

The House of Representatives

Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations

Inquiry into employment: increasing participation in paid work

Submission from the Australian National Training Authority

August 2004



Terms of Reference

Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations

Inquiry into employment: increasing participation in paid work

- measures that can be implemented to increase the level of participation in paid work in Australia, and
- how a balance of assistance, incentives and obligations can increase participation, for income support recipients.

About ANTA

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) is an Australian Government statutory authority established in 1992 to provide a national focus for vocational education and training (VET).

ANTA reports to an industry-based Board and is an administrator and adviser.

It advises the ANTA Ministerial Council (ANTA MINCO) of Australian Government and State and Territory Ministers responsible for vocational education and training on:

- VET policy, strategy, priorities, goals and objectives nationally and
- VET plans which States and Territories develop each year. These plans detail how States and Territories propose to meet national priorities, goals and objectives.

ANTA administers national programs and the Australian Government funding of the national VET system.

ANTA works closely with governments, industry and other stakeholders to develop a strategic focus for the VET sector, to recommend on national policies and strategies and to provide advice to [ANTA MINCO](#). ANTA's core roles include:

- developing a draft national strategy
- development, management and promotion of the National Training Framework
- developing advice to identify and plan for future growth requirements
- ensuring comprehensive up-to-date national statistical data are available
- developing advice on key performance measures and reporting objectives
- providing an integrated annual national report
- coordinating national initiatives and undertaking policy reviews, evaluation and research on national priorities, and
- administering programs requiring national delivery.

This Submission

This submission provides an overview of the ways in which ANTA is working with other government agencies, industry and the community to improve participation in the labour force by ensuring that the vocational education and training system, 'provides skills and knowledge for work, enhances employability and assists learning throughout life'.

In addition to this overview specific reference will be made to:

- Initiatives to meet the needs of particular groups:
 - mature age people
 - people with a disability
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
 - women
 - young people
 - people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
 - clients of community sector organisations
 - volunteers

- Recognition of Prior Learning
- New Apprenticeships
- Adult and Community Education
- Meeting the needs of communities

Key Messages

- The value of vocational education and training in providing employment outcomes is not sufficiently appreciated in the community at large.
- The completion of post-school qualifications appears to significantly improve employability and employment outcomes. A survey of TAFE students shows that 42% of graduates and 29% of module completers who were not employed before their training found work after their training. Almost all (92%) of TAFE graduates were employed or in further study after their training¹.
- For groups at particular risk of long-term unemployment, training by itself is not sufficient to effect successful transition to employment but it is a crucial ingredient.
- People of all ages need access to effective career guidance systems if education and employment policies are to work.
- VET provides significant training pathways for both youth and adults:
 - 14.3% of the employed population aged 25 to 64 years were VET clients
 - 9.8% of the population aged 25 to 64 years were VET clients, and
 - 55% of our client group were aged 25 to 64 years².
- In 2002, around 25% of employers provided nationally recognised structured training. Employers also provided practical support for their employees, for example, time to attend courses or paying a contribution towards fees.

¹ 2003 Student Outcomes Survey, NCVET, 2004

² Australian vocational education and training statistics, 2001.

How ANTA is working to improve labour force participation

Setting National Priorities

Each year ANTA presents the Annual National Priorities for the VET system for consideration by the ANTA Ministerial Council (ANTA MINCO). In June 2004, ANTA MINCO endorsed as a priority for 2005:

‘Improve VET opportunities and outcomes, including through better linking of training and employment, particularly for people with a disability, women and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.’

This resolution builds on similar resolutions in previous years. Closer working relationships across government, job network providers and industry have enabled targeted VET programs to deliver workforce skills required for economic growth. For example:

- South Australia has established a Workforce Development Fund, which is aimed at enabling organisations to recruit, retain and/or upskill employees to improve the working environment and contribute to South Australia’s innovative and competitive advantage. The State government has provided \$400,000 which will be matched by industry.
- Western Australia has allocated an annual investment of more than \$31 million in publicly funded training in skill areas relevant to the \$29.5 billion Burrup resource development project, representing approximately 15,000 training places. Major initiatives include targeted training in priority skill areas, increased apprenticeship and traineeship places, up-skilling programs for the existing workforce and accelerated trade training programs.

The National Strategy

The National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004-2010 was endorsed by ANTA MINCO in November 2003. This Strategy is a commitment over seven years to pursue a range of outcomes which include:

- Adults, through lifelong learning, continuously upgrade their skills to meet current and future work requirements.
- The learning needs of people who face barriers due to age, gender, cultural difference, language, literacy, numeracy, cost, **unemployment**, imprisonment or isolation are addressed through an integrated diversity management approach.

This Strategy will guide the commitments of both the Australian Government and state and territory governments. It will be progressed through an Action

Plan which details national priority actions to be undertaken through partnerships between ANTA, the Department of Education, Science and Training, State Training Authorities, industry, diverse stakeholders within the vocational education and training sector as well as key Australian Government departments such as the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, the Department of Family and Community Services, the Department of Industry Tourism and Resources and the Department of Transport and Regional Services. This Action Plan was recently agreed to by Ministers at their 11 June meeting.

The National Skills Forum and Industry Skills Councils

One of ANTA's key roles is to work closely with industry to ensure that the VET sector is responsive to industry's need for a skilled workforce. ANTA seeks industry advice in two key ways:

- a high level twice-yearly national industry skills forum led by the ANTA Board and involving key industry stakeholders. The first two forums were held in September 2003 and April 2004, and
- 10 new Industry Skills Councils, which are progressively replacing the existing Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs).

These National Industry Skills Councils have two key roles:

- providing accurate industry intelligence to the VET sector about current and future skill needs and training requirements, and
- supporting the development, implementation and continuous improvement of quality nationally recognised training products and services, including Training Packages.

Key messages coming from industry include³:

- The VET sector needs to become faster at responding to changing industry skill needs. This issue is a priority in ANTA's work with Industry Skills Councils.
- Training needs to be offered in a way that is flexible and responsive. Employers and individuals are looking for flexible training to match their increasingly mobile lifestyles. Training needs to be tailored to particular client needs.
- Shorter apprenticeships, a concept being trialed by DEST⁴, may be a better way to meet skills needs in some industries and to assist some clients, particularly the mature age unemployed, into skilled employment. Such programs may also be more attractive to young people and employers unwilling or unable to commit to a longer training program.

³ Report of the National Industry Skills Forum, April 2004.

⁴ National Skills Shortages Strategy, 6 April 2004

- Generic and employability skills, as well as specialist technical skills, are important for a modern economy. ANTA is developing employability competency standards for incorporation within national qualifications and programs. ANTA is also working with other sectors to implement an employability skills framework across the formal education and training sectors and the broader community.
- Industry wants more access to recognition of prior learning, especially for mature-aged workers.

The High Level Review of Training Packages

In 2003, the ANTA Ministerial Council commissioned ANTA to undertake a High Level Review of Training Packages. Training Packages, one of the central elements of the National Training Framework, are developed by industry through the Industry Skills Councils and define the skills and qualifications that the vocational education and training system is to deliver.

Training Packages provide a means through which to ensure that the VET system enhances employability by delivering the skills and qualifications that industry want from a national perspective.

This wide ranging review undertook amongst other things to investigate the needs of Australia's changing workforce. The ANTA Ministerial Council agreed to a range of recommendations arising from the Review at their June meeting. Key benefits will include:

- greater skills transfer across industry and improved industry relevant pre-vocational pathways and enhanced school to work transition, and
- access to the generic and employability skills that industry and individuals require.

Resourcing the VET sector - the ANTA Agreement

A large part of the funding for the VET system in Australia is provided jointly by the Australian Government and by State and Territory governments under the ANTA Agreement. In 2004 the Australian Government contribution will total \$1.11 billion. State and Territory governments provide public funding through their training authorities, while the contribution from the Australian Government is administered and allocated to these training authorities by the Australian National Training Authority.

The largest proportion of recurrent public funds (75%) are allocated to the major public providers according to the profile of activity that State and Territory Training Authorities plan for their jurisdiction. This is done within a national framework and takes into account the training needs and priorities of industry and the community within their State or Territory. Particular client groups can also be specifically targeted as part of the services purchased.

A relatively small portion of public funds is also provided to the system on a competitive basis, making up around 25% of the total allocation of national recurrent government funding. The processes used to allocate these funds include competitive tendering, preferred supplier arrangements, and user choice.

Competitive tendering involves public and private registered training organisations competing for funding contracts offered by government. These funds can be made available to both public and private registered training organisations (open competitive tendering), or restricted to either public or private registered training organisations (limited competitive tendering).

User choice arrangements apply to the training component of New Apprenticeships. Under these arrangements, the employer and the apprentice / trainee can select the recognised private or public training provider they wish to use, allowing them to negotiate the timing, location and nature of the training.

In 2002, the Australian Government, State and Territory recurrent government funds purchased the mix of VET shown in Table 1. A large proportion of this activity is nationally recognised training at a Certificate level, according to the Australian Qualifications Framework. Almost half of the course enrolments funded were in the industry areas of Business and clerical, General education and training, and Community services, health and education.

Table 1: Course enrolments in the publicly funded VET system in 2002

2002 Industry area of the course	AQF level of the course				Total
	Diploma or higher	Certificate III & IV	Certificate I & II	Other (a)	
1 – Arts, Entertainment, Sport & Recreation	17,610	22,529	10,295	5,812	56,246
2 – Automotive	11	21,047	7,647	1,071	29,776
3 – Building & Construction	10,505	41,091	8,205	10,725	70,526
4 – Community Services, Health & Education	30,637	78,318	8,634	25,981	143,570
5 – Finance, Banking & Insurance	5,791	11,296	2,260	3,047	22,394
6 – Food Processing	106	9,362	14,274	1,570	25,312
7 – Textiles, Clothing, Footwear & Furnishings	753	11,827	4,373	1,435	18,388
8 – Communications	1,209	3,518	1,399	859	6,985
9 – Engineering & Mining	15,200	22,888	14,803	14,477	67,368
10 – Primary Industry	3,304	33,681	31,408	11,812	80,205
11 – Process Manufacturing	2	1,700	2,210	133	4,045
12 – Sales & Personal Services	3,019	32,136	38,411	3,179	76,745
13 – Tourism & Hospitality	6,329	47,223	27,416	10,715	91,683
14 – Transport & Storage	605	11,821	16,189	3,928	32,543
15 – Utilities	8,770	19,710	4,771	4,094	37,345
16 – Business & Clerical	63,315	116,093	81,612	56,343	317,363
17 – Computing	15,118	34,676	11,605	10,517	71,916
18 – Science Technical & Training	13,217	19,688	29,315	17,660	79,880
19 – General Education & Training	422	23,760	78,190	116,044	218,416
Total	195,923	562,364	393,017	299,402	1,450,706

Notes: (a) Includes Secondary education, non award courses, and other education and training.

Source: National VET Provider Data Collection, 2002 Course Enrolments.

Australians Working Together

The Australians Working Together (AWT) program provides an additional \$72 million of VET funding over four years for people with a disability and people affected by changes to income support arrangements.

In 2003, \$12.381 million was allocated to States and Territories under this package. States and Territories used this funding to:

- develop strategies to discourage long term welfare dependency
- improve the levels of participation and outcomes being achieved by people with a disability, and
- provide additional places for people with a disability.

In 2004, AWT funds will be administered differently. The Australian Government will use these funds to purchase places for people with a disability, parents returning to work and older workers. The funds will be allocated via a tender process administered by the Department of Education, Science and Training.

Promoting the value of VET

Market research carried out by ANTA and others between 1991 and 2003 with all VET's client groups (from businesses through to parents and career counsellors) consistently shows that VET is misunderstood and not always highly valued. The VET option is not always highly competitive as a brand and VET qualifications are perceived to lack status. Outside the VET sector and, to some extent, inside the VET sector, people are confused about what VET is, how to recognise it, and what it offers.

These perceptions contrast strongly with the VET sector's consistent performance in enhancing employability. Growing numbers of university graduates see the VET sector as offering value to them in entering the workforce.

ANTA is working with States and Territories, industry and community stakeholders to promote the value of VET and to assist clients to get the information they need.

The portal, *training.com.au* provides an on-line entry point for comprehensive information about vocational education and training. Stage one, launched in 2003 was targeted at employers. Stage two to be launched later this year will be targeted at registered training organisations and stage three will be targeted at individuals.

ANTA is also a major sponsor of WorldSkills Australia, an independent, non-profit organisation promoting the status of vocational education and training across Australia. Through their regional and national skill competitions, and participation in the International WorldSkills Competition, they challenge young people, their teachers, trainers and employers to achieve world class

standards in all industries. These competitions attract wide interest from media and schools providing a great opportunity to reach and inspire school students to consider the careers featured in WorldSkills competitions.

Meeting the needs of particular groups

Mature Age People

Access to training and the opportunity to add to and up-grade skills will become increasingly important for people of all ages if they are to remain active participants in the workforce.

The training needs of mature age workers, including mature age unemployed, are to be a key focus in the Action Plan to implement the National Strategy 2004-2010. This issue will be a focus of coordinated action drawing together policies and initiatives at state, territory and national level as well as cross-government approaches.

Several specific issues have already emerged:

- Recognition of Prior Learning processes
- the effectiveness and appropriateness of New Apprenticeships, and
- the use of financial incentives targeted at employers and/or individuals.

As mentioned elsewhere in this submission, RPL and New Apprenticeships are priority areas in ANTA's work⁵.

Financial incentives aimed at encouraging the employment and/or training of mature age workers have been implemented overseas and some highly targeted incentives have been used in various Australian jurisdictions. For example, the Australian Government through the Department of Education, Science and Training currently provides an incentive for employers taking a mature age person as a New Apprentice.

Overseas experience shows however that the effectiveness of incentives schemes is hard to measure and that by themselves, they are not sufficient to shift negative employer attitudes to mature age unemployed people. There is some evidence that incentives targeted at individuals may assist or encourage them back into the workforce.

From ANTA's point of view any use of incentives needs to be carefully implemented so as to avoid unintended consequences. Such measures need to encourage individuals to enter areas of skill shortage and both individuals and employers to increase their investment in high quality training.

People with a disability

ANTA has responsibility for *Bridging Pathways a National Strategy for increasing opportunity for people with a disability in vocational education and training* and its blueprint for implementation.

⁵ See Recognition of Prior Learning p17ff and New Apprenticeships p17ff

The Australian Disability Training Advisory Council which worked with ANTA to develop this strategy and blueprint has also produced a major directions paper *Whole of Life, All of Life*⁶. The paper proposed to place disability on the agendas of key high-level cross-government committees and forums.

Recent research by ANTA has shown a potential \$2.7 billion per annum net return on investment if more people with a disability participated in vocational education and training in Australia⁷. Deakin University has identified a potential global market in the order of \$1 trillion for businesses that target the 10% of people with disabilities worldwide who currently have a disposable income.

While some steps are being taken to address some of the barriers facing people with disabilities, progress in improving outcomes has been slow and patchy. For example, participation of people with a disability in vocational education and training is low, and for students with a disability, employment outcomes following training are actually declining.

In 2003, ANTA commissioned a study, *Improving employment outcomes for VET graduates with a disability*. This study highlights the need to:

- Target strategies to help those who are studying with the aim of achieving paid employment and in need of assistance to achieve this goal.
- Focus on ability and capacity development as well as on disability by providing individualised transition and career planning to identify pathways from VET to employment and calls on a range of stakeholders (within VET and from other sectors) who can address identified needs.
- Develop cross-sectoral partnerships at delivery level between VET stakeholders, employers, and disability sector specialists – particularly employment services. However, the report also notes that collaboration is inhibited by the rigid separation of responsibilities embodied in the Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement.

⁶ Australian Disability Training Advisory Council, The 'Whole of Life, All of Life' Approach to Disability A Way forward, April 2003.

⁷ The Economic and Social Analysis of Increasing Opportunities for People with a Disability in VET, Mike Dockery, Elisa Birch and Peter Kenyon, The Institute for Research into International Competitiveness (IRIC), Curtin Business School, Curtin University of Technology, Australian National Training Authority, February 2001.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

Partners in a Learning Culture, Australia's National Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island People in vocational education and training 2000-2005 with its associated implementation blueprint set out the basis for achieving the following vision:

'A vocational education and training system which renews and shares an Indigenous learning culture with all Australians in a spirit of reconciliation, equity, justice, and community economic development and sustainability.'

The fourth objective of this strategy is to develop closer links between VET outcomes for Indigenous people and industry and employment.

The mid-term review of progress in the implementation of the *Partners in a Learning Culture Blueprint* has highlighted the need to improve employment outcomes and ensure that more Indigenous Australians achieve higher-level qualifications.

This year ANTA embarked on a major partnership with DEWR to improve training outcomes for Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) participants. This project, *Pathways to Employment*, aims to improve outcomes for Indigenous Australians by developing more strategic, long-term co-ordinated links between CDEPs, training and employment programs.

Later this year, the NCVET will report findings of the *Survey of Indigenous Vocational Education and Training Students*. The survey aims to cast light on the question 'What individual, community and economic benefits arise from participation in VET by Indigenous people?'

Women

During 2003 a national policy framework - *Women: Shaping our Future* - was developed around the four objectives of the new National Strategy for VET 2004-2010. The policy framework agreed by Ministers provides a platform for the VET sector and business to work together to improve the learning and employment outcomes of women engaged in VET.

The MCEETYA VEET Women's Taskforce formally evaluated the *National Women's Vocational Education and Training Strategy 1996-2000* in 2000. The evaluation *Transforming VET transforming women* found that some of the major outcomes were not achieved or could not be accurately measured. For example:

- While the number of women enrolling in 'non-traditional' fields of study increased slightly, women continue to be concentrated in a narrow range of 'traditional' female occupations and industries.

- Women graduates experience poorer employment outcomes than men – such as lower levels of employment, lower income, and fewer training opportunities.
- Women are still significantly under represented in senior management.

Challenges for the VET sector include:

- establishing joined up solutions – whether they are cross industry, whole of government, whole of community, or public-private partnerships – as a way of making a real difference for women.
- understanding and respecting the choices women make as a given and encouraging informed choice rather than seeking to bring about gender parity.
- distinguishing between generic issues that impact on all clients and those issues that are specific to women or those generic issues that have particular impacts on women.
- understanding the specific impact on women experiencing multiple disadvantage.
- supporting women's choices with information that can be effectively targeted at them at key decision making points throughout their lifecycle – at entry level to training, during career transitions, on return to work or study following birth and parenting, or when entering into self employment or small business.
- ensuring that the information and choices on offer to women are fully representative of the range of VET offerings so that perceptions are well informed and choices can translate into well articulated training and employment pathways.

Young People

Since the commitment of funding by the ANTA MINCO in 1996, the VET in Schools program has experienced unprecedented growth with 95% of secondary schools participating in the program, 202,935 students enrolled in VET in Schools programs in 2003 and 10,568 students commenced School-based New Apprenticeships. In November 2003, Ministers agreed to continue to fund the VET in Schools Program for \$20 million a year (plus indexation) for 2005-2006, through the *Vocational Education and Training Funding Act 1992*.

The roll-out of VET in Schools programs including School Based New Apprenticeships has been a key factor in raising Year-12 retention rates and improving the engagement of young people at risk of leaving school early.

Changes to incentives provided by DEST in mid-2003 removed unintended disincentives to the employment of VET in Schools graduates.

In 2003, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training conducted an inquiry into VET in Schools, in particular, the place of

vocational education in schools, its growth and development and its effectiveness in preparing students for post-school options. The report was tabled on 29 March 2004, and will assist policy debate on future directions for VET in Schools.

One key challenge for the future will be to explore the potential for VET in Schools programs to be more closely aligned to areas of skill shortage. This has been included by ANTA as a key priority for the years 2005-2006 in the Guidelines for VET in Schools Funding to States and Territories.

People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds

At the June 2004 ANTA MINCO meeting, Ministers agreed that people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds would be specifically identified within the broader priority of improving outcomes for VET sector clients.

To date ANTA's main focus has been on the provision of literacy and language skills within the context of vocational education and training. Plans for 2005 include market segmentation of this client group to understand the key factors impacting on successful and unsuccessful outcomes of training and to determine policy responses.

Clients of Community Sector Organisations

In 2003 ANTA commissioned a report to look at how clients of community sector organisations might be encouraged to take up New Apprenticeships as a pathway into skilled employment. Such clients include people faced with a wide range of barriers in entering the workforce. This report, based on a survey and consultations with community sector and VET sector organisations, will be finalised shortly. The project is expected to highlight the need for the community sector and VET sector to build a stronger mutual understanding at all levels and to support effective partnerships at the local level.

Volunteers

ANTA recognises the value of volunteering as a pathway into employment by providing recognised training pathways for the training of volunteers. This can happen in a number of ways.

Some organisations that train volunteers have become registered training organisations (RTOs). This means that the training they provide is based upon and consistent with national Training Packages. Volunteers can achieve recognised qualifications or have the skills they learn counted formally in other training and/or employment contexts. Other organisations partner with external RTOs. Others again plan their training so that the skills gained can be mapped against any formal training that a volunteer might choose to undertake.

The Due Credit project completed in 2003 looked at how young people might get recognition for the skills that they applied through participation in a wide range of community and youth activities. The report documents a framework of options for community and youth organisations to consider. The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs recently launched a new resource kit, *Above & Beyond: Recognising Youth Development in Australia*, arising from this report and the work done by ANTA.

Some key initiatives

Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition of Prior Learning is fundamental to improving training and employment outcomes for a wide range of clients including mature age people, women and Indigenous Australians.

Industry has told ANTA loud and clear that coming to grips with the recognition of prior learning must be a priority. This includes a series of projects that we're undertaking in partnership with employer and employee organisations. These projects are designed to carry out skills audits, RPL assessments and certification of individual's competencies against national standards, and then to develop training plans in response to the skills gaps for individuals and enterprises. This will produce information about RPL processes and result in models that can be replicated more widely.

In 2003, the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board completed a project to develop National Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in post-compulsory education and training. These will be disseminated through the VET sector and the higher education sector in 2004. The information will also be available through the Australian Qualifications Framework website, www.aqf.edu.au.

New Apprenticeships

New Apprenticeships combine practical work with structured training to give learners both on-the-job experience and recognised qualifications.

As in previous years, the number of New Apprentices in training continues to grow. At the end of 2003, there were 406,900 New Apprentices in training, 10% more than at the end of 2002. The strongest growth in the number of apprentices and trainees in 2003 was in the 45 and over age group, which has more than quadrupled over the last five years.

The number of female apprentices and trainees continues to grow at a faster rate than for males. There was a 15% increase in the number of female apprentices and trainees in training, compared to an eight per cent increase in the number of males.

ANTA engaged KPMG to undertake an independent risk assessment of the impact of User Choice and New Apprenticeship policy on the VET system. Findings from this assessment together with other sources of industry advice confirm that New Apprenticeships, originally devised as an entry-level pathway principally targeted at young people is also being used to meet the needs of existing workers.

At the same time growth in New Apprenticeships signals the value recognised by both individuals and employers of training opportunities that combine formal training with on-the-job learning in relevant employment. There is a

view by some stakeholders that what is needed now is consideration of new New Apprenticeship type opportunities that meet the needs of particular clients such as mature age unemployed people.

Adult and Community Education

Adult and Community Education (ACE) can be distinguished by the way it embraces and connects vocational learning, learning for life effectiveness and learning for enjoyment and pleasure⁸. The *ACE Outcomes* report takes it to mean 'organised adult learning in community settings'⁹.

ANTA provides support via a grant to Adult Learning Australia (ALA), the peak body for adult learning in Australia. ANTA and ALA have a strategic relationship agreement around their common vision to promote and progress quality education and training opportunities for adults that contribute to the economic and social development of Australia.

Within this broad scope of activity there are a number of direct connections with employment:

- more than 75% of all employees take part in "on the job" learning
- in 2002, 81% of Australian employers provided opportunities for their adult employees to develop, maintain and improve their work-related skills at a cost of more than \$4 billion, and
- adult learners prefer an informal and social learning experience in which the learning is negotiated and formal assessment is minimised.

ACE is undertaken for a wide variety of reasons. For many clients, ACE provides an important avenue for learning skills to assist their employability. These skills may include generic skills such as communication, team work, language and literacy or skills which are specifically vocational.

Many ACE providers are also registered training organisations (RTOs) which provide formal VET courses. In doing so they provide a learning environment and pathways which may be more accessible to some clients than those offered by other VET providers.

The report *Exploring the social and economic impacts of adult and community education* highlighted the benefits accruing to the disadvantaged and special interest groups in the community who otherwise might not participate in learning.

Difficult as such things are to quantify, the provider and student surveys attest to the community and regional development role of adult and community education. ACE providers have strong links into their immediate communities and provide many life skills for community development.

⁸Barry Golding, Merryn Davies and Veronica Volkoff, *A consolidation of ACE research: review of research 1999 - 2000*, NCVET 2001.

⁹Allie Clemans, Robyn Hartley, Helen Macrae, *ACE Outcomes*, ANTA, 2003

Related to its community development role is the role the ACE sector plays in regional development. Half of the providers who responded to the survey were located in rural and regional Australia. Many would be the only post-compulsory education provider in a town, or even a region. Their role is intensified when, for example, a town loses a major employer. For the town to readjust and survive, the displaced resident workers will need to learn new skills.¹⁰

Meeting the needs of Communities

From ANTA's perspective, VET contributes to economic and social development by increasing skills levels in the community and strengthening businesses.

The National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training recognises that communities are key clients of the VET sector. ANTA is working with key partners to ensure that the VET sector is able to skill local workforces to meet new employment opportunities generated in regional Australia. The National Strategy Action Plan commits to a program of targeted research which will strengthen regional and community development initiatives occurring across Australia. Focus areas will include:

- the role of VET in building social and economic capital in communities and regions
- the nature of partnerships with VET, including how they can be formed, sustained and used to address skills supply and demand at the local level, and
- development of a set of indicators and measures to assess the contribution of VET to communities and regions.

ANTA funds Adult Learning Australia (ALA) to gather and share intelligence generated by the growing learning communities movement via the *Learning Communities Catalyst* website. This site was established as a clearinghouse of information, research, case studies and practical tools to assist communities, councils, government, businesses, policy makers and other stakeholders researching, advocating for and developing learning communities.

The website (www.lcc.edu.au) is a collaborative effort between ALA, the Australian Learning Communities Network, the Australian Local Government Association and EDNA Online.

¹⁰ *Exploring the social and economic impacts of adult and community education* by Elisa-Rose Birch, Peter Kenyon, Paul Koshy, Nick Wills-Johnson (ANTA, 2003),.