual needs and circumstances. However, it is also possible to segment disadvantaged learners into groups to aid social inclusion strategy development. Three approaches to learner segmentation are outlined below with the third – the learning disadvantage level – approach recommended.

**a Social equity group approach**

This is the traditional approach to learner segmentation where whole social groups are described as educationally disadvantaged. An advantage of this approach is that it can focus attention on populations with high numbers of disadvantaged among them such as Indigenous Australians, people from other non-English speaking backgrounds, people with disabilities, early school leavers, low-paid workers, jobseekers and whole low socio-economic communities.

The disadvantage is that the whole group approach can assume uniformity within the group which does not mirror the lived experiences of all members of the group. Not all people from the one social group or low socioeconomic area are disadvantaged. Similarly, not all people from a high socioeconomic area are
advantaged. The group approach can lead to a blinkered view and uniform solutions. It may also mean emerging disadvantaged learners are not seen and/or responded to.

b Managing diversity approach

The managing diversity approach recognises that every learner has needs and seeks to embed a learner-needs focus into the system. However this laudable approach can subordinate disadvantage.

In fact, it may be better to discard both the concept of ‘targeted equity groups’ and that of ‘managing diversity’, since both, it could be argued, inadequately conceptualise the disadvantages faced by individuals. The equity groups approach tends to oversimplify and homogenise disadvantage; the managing diversity approach tends to sidestep the very concept of disadvantage. It may be more productive to think about the disadvantages which clients – or potential clients – face as learners. (Figgis et al 2007: 15)

c The learning disadvantage levels approach

There is growing consideration of levels of disadvantage, including starting point attitudes to learning, as the most useful learner differentiation approach. The learning disadvantage levels approach is reflected in the successful Youth Engagement Innovative Community Action Networks (ICANs) initiative of the South Australian government (SA DECS 2004). ICANs is one of the major initiatives of the South Australian Youth Engagement Strategy and School Retention Action Plan which aimed to empower local communities to use their knowledge and drive to re-engage young people in education and training and employment. ICANs identify four youth learner segments according to their level of engagement with learning and disadvantage and link the risk profiles to learning program types and persistence strategies (SA DECS 2004), as outlined in Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk profile</th>
<th>Early intervention</th>
<th>Keep on track</th>
<th>Keep connected</th>
<th>Re-engage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At some risk of leaving school</td>
<td>Some attendance issues</td>
<td>Habitual attendance issues</td>
<td>Completely disengaged/ school refusal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on literacy &amp; social skills</td>
<td>Accredited learning in school and community</td>
<td>Accredited learning in school, RTOs or workplaces</td>
<td>Engagement in pre-accredited learning first if need be</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School based via flexible plan</td>
<td>Mainly school - some community-based</td>
<td>Some school - more community-based</td>
<td>Community based-programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School based support tutoring and mentoring</td>
<td>Brokering in &amp; out of school support via youth worker</td>
<td>Pathway guidance - case manage via Youth agency</td>
<td>Intensive case management, holistic services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Innovative community action networks youth segments
A similar conceptual model that places youth into four vulnerability layers is presented in a policy direction discussion paper *Pathways to re-engagement through flexible learning options* (Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2010: 10). The *National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions Program* also acknowledges there is a continuum of young people according to their profile for learning requiring a continuum of increasing levels of support. Similarly, with regard to adults Couldrey (2006) produced for ACE NSW a four-stream client typology by level of learning disposition and recommended strategies for each segment based on the client marketing work of ANTA (2000 & 2004), see Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indifferent</th>
<th>Aware</th>
<th>Ready</th>
<th>Doing it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forget it</td>
<td>Make it easier</td>
<td>Almost there</td>
<td>Might give it away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Done with it</td>
<td>Learn on hold</td>
<td></td>
<td>Learn to earn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Passionate learners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Suggested strategies**

- Use community networks to promote positive benefits of learning for them and their children
- Recognise prior learning to show relevance of current skills
- Use local newspapers and radio to promote positive benefits of learning
- Advise of assistance to address cost issues
- Engage in taster sessions and short programs
- Advise of assistance to address cost barriers or use *pay as you go*
- Provide learning supports
- Offer flexible family and work-friendly learning schedules
- Know what they want — make the benefits tangible
- Provide learning supports
- Ensure value for money
- Offer services linked to jobs

**Table 6: Adult segments by attitudes to learning & suggested strategies (Adapted from Couldrey 2006:15)**

The new *Job Services Australia Program* also uses a framework of four levels or streams of disadvantage and of required support among jobseekers (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2009). JSAs assess clients at initial interview who are then placed in one of four streams depending on level of assistance required. Level one assistance is the lowest and level four the most intense. All stream services involve the client in developing an Employment Pathway Plan and provide funds to purchase assistance through the Employment Pathway Fund.

The general rule that emerges is that the more vulnerable the person as a learner the more comprehensive, more focused and more specific are the education-to-work programs required. This underlines the importance of linking the intended social inclusion toolkit with then Australian Government’s service provision framework to provide the option for collaboration between the National and state governments.

**Principle 5  Encouraging learners to persist**

Encouraging learners to persist is about fostering learner’s commitment to pursuing and completing a personal learning journey, no matter how
complex, or how long it takes. Adult learners do not always make linear progression from their current level of skill in a subject, through courses of ever-increasing difficulty, neatly gaining the appropriate accreditation along the way, and moving on into stable employment. The reality is that learners’ journeys are often stop-start, with many detours and breaks – some of the learner’s own choosing and some not (NRDC 2008 in Nechvoglod and Beddie 2010)

Persistence in learning, the ability to continue to completion, is a term commonly used overseas in contrast to retention that is usually associated with a percentage measurement of how many students re-enroll at an institution they have attended the previous year.

Developing persistence is very important for disadvantaged learners, and for the educational institution and society in general. For students, the failure to complete their program of study leaves them without a credential that could lead to greater earnings and opportunities. For institutions, low levels of persistence signal both the poor use of resources eg: resources spent on recruitment and admission are not matched by continuing income in the form of tuition and per-student government funding, and poor performance in terms of teaching or administration.

For societies, poor persistence results in lower educational attainment at a time when higher levels of education are important to both prosperity and quality of life. Poor persistence can also exacerbate social inequities that are costly to society (Parkin & Baldwin, undated but has 2008 references: 2). An alternative way to consider persistence is in terms of resilience – the capacity to overcome obstacles, adapt to change, recover from trauma or to survive and thrive despite adversity (Parkin & Baldwin). A typology of students based on their persistence patterns has four groups that have some persistence issues, and one group for whom persistence is not an issue, as seen in Table 7 (UK National Institute of Literacy: undated)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long-term students</th>
<th>They have very few barriers to participation. Good programs that provide convenient services are going to be able to serve this group.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory students</td>
<td>They have to participate because of the legal mandates of a social service or correctional institution. These students need help to build personal motivation so they attend because they want to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term students</td>
<td>They have a specific goal and may have barriers to persistence but they can overcome those barriers for the short period of time to reach this goal because they are motivated to achieve. Programs should identify the goals and help the students to reach them and to count them as success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try-out students</td>
<td>They have the motivation to come to programs but are facing very high barriers to participation. They need help to develop a plan to overcome these barriers so that in the future they will be able to come and be successful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermittent students</td>
<td>They come to programs but at some point during their participation a barrier arises that is so strong that it knocks them out of the program. They need to be looked on not as dropouts but rather as students that just cannot participate at this time. Ways to bring them back into learning services as soon as possible need to be developed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Five different kinds of students based on their patterns of persistence
SECTION 3  STRATEGIES

This section details strategies to assist those at risk of being socially excluded to achieve education, training and/or employment outcomes. These strategies build on good practice principles and emphasise the need for learner motivation, engagement and persistence strategies.

Engaging those at risk of being socially excluded

McIntyre (2007) has reviewed a number of perspectives on learner engagement in learning, including a social risk perspective. He argued that for most disadvantaged learners the potential costs of formal training may outweigh the benefits.

For disengaged adults, the effort of participation in formal training may represent a highly indeterminate ‘exchange’ for its supposed benefits (personal, social or economic) and a high risk that the benefits may not eventuate. In sum much disengagement has a large component of social risk aversion. (McIntyre 2007: 5)

McIntrye suggests the obvious implication for learner engagement, is that more of the same will not work. Learning providers must change their viewpoint from one that says it is up to the student to grasp the opportunity to one that focuses on how opportunities can be constructed so that disadvantaged learners will take them up.

The literature suggests that developing motivation for learning, ensuring positive initial contact and building identity as a learner are the critical early milestones to focus on when working with those at risk of being socially excluded.

Developing motivation for learning

Developing motivation for learning involves appealing to the learners’ interests and focusing on the benefits they will acquire. Learning programs aimed at engaging disadvantaged learners must be relevant to their lives and yield fairly immediate tangible benefits.

Three recent papers on keeping students engaged in vocational education and training examine quite different practices but the underlying theme that emerges in all of them is make learning relevant.

In all three studies, students appreciated being able to see why it was important to do their study and how it was relevant to their vocational goals. Whether it was by participating in an authentic ‘real-world’ task like problem-based learning, developing a clearer understanding of the aims of assessment, or learning about the pathways from school to further education to the workplace, students became engaged when they could see the connection between the task at hand and their end goal. (Bartram 2010: 1).

Another important consideration is the time and costs involved, especially for those already in work. It has been found that among low-skilled and low-paid workers undertaking some form of learning outside of the workplace does result in a significantly higher work-life conflict … The most common reason for not participating in education and training are time, despite most low-paid workers indicating that their employer would provide some support, and that the outcomes would have employment benefits (Skinner 2009 Key messages).
Hence short taster programs or single-subject programs, that are connected and keep moving the learner forward towards their goals, are suggested. Short connecting learning programs aid study, life and work balance. Addressing cost barriers by advising on assistance programs is also important.

Reaching hard-to-reach learners

Hard to reach learners are learners who do not self-refer or readily seek to engage in adult learning programs or courses. They are difficult to recruit, to the extent, that if there are softer targets available locally, little effort is made to make contact and connect with the hard to reach and thus their voices can remain unheard and their needs and wants largely ignored (Pittman 2009 in Nechvoglod and Beddie 2010). Nechvoglod and Beddie (2010) provide ideas for encouraging these learners to return to education and training, including:

- **media** – using sophisticated marketing messages that emphasise the benefits and relevance of learning
- **learning champions** – through stories of others learning journeys
- **people-to-people recruitment** – word of mouth and accompaniment to the learning
- **links with other organisations** that already have relationships with the target group
- **ensuring positive initial contact**
- **offering taster courses** for starters

Taking the learning program to the learners, for example into their meeting places, is another strategy.

Ensuring a positive initial engagement experience

Ensuring a positive initial engagement experience is essential for disadvantaged learners. Negative forces often work quickly and a common finding of retention studies is that many disadvantaged learners leave courses early (Comings, Parella & Soricone 1999).

Everyone needs emotional support and, for disadvantaged learners, program staff, teachers and fellow students may need to provide that support. Staff need to build trusting one-on-one relationships with students and between students. Priest (2009) discusses how education providers can build this *social capital*. Balatti, Black and Falk (2010) have researched the use of a social capital approach to literacy and numeracy skills development and suggest strategies teachers can adopt to build relationships within the learning group. These include:

- reducing the social distance between themselves and the learners, including sharing relevant material from their own lives
- minimising teacher-directed pedagogy and maximising learner input
- becoming part of small discussion groups and encouraging debate
- connecting with learners by using humour, finding common ground and valuing the life experience that learners bring
- providing opportunities for peer learning by encouraging interactions among learners including sharing experiences, group work, mentoring and buddy systems
Some teaching strategies to promote participation in new networks are:

- arranging for learning experiences to occur in out-of-class contexts that are useful to the learners
- setting tasks that require learners to interact with networks of organisations, community groups and service providers that they have not yet accessed
- inviting people from potentially useful networks to coteach or coparticipate in the training
- fostering the building of bridging and linking ties eg: arranging visits to museums and teaching how to access and use websites

(NCVER 2010 based on Ballatti et al 2010)

Building identity as a learner

Building self-identity as a learner is critical for those in the process of re-engaging with learning. Learners need learning programs that build on their strengths and reflect their cultures and values. This in turn means new students need to be engaged early in activities that sensitively explore their past education, goals for education and future and current skills and capacities. This involves using recognition of prior learning as a learning development tool, as opposed to credentialing that might come later.

The developmental model uses RPL to help students improve outcomes by integrating the learning they have obtained outside an educational setting with the learning inside the setting. The credentialling model uses RPL to lead to the partial or full completion of credentials and is subject to the Standards of the Australian Quality Training Framework for Registered Training Organisations (Misko et al 2007).

Developing confidence, self-esteem and a self-view as a learner can take time and several learning experiences. The trap to avoid is churning whereby the learner repeats the same programs without apparently learning anything new. This is why reporting of learning is important and why it is important to try and capture the less tangible outcomes from learning (Dawe 2004). These less tangible outcomes include increased confidence, changed attitudes to learning and willingness to consider further learning.

Developing foundations skills

Filling gaps in foundations skills is often part of the process of building identity and confidence as a learner (Dymock 2007b). Foundation skills are required by all people for success in study, work and life. However, terminology is an issue when discussing these skills. They are variously referred to as basic skills core skills, essential skills, generic skills, employability skills, transferable skills and key competencies.

The term foundation skills has appeared recently in Australian policy environments to refer to:

1. the core skills of reading, writing, oral communication, numeracy and learning
2. the employability skills of learning, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self-management and the use of technology

The core skills and the employability skills have been the focus of separate study in Australia although they do overlap. Career development and management competencies
that overlay employability skills, and arguably are also foundation skills, are also the focus of separate study. Some starting-point mappings have been undertaken to make linkages and find ways to achieve complementarity between these sets of skills and for identifying differences.

Core skills and employability skills require similar approaches to their development. The core skills and the employability skills are exercised as part of the process of carrying out all tasks and activities. This means that any topic can be used as a learning focus to develop these skills, as they are best developed in situ or in context, as part of other activities. The topic could be of a personal interest, non-accredited nature or a vocational, accredited learning activity. However, the skills require systematic attention, coupled with reflection on how they have been exercised and developed within the topic or learning program.

Another important common feature of core skills and employability skills is that they cannot be interpreted as only low-level or single-level skills. There are agreed levels of core skills but no agreed levels of employability skills, despite the fact that the Mayer Key Competencies, which the employability skills replaced, had three performance levels from no competency to high-level competency.

Employability skills are embedded in VET training packages and their level of application requires interpretation. There are facets that provide specific examples of skills and behaviours in the context of the qualification and job role that imply the depth and application of the employability skills. High-order employability skills summaries for every VET qualification are available at <employabilityskills.training.com.au>.

Some researchers (Giles-Peters 2008, Bowman & Kearns 2008) consider that performance-level structures that show progression in the employability skills need to be developed. Identifying the different levels of application and performance of the employability skills, from basic through to advanced, would aid student understanding of the contextual nature of these skills and how to progress.

For each employability skill the number of times I have proven competence through self reflection at the various performance levels can be put into a simple table to present to an employer and I can back this up with my validated evidence that I keep in a folder. Coming to grips with the performance levels can take a while but once you get it they provide a useful framework of how you can advance up the employability skills ladder. (Student interviewed in a case study on LINKup by Bowman and Kearns 2008)

**Developing English language, literacy and numeracy skills**

The International Adult Language and Literacy (IALL) Survey has successfully spotlighted English language, literacy and numeracy (ELLN) skills. The 2006 survey found that among working-age Australians 43.5% have ELLN skill levels below Level 3, which is required for effective functioning in the workplace and in modern life, including participation in further education and training (ABS 2008). The survey also found that individuals are inaccurate in estimating their own literacy and numeracy skills. This led Roberts and Wignall (2010) to suggest that it might be best to make the assumption that about 50% of all adult learners require ELLN skills development.

The overall demand is large for ELLN skills development. International experience is that it takes 300 to 450 hours to increase these skills by one IALL level (South Australian Centre for Economic Studies 2010). The main types of ELLN programs are:
- **Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)** – a Commonwealth-funded program that provides between 510 and 910 hours of English language tuition for eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants who do not have functional English. The program uses the *Certificates I, II and III in Spoken and Written English* (CSWE) as the curriculum and to report outcomes.

- **Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program** – a Commonwealth-funded program that delivers LLN integrated with vocational training in the workplace, tailored to groups of employees and not individuals. WELL training programs generally use accredited general education courses and/or embedded LLN in vocationally-focused units from Training Packages with reporting against the ACSF.

- **Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP)** – a Commonwealth-funded program that provides up to 800 hours of accredited LLN training to help jobseekers address their LLN gaps with the aim of making them more competitive in the job market and/or placing them in a better position to complete further education and training. LLNP providers use a wide range of accredited general education courses. Learning outcomes are reported against the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF).

- **Community-based Service Development** (formerly Foundation Skills Taster Course Program) – a Commonwealth-funded program that offers informal, short courses structured around topics of direct relevance to adults disengaged from formal learning, with the ultimate aim of reconnecting individuals into the LLNP.

- **VET system funded stand-alone accredited LLN delivery** – foundation skills delivery comprises a significant proportion of all publicly-funded VET delivery – in the vicinity of 12% nationally and between 4% to 25% at the state level

- **VET system integrated delivery** – LLN skills embedded in Training Packages

- **Pre-AQF level programs** – programs that are about learning to read and write before using these skills to learn

(Roberts and Wignall, 2010)

There are a wide range of ELLN courses in use. Perkins (2009) argues a lack of strategic planning has led to a fragmented approach and inconsistencies in the development and delivery of ELLN. The Foundation Skills Package announced in the 2009/2010 national budget proposes the development of a national strategy for foundation skills. The most widely used ELLN curricula in Australia are listed in Table 8 (Roberts & Wignall 2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State-accredited courses</th>
<th>Pre-AQF courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certificate I in Initial Adult Literacy and Numeracy</td>
<td>Course in Initial General Education for Adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate I in Vocational Preparation</td>
<td>Course in Recognised Informal Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate I in Vocational Access</td>
<td>Course in ESL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificates I-II in Introductory Vocational Education</td>
<td>Course in Preliminary Spoken and Written English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificates I-III in General Education for Adults (CGEA)</td>
<td>Course in Language, Literacy and Numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificates I-IV in Spoken and Written English (CSWE)</td>
<td>Course in Vocational Literacy/Numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificates I-IV in ESL</td>
<td>Course in Adult Literacy and Numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stand-alone courses at AQF 1-3 &amp; pre AQF 1</td>
<td>Course in Foundation Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Widely used English language, literacy and numeracy curricula
There is no one successful LLN delivery method for all learners (see Table 9 below). There are many stand-alone English language, literacy and numeracy courses and they have their place but an accepted view of adult literacy and numeracy practice is that, to optimise benefits, the skills are best taught in real-life situations and related to everyday needs and/or within the context of vocational subjects. The principle is to increase contextualisation and integration of ELLN skills by education level.

Programs that build ELLN skills in tandem with everyday life activities or vocational skills are referred to as integrated programs but they require expertise to develop. Team teaching is becoming popular where vocational experts teach the technical components and ELLN specialists teach the ELLN components or advise and assist with the ELLN components at critical times. Features central to successful integrated LLN and vocational teaching include:

- considering the needs of learners
- taking a constructivist approach, which acknowledges that learning is affected by the context in which it is taught, as well as by learner beliefs and attitudes
- adopting an explicit model of language appropriate to the context of the industry
- adopting a multi-disciplinary approach to teaching
- developing a framework for describing language, literacy and numeracy
- analysing the specific training package and workplace context
- developing capacity to identify critical points of intervention

(McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2005: 8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AQF level 3</th>
<th>Delivery is best integrated into meaningful vocational or other contextualised outcomes as these skills are rarely a goal in themselves. Learners are focused on the achievement of other personal and vocational objectives.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At AQF levels 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>Some contextualisation may make LLN outcomes more meaningful. This is generally done through the inclusion of introductory vocational units.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners with very low level LLN skills</td>
<td>At this enabling level learners need to focus on very basic skill acquisition around learning to read and write before they can begin to use these skills in other learning. Learners may benefit from stand-alone LLN, face-to-face delivery methods without any significant contextualisation. Learners may prefer informal, non-accredited programs because they either do not need or would struggle with an accredited course (Dymock 2007a).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Suggested successful models of LLN delivery (Roberts and Wignall 2010)

### Developing employability skills

Employability skills are taking on increased importance because contemporary jobs require flexibility, initiative, ability to undertake many different tasks and capacity to deal with non-routine processes. Industry has been the key driver of the development of employability skills in VET. The Employability Skills Framework was developed by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Business Council of Australia and published in Employability skills for the future (DEST 2002). There are eight employability skills, also seen as life skills, and 13 personal attributes in the industry-
developed and VET-accepted Employability Skills Framework (See Table 10). The Australian VET sector uses the following industry definition of employability skills:

Skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one’s potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions (DEST 2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employability skills</th>
<th>Personal attributes that contribute to employability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Personal presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>Balanced attitude to work and home life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-management Planning and organising</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology use</td>
<td>Common sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life-long learning</td>
<td>Ability to deal with pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative and enterprise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honesty and integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive self esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Balanced attitude to work and home life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A sense of humour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Common sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to deal with pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reliability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Employability Skills Framework (DEST 2002)

The VET sector has researched how best to teach the employability skills and there is general recognition that active or hands-on learning is the most effective means of developing these skills. This includes learning through real-work settings, simulated work settings, project-based activities, well constructed scenarios, case studies and/or real-life situations.

Cleary, Flynn & Thomasson (2006) recommend four adult learning principles for effective employability skills development: responsible learning, experiential learning, cooperative learning and reflective learning. Bowman and Kearns (2009) propose providing structures that take account of the relationships between the employability skills to facilitate effective teaching and learning. These researchers have clustered the employability skills into families of like skills against the four adult learning principles to emphasise their development and the technologies suited to each cluster of employability skills.

Supporting learner progression

The 2008 Ministerial Declaration on ACE identifies four strategies to support learner progression which are discussed below

Strategy 1 Careers services

It is seen as very important to proactively offer career services to people who are disengaged from the labour market or educational systems. Many adults do not know how to manage their careers because no-one has ever assisted them to. Adults disengaged from the labour market or educational systems do not necessarily understand the contemporary world of work or have the skills to manage their careers and life pathways. When made aware of what career guidance services can offer, many of these adults recognised their value (Beddie, Lorey & Pamphilon 2005). Careers services can be divided into two types:
a Career information services can provide current, unbiased information about work roles, educational programs and work opportunities. Such resources include computer-based career information delivery systems, the Internet, print and media materials, informational interviews, workplace speakers and more. This is a first step that an ACE provider can take.

b Career development services refer to programs and services to assist individuals to gain the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to manage their life, learning and work in self-directed ways. (Halliday-Wynes et al 2008).

Strategy 2 Education pathways development

Developing education pathways is about making linkages between one kind of learning experience and another to guide learners along a route to employment. The best research found on ACE-to-VET pathways models is over ten years old but continues to be highly relevant, as can be seen in the following principles (McIntyre & Kimberley1997).

- **Community responsiveness** – engaging in responsive provision in their communities as the basis of pathway planning
- **Localisation** – developing customised training packages at the local level to meet the needs specific groups
- **Informality** – understanding pathway entry points in terms of a range of options and experiences available to learners, and not limiting pathways to linkages between formal courses
- **Individualisation** – assisting learners to assess their educational and life experiences, needs and goals in defining pathway options
- **Adaptation** – designing the timing, venue, process, activities and tutoring to reflect the needs and goals of individuals from the target group
- **Integration** – integrating adult literacy and vocational training, rather than making the completion of literacy a barrier to vocational learning
- **Vocation** – developing training which targets the preferred local employment of a group of learners and offering relevant and practical training, including accredited courses
- **Collaboration** – developing partnerships with VET providers to provide a greater range of accredited courses and maximising the vocational options for learners
- **Networking** – networking with other community agencies to ensure that participation in courses is supported by appropriate services
- **Cultural appropriateness** – negotiating culturally appropriate pathways with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other cultural groups, as this was identified as an overarching pathway strategy in all instances
- **Resourcefulness** – developing packages of funding from a variety of sources to create flexible, responsive pathways
- **Access** – exploiting the development of open and flexible learning approaches and technologies to promote pathway options, particularly for remote communities

The kinds of pathways that an ACE provider develops will in part depend upon whether they are a VET provider of both non-accredited learning and accredited vocational education and training or a non-accredited learning only provider.

Three kinds of general pathways are:

a. **Within ACE pathways** – These pathways are planned and developed largely within the offerings of the provider from an entry point to another experience. For some disadvantaged learners it may take several enabling course experiences before they are ready to move on to more specific and formal vocational programs.

b. **ACE to other VET provider pathways** – These pathways include from ACE to an accredited course in another VET provider, for example, a small ACE centre may act as a feeder for accredited courses or agree to be an extended campus of a larger regional VET provider. The ACE provider may be a broker through inter-agency collaboration of educational options for the community by offering advice, referral and support for students at other education providers. ACE VET providers might also partner with other VET providers to provide a greater range of accredited vocational options for learners.

c. **Joint ACE other provider pathways** – In these pathways the learner attends more than one provider or has more than one provider come to them as part of their learning program. Various components of the learning program are offered by different providers. Examples include joint literacy and VET qualification programs, apprentices and trainees attending workplaces and VET institutions, VET-in-school students attending both school and a VET provider or school students doing some community learning as part of the strategy to keep them engaged in school.

(Adapted from McIntrye & Kimberley 1997)

**Strategy 3 Recognition of prior learning and skills assessment services**

Recognition of prior learning for credentialing purposes is another element that could be part of a pathway model. RPL is a process whereby the skills and knowledge learners have obtained though informal and non-formal learning are recognised for entry into a formal education course and/or part credit for a course of study. This process must be done by a Registered Training Organisation and is subject to the Standards of the Australian Quality Training Framework. The RTO assumes responsibility for assuring the quality of the assessments conducted, is required to set up systems for monitoring and evaluating assessment processes and judgments about competence and is responsible for issuing qualifications or statements of attainment.

In 2008, Adult Learning Australia ran a pilot project entitled *Evidence of Learning for ACE: An E-portfolio for Recognition of Prior Learning* (for the Australian Flexible Learning Framework). The project aimed to identify and
trial, specifically with learners from the ACE sector, an e-portfolio system to support lifelong learning and an RPL process (www.ala.asn.au).

**Strategy 4 Employment assistance services**

Paid work is the end-goal of achieving social inclusion in education and training. Yet often it is the case that links between ACE providers and employment agencies and employers are not strong. While it may not be seen as the responsibility of ACE providers to deliver needed employment assistance services, it is good practice to ensure disadvantaged learners have access to these services which include the following:

- providing local job opportunities data and information and showing disadvantaged learners how learning programs relate to local jobs
- résumé preparation and letter writing assistance
- job hunting assistance eg: opportunities to meet employers
- explaining to job services and/or employers the value of employing learners
- job-brokering/placement assistance, as matching jobs to learners reduces any risk for employers
- providing in-job support by staying in touch after job placement
- offering volunteer opportunities in the ACE organisation to provide work experience
- engaging disadvantaged learners as trainees of the ACE organisation

For disadvantaged learners the need to provide assistance to find employment can be high, as they may not have their own work-related networks. The literature on facilitating the entry of individuals from disadvantaged groups into the workplace shows that social bridging ties give individuals access to networks outside their own and increase access to information. However the disadvantaged are not likely to establish these on their own (Collet 2008). The following suggestions for engaging employers are based on the learning gathered from not-for-profit organisations:

- Recognise that business people are also parents and community people.
- The desire of business to partner, particularly in the education field, is often reflected in corporate social responsibility statements and driven by a desire to provide opportunities for employees to engage.
- Business expects the not-for-profit sector to know their role and to undertake this role without business guidance.
- Engage with the business sector beyond requests for one-off funding by providing many different opportunities such as volunteer days and enabling businesses to showcase their business job opportunities and to coach and mentor.
- Business responds to tangible requests and outcomes. Articulate the business return on investment, be it investing in the local community, a marketing strategy, provision of coaching and training, or provision of
opportunities for employees. Undertake appropriate research prior to engagement to know what to ask for.

(Lassiter 2006: 17-19)

Retaining learners using persistence strategies

Learner persistence is an issue which needs to be attended to, as appropriate, in each of the sequential steps of engaging the learner, developing foundation skills and aiding learner progression to further education and training and into work. Persistence involves enabling students to continue their studies and ultimately to proceed to the completion of their program and a paid job. The general rule is that, the greater the disadvantages faced by the learner, the more comprehensive the persistence strategies need to be and the longer the time period over which they need to be implemented.

Effective persistence strategies include:

- Learning programs that match learner interests
- Developing individual learning plans and associated support plans
- Tutoring
- Mentoring
- Advocating and brokering on behalf of the learner
- Case managing the learner
- Following up and redirecting, if needs be

Developing individual learning and associated support plans

Having a goal and making progress toward its achievement can be powerful motivators to persist in learning. The quantitative side of a study undertaken by the United Kingdom National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy showed that students who were able to articulate a very clear goal were more likely to persist than those who could not. Active participation by the learner in deciding their pathway is critical with the need to establish expectations that are high but realistic and based on good career information.

Encouraging a commitment from learners to follow through on their individual learning-to-work plans is also highly desirable. There is a competency unit on individual learning plan development in the Business Services VET Training Package. Active participation is assisted by having a learning-support plan.

Key learning support strategies

1. Tutoring
   Tutoring is a learning support activity and literacy is the most common learning support need. Volunteers are often used to provide support.

2. Mentoring
   Mentoring is a personal support activity requiring a one-to-one caring, supportive relationship between the mentor and the mentee that is based on trust. Successful mentoring is achieved through the sharing of experiences and world-views, listening and reflecting, and through a process of facilitated self-discovery. In
relation to education, mentoring has been described as a planned, intentional and committed relationship with specific aims including developing generic competencies, career prospects and social skills.

3 **Advocating and brokering on behalf of the learner**

Some learners need assistance to gain their required supports, people who advocate for them and broker with service providers with full agreement. This advocacy could extend beyond the time of the learning program and employment placement.

4 **Case management**

Case management is an extended form of brokering. It is particularly useful for learners with complex and multiple needs and requiring long-term assistance. The concept of case management is based in service provision arrangements that require different responses from within organisations and across organisational boundaries. Case managers provide the coordinating and specialist activities that flow from the particular setting, program and learner population.

5 **Following up and redirecting**

When learners stop attending, programs should attempt to maintain contact, keeping the door open for re-entry. Hopefully though, learners and teachers regularly revisit goals to assess whether they are still relevant and achievable. Persistence can falter with lack of progress and sometimes goals must be revised and learners redirected toward new goals. Sometimes this results in redirection that may involve:

- postponing the goal until serious situational barriers are under control
- shifting to a different goal path
- adjusting the goal up or down
- taking a different route to the goal, which might mean switching to a program that better meets learner needs
- withdrawing

(California Adult Education 2005)
SECTION 4  CAPABILITIES OF ACE PROVIDERS

This section provides a brief overview of the key issues an ACE organisation will need to consider in building their capability to achieve social inclusion in workforce development. Capability development requires planning and supporting, at the organisation level, those aspects of the social inclusion framework that can be met effectively and efficiently given current strengths and weaknesses of the organisation, levels and type of resources available and any other limitations which exist.

An outline of required capabilities

Capability development can be considered under the following four headings.

1  Personnel

ACE organisations need to have strong leadership with enthusiasm for the social inclusion agenda, otherwise this agenda is at risk of being marginalised. Social inclusion needs to permeate the entire organisation for enduring success (Figgis et al 2007, Volkoff et al 2007). It is a lot easier to attend to those who walk through the door than to connect with disadvantaged learners who do not self-refer or readily seek to engage in adult learning programs. There is variability among ACE providers as to how many of their current participants are from social and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

ACE organisations need staff with the necessary knowledge, skills and qualifications. Five common characteristics of successful practitioners working with disadvantaged learners are knowledge, adaptability, supportiveness, tenacity and connectedness (Ithaca Group 2005). ACE staff need to:

- understand individuals or groups of people at risk of being socially excluded
- offer quality learning programs
- use flexible delivery styles
- use appropriate and sensitive assessment procedures to encourage confidence and willingness to try more difficult tasks

(Nechvoglod and Beddie 2010)

Staff with expertise in foundations skills development will be particularly required to equip those at risk of being socially excluded to engage in broader vocational training and work. Some ACE providers deploy skilled LLN practitioners to work with groups of trained volunteer tutors who can provide one-to-one tuition under the supervision of the skilled practitioners. Two examples are the Caboolture Community Adult Literacy Group in Queensland and the Outer Eastern Literacy program Boronia, Victoria.

Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA) is to conduct a project to identify a series of measures to upgrade the skills and knowledge of the VET workforce in adult language, literacy and numeracy. Meanwhile the recently endorsed Vocational Graduate Certificate in LLN Practice and the Vocational Graduate Diploma of LLN Leadership offer graduate level qualifications that can be used to upskill teachers and trainers (Roberts & Wignall 2010).
ACE staff need to be familiar with the Australian VET System, to know how their offerings fit with the VET competency-based system and to be able to assess learner skills in these terms. Current capacity in these areas is variable. From a survey of 109 ACE providers in 2009 it was found that:

- on average, between 21% and 50% of non-accredited courses offer pathways into VET programs with ACE providers, that are also RTOs with ACE RTOs more likely to offer such pathways than non-RTO ACE providers
- learners are more likely to move sometimes as opposed to never or often into VET programs after completing non-accredited courses
- almost one-half (45%) of providers sometimes and another one-third of providers never (33.9%) assess learners for prior learning or arrange RPL assessment

(Haukka & Haukka 2010)

ACE providers delivering non-accredited, bridging, basic education and life skills programs would be wise to devise and operate a learning quality assurance mechanism to promote and monitor the integrity and effectiveness of their programs.

A Model of VET Capability Development created by Mitchell and Ward (2010) might be useful for ACE practitioners and workforce development planners in developing efficient professional development programs in teaching and assessment. The Model is based on survey responses from 2230 VET staff about their capabilities and professional development needs that were condensed into nine logical and coherent skills sets and put together into a model that shows how the skills sets come together to enable VET people to perform their professional duties. The Model of VET Capability Development identifies three categories of VET staff:

a The Foundation VET Practitioner of which there are 2 broad types: Novices who are not yet proficient in the five foundation skills and Established who have acquired the foundation skills.

b The Specialist VET Practitioner of which there are two broad types: Commercial Specialists who are able to manage commercial relationships and adapt training packages for commercial purposes and Learning and Assessment Specialists who are involved in classroom, workplace, distance and off-shore learning, as well as e-learning.

c The Advanced VET practitioner who is both a Commercial and a Learning and Assessment Specialist

2 Networks and partnerships

No single agency can meet all the multifaceted needs of disadvantaged Australians. A diverse contribution is required through the building of partnerships with other agencies to create ways to meet each learner’s different needs. Developing networks with other stakeholders is a way of making contact with specific client markets and ensuring education programs are provided in the most effective and appropriate way for all parties. It can also ensure appropriate support services are in place to support learner persistence and progression to a job outcome. Networking suggestions include:
networking with other agencies in order to meet learner needs through referral

saving time by setting up networks through already existing networks, where possible

identifying activities that could be better done at regional or national level and leaving the local level agency to concentrate on one-to-one work with learners

having a systems-based structure for collaboration rather than relying on the goodwill of individuals

(Hawthorn & Galloway 2009)

Systematic collaboration requires undertaking partnership work and this requires adept individuals who can cross boundaries to connect with many groups, within and beyond the ACE enterprise, to achieve linked-up services.

Success factors

What partnering among educators and others involves has been the subject of many studies (eg: Griffin & Curtin 2007) including among ACE and VET providers (Gelade, Stehlick & Willis 2006). Partnerships are more likely to be successful in securing the desired outcomes if they:

- have common understandings of their joint purpose
- have common understandings of how to assess progress towards achieving a common purpose
- bring with them the appropriate financial, social, cultural and physical resources to achieve a common purpose
- hold compatible philosophical positions with respect to a common purpose, while having respect for each other
- communicate well and work as part of a team

have developed at:

- the macro level between government departments and peak organisations or philanthropic groups
- the middle level with partnerships at the service provider level
- the micro level or at the coal face between teachers, learners and community representatives

have a succession plan for when lead personnel in a partnership move on

(adapted from Balatti, Black & Falk 2010)

Possible barriers to successful partnerships

- Lack of time is a barrier because establishing and maintaining partnerships is resource intensive. Relationship building takes time.
- Lack of adequate resources can be lack of funds to establish a program and a partnership and also resources to sustain the partnership.
• Failure to establish value in the partnership can lead to lack of ongoing commitment, particularly when the partner’s involvement is either short-term or funding driven.

• Mismatches between needs can result from the desire on the part of a not-for-profit to engage in more strategic business partnerships being met with resistance due to a mismatch between business needs and not-for-profit aims of the partnership, as well as a lack of flexibility in partnership and/or program design.

• Sector specific issues that can serve as barriers include the capacity of the not-for-profit sector to work non-competitively, government silos, and business focus on measurable results.

3 Resources and funding

The adequacy of funding levels for programs to support the engagement of disadvantaged people in learning has been raised on many occasions. The adequacy of funding timelines has also been queried.

To achieve inclusiveness by involving those disadvantaged in learning, takes more than seed funding – the common approach to date. Many equity programs remain stuck in the seeding stage and fail to thrive and grow because current funding approaches place too much emphasis on starting initiatives and not enough on the development and scale-up of promising ones. Lack of sufficient funds to fully support disadvantaged learners is a commonly raised issue. A rethink of the funding mechanisms currently used is needed if we are to stimulate innovative equity practice. (Figgis et al 2007).

The schools and university education sectors already have visible education social inclusion agendas that they are progressing through discrete funding arrangements:

• National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions

• National partnership agreement on low socioeconomic schools

• National Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program

The VET sector has assured intergovernmental funding arrangements into which NVEAC is seeking to insert a new funding mechanism. This is the proposed National Partnership on Equity in VET that takes account of the true cost of delivery for disadvantaged learners that is greater than the unit cost to achieve similar outcomes for other learners. ACE providers who are also VET providers will presumably benefit.

The ACE non-VET providers have no nationally agreed funding mechanism, although there are some national and various state-based funding schemes they can tender for. To develop the required resources for those at risk of being socially excluded the modus operandi of many ACE providers is to pull together resources from a variety of sources.

It is beyond individual ACE providers to influence their current funding arrangements to build capacity to expand social inclusion initiatives but they have lower costs advantages to market.
4 Performance reporting

There are many ACE providers who already engage people who are socially and educationally disadvantaged, giving them the confidence to extend their participation to vocationally focused programs and providing opportunities to access pathways to further formal education, training and/or jobs. However there are few studies that provide the evidence.

Data collecting, to demonstrate the value-add for those at risk of being socially excluded, is a long outstanding issue in the ACE sector. An expanded set of targets and measures is required to acknowledge that for learners with low initial skills small transitions and improved quality of life are important milestone outcomes to the ultimate goals of qualifications and employment.

Bowman (2007) has taken up the challenge of identifying a comprehensive but still high order set of outcomes related to adult learners. Her extended key performance measures framework (see Table 11) is based on a review of existing research and covers five types of learning outcomes. Ideas on what the measures could be for each learning outcome category are also provided to raise discussion on what should be reflected in an ACE performance measurement framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome category</th>
<th>Outcomes measures</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>Number of adults participating in a learning program OR Numbers apparently not engaged in learning</td>
<td>Although hard to measure, indicative figures are better than none. Who is missing out on learning research may provide some assistance. Alternatively, ABS data may provide part answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity capital</td>
<td>Self confidence Self esteem Personal enrichment Self concept as a learner</td>
<td>Can be measured through self-reporting by the learner. Surveys using a 5-point Lickert scale have been used to determine degree of change experienced. Aspects of identity capital were included in the special Indigenous Australians survey of training experiences by NCVER (Butler et al 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generic skills</td>
<td>Literacy levels Interpersonal skills Problem solving Enterprising skills</td>
<td>There is an international adult literacy survey instrument that the ABS has used. Allen Consulting Group (200?) recommends the assessment of employability skills by a descriptive reporting approach by providers supplemented by student portfolios of evidence. There has been an employer satisfaction with graduates generic skills survey undertaken for both VET and university graduates (2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital</td>
<td>Social connections Community connections Volunteer work</td>
<td>Changes in peer networks, membership of community groups, and participation in voluntary work have been reported on in the past, especially by ACE providers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human capital</td>
<td>Doing more study Got a first job Retained existing job Advanced to higher job Changed careers/developed skills towards New career Moved to self employment</td>
<td>This level of differentiation of job outcomes (move to being self-employment excepted) is collected in national VET student outcomes surveys and, analysed and documented under that name (e.g: NCVER 2005). The more fulsome account of the economic outcomes of VET learn-to-earn programs, that this set of measures provide, should be considered for inclusion in the VET key measurement report to better illustrate the value added by the learning program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Critical outcomes from adult learning for measurement (Bowman 2007: 18)
The diversity of the current capabilities of ACE

The current capability of individual ACE providers to provide a bridge between the Social Inclusion Agenda and the National Workforce and Productivity Agenda is highly variable. Some ACE providers have a proven track record in reaching the educationally disadvantaged, building their foundation skills and facilitating their moves on to qualifications, courses and employment outcomes. Some ACE providers now have a significant involvement in recognised vocational education and training as well, while other ACE providers remain focused on personal interest learning.

An ACE Capability Framework from a vocational education and training and employment perspective constructed by Bardon (2006) divides ACE providers into three groups. The Framework (see Table 12) could be explored with ACE providers, shaped to reflect contemporary types of providers and used as the basis for developing a differentiated set of ACE organisation social inclusion capability building programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider features</th>
<th>Community learning provider</th>
<th>Community participation provider</th>
<th>Community VET provider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provision profile</td>
<td>Informal learning</td>
<td>Basic skills learning and informal learning</td>
<td>Formal VET and Pre-accredited VET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner profile</td>
<td>Personal interest, focus, all ages</td>
<td>Life improvement and work readiness focus, of working age</td>
<td>Learning for earning focus, of working age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff capability</td>
<td>Require course takers</td>
<td>Require foundation skills specialists and trained tutors</td>
<td>Require VET professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>User pay</td>
<td>Collaborate to optimise learning options and supports. May compete for literacy, employability and prevocational funds</td>
<td>Compete for funds Collaborate to extend learning options &amp; provide support services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting</td>
<td>Program numbers</td>
<td>Detail outcomes and pathway articulations</td>
<td>VET statistical standards compliant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: National ACE Capability Framework (Adapted from Bardon 2006)
SECTION 5 REFERENCES


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