

# Training and development in Centrelink

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This chapter deals with the systemic changes in Centrelink induction and training, illustrates the present organisational training profile, and considers trends in organisational learning and development.

Generally speaking, this chapter responds to term of reference (b), training and development, and also (c) the role of the Public Service Commissioner.

## Induction and accredited training

The 1998 national learning strategy led to Centrelink registering as a training organisation (RTO) in June 1999 (C1999a), under the Australian Recognition Framework. This is now recast as the Australian Quality Training Framework (ANTA 2001). In 2001, the RTO was relaunched as the Centrelink Virtual College (CVC).

The Virtual College (C 2001c) is an in-house team of specialists offering Centrelink employees access to nationally recognised learning and qualifications. The College Dean chairs the advisory CVC Board of Studies, which includes other National Managers, Area Managers, and a training expert from each of PSMPC and Defence.

CVC also manages the Centrelink Education Network (CEN, see below) and Indigenous cadetships and scholarships. Qualifications available from CVC include certificates and diplomas in business from the Community Services Training Package, certificates and diplomas from the Business Services Training Package, the certificate IV in telecoms (call centres) from the Telecommunications Training Package, and the certificate IV in government (fraud prevention and detection) from the Public Services Training Package.

At the end of 2000–01, Centrelink noted (C2001a) that the CVC was upgrading its status to meet the new national training quality standards (ANTA 2001). A new Learning Management System (or Service) was to be developed for mandatory ANTA performance reporting, links with external training providers were to be strengthened, and accredited programs for existing employees were to be broadened.

Centrelink also reported that it offered seven nationally recognised qualifications, with 3000 employees enrolled, up from 270 in 2000. This was a significant development in a short timeframe. Against the APS trend of recent years, Centrelink has gone beyond all other APS agencies in positioning itself in the vocational education and training (VET) system. This is in keeping with its size, dispersion of employment, and service delivery and skilling challenges.

Centrelink's new VET profile is also a marker of progress in the national competency based training system. Although this framework dates back to 1990 in its original form, the Australian Recognition Framework, introducing Training Packages and mutual RTO status for TAFE and non-TAFE providers, is as recent as 1998 (Saunders, S 2001, pp. 47-48). The 'road-tested' Training Packages that are now being adopted by Centrelink only became widely available around 1999–2000.

The overall new apprenticeships system doubled in size over 1995–2000 (see Saunders, S 2001, p. 44). There were 1.75m Australians enrolled in VET (NCVER 2001c) and 275 000 total

in new apprenticeships at 2000, with only 15 000 of the apprenticeships being in government administration and defence (NCVER 2001b, p.69).

These national VET statistics may be compared with total May 2000 employment of 9m, and total government employment of 0.35m (ABS 2000). This means that, at the time, 19% of employed persons were enrolled in VET, 3% of all employed persons were in apprenticeships, and 4% of government employees were in apprenticeships.

At the same year, 2000, the percentage of the Centrelink workforce enrolled in VET was about 1% (table 7). It is now above 10%. The percentage of new apprenticeships appears to be around 10%, compared with the 3-4% share to be found in the public sector or the employed labour force generally.

**Table 7: Centrelink new apprenticeships (NA's) and VET estimates, 2000 to 2002**

	2000	2001	2002
No's of NA's funded:			
Call Centres		1430	1500
Areas		420	500
For AWT (est.)		-	400
Total	n/a	1850	2400
As % of ASN (1)	n/a	9%	11%
No's of VET enrolments:	270	3000	3000+ (est.)
As % of ASN (1)	1%	14%	13-14% (est.)
No's of VET completions (2)		800 (3)	
As % of ASN (1)		3-4%	

Sources: C 2001a, and recent CVC survey of Area Learning Managers.

(1) Taken as 21 000 approx. for calendar years 2000 and 2001, 22 000 approx. for 2002, by interpolation from figure 2.

(2) Both certificates and statements of attainment.

(3) Includes 2002 year to date.

The new apprenticeships and VET enrolment rates are substantial, although the figures are to be interpreted with caution. Some of the enrolments will represent desirable upgrading of skills for existing Centrelink staff rather than induction-based skilling for new staff. The rate of enrolment is much lower than the rate of completion (including statements of attainment), although the gap should narrow as the organisational VET framework matures.

The future directions of the broad VET-based induction program, and the expected or desired intensity of the organisation's VET training effort over the medium term, are issues to be managed in workforce planning. Equally important is the direction of the training effort—sustaining learning opportunities and qualifications that are implicitly valid and valued by frontline staff, as well as explicitly measured in performance benchmarks.

The Learning Management Service, or System, (LMS) should enhance VET planning in Centrelink. This is a single organisation-wide system to manage staff learning and training operations. First priority here is to systematise essential ANTA registration and reporting requirements, and the necessary LMS elements for this should be in place by 2003.

Through the LMS and other means, data will become more readily available on the CVC effort for young people and women, also an ANTA reporting requirement. At 2000, under-25s held 68% of Australia's new apprenticeships—although their share has dropped 10% since then—and 37% of all VET places. Women held more than 30% of new apprenticeships

and about 50% of all VET places (NCVER 2001a, c, 2002). The Centrelink workforce profile suggests that younger workers and women will be well represented in its VET profile.

Not all, but a significant proportion, of the Centrelink new apprentices are new recruits, especially in the Call Centres, which have dominated Centrelink's recruitment and VET profiles in the past two years.

Area North Central Victoria, and Call, were early movers in terms of upgrading the approach to induction, meaning a longer induction program finishing with an accredited qualification. This approach is now to be upgraded further, becoming part of a larger reform in the mainstream of Centrelink induction and training.

In the lead up to AWT, and noting the diversity of Area induction practices, Guiding Coalition agreed to the piloting of a formal 28-week induction program in Area Brisbane. Following the initial evaluation of this pilot, the Guiding Coalition has now agreed in principle that all new ongoing Centrelink recruits would do the program, commencing July 2002 to align with the first wave of AWT staff taking up duties.

CVC is to design the modules and manage the program, for which off-the-job learning may be conducted in-house (as in Area Brisbane) or by an external TAFE provider (Box Hill TAFE provides for Melbourne-based Areas). Successful AWT trainees would receive (at least) a certificate III at the end of the induction period, with some limited customisation of the qualifications to fit in with the Centrelink environment.

Looking ahead, CVC has developed a 'career pathways vision' (figure 5) for the organisation. This puts the APS value of a career service into practice. Typical career and qualification pathways are plotted within and across the three Centrelink work streams—customer services, business services and I & T—and up into managerial and SES jobs. The community services certificates, and the other qualifications listed above, slot into this overall schema.

Primarily, the concept is to take recruits, whether young people or more experienced workers, possessing the right characteristics and train them up internally. The vision is that staff would be with an employer of choice with a visible commitment to training, offering contemporary qualifications and making a net contribution to VET generally (as is already beginning to happen).

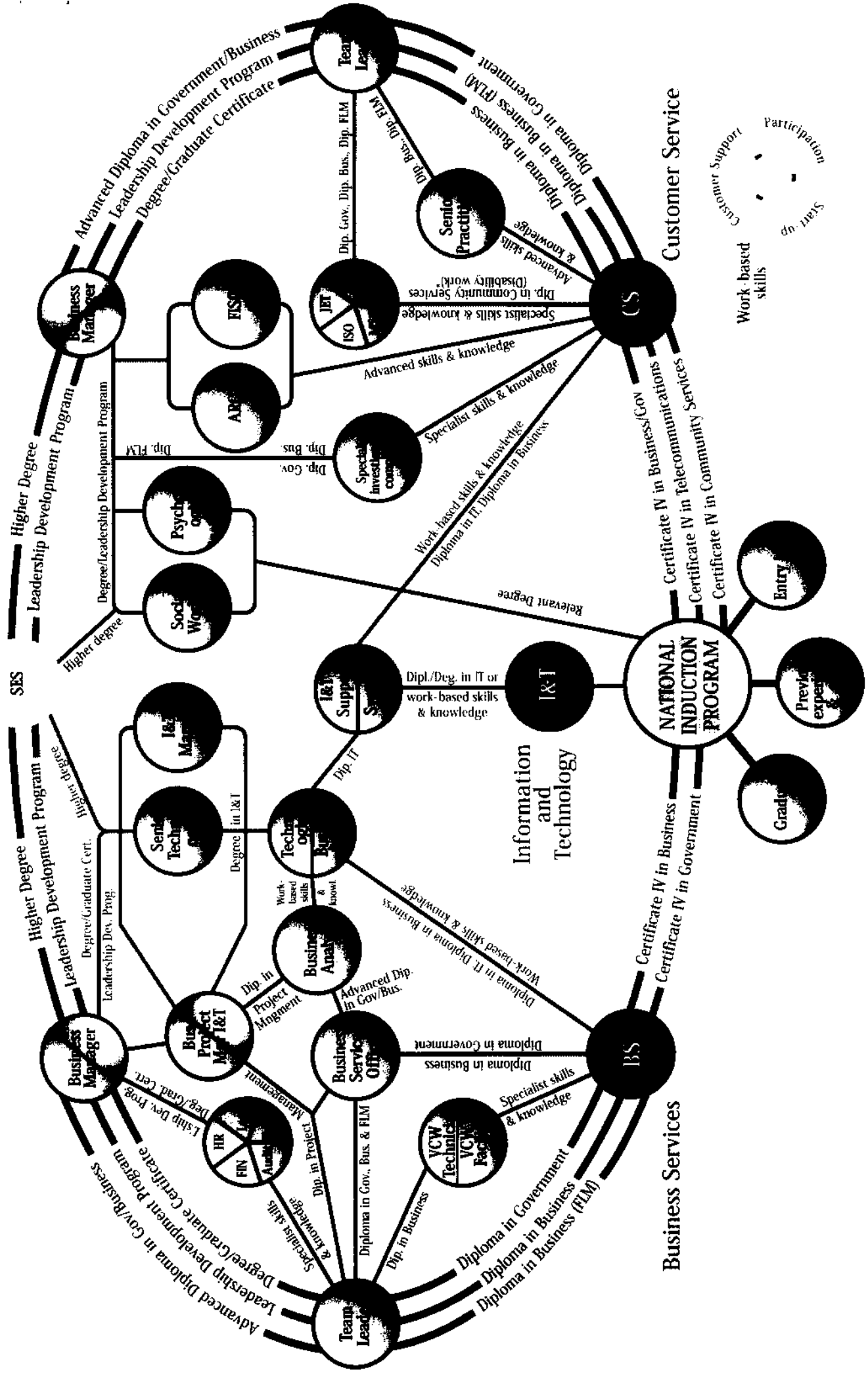
Whereas the 1999 Development Agreement deals succinctly (C 1999b, pp. 22-24) with accredited and other learning, the 2002 Agreement and supporting guidelines will be more expansive, reflecting evolution in the enterprise bargaining process and Centrelink's new maturity in VET and learning.

The Agreement and classifications will incorporate the three work streams of the careers vision. Over time, this shift will improve the management of support vis-a-vis customer service. The intention is that the relatively small 'business services' and 'IT' streams should apply mainly to support staff working in Area or National Support, whereas the large 'customer services' stream is for staff working in CSCs and other service delivery sites.

Centrelink does not maintain a generalised graduate induction program. The preference is that middle management and technical skills will come in on transfer from the network, and Centrelink is also able to attract graduates on transfer from other Canberra APS agencies.

Within the I & T work stream, Centrelink introduced in 1999 an IT graduate induction program for the I & T group in National Support Office.

# The Vision: Career pathways within Centrelink



The journey begins

Figure 5: Career pathways vision for Centrelink

[Shrink the diagram and key to one page, landscape]

The IT program attracts a majority of male graduates. That would be expected in an IT recruitment exercise, but it is not actually characteristic of the senior I & T managers in Centrelink, half of whom are females. The program (table 8) has been successful in attracting and retaining (younger) IT graduates of quality from interstate and the ACT, making a significant contribution to succession planning for the Centrelink I & T group.

Over the four years to 2002, an average of 55 IT graduates a year have joined the I & T group, about 4% on average of its ongoing staffing.

Centrelink's overall need for and success in attracting talented officers—including younger graduates—for NSO and the three work streams is a matter to be monitored in successive skill audits and workforce plans. Over time, information on higher qualifications should be picked up in the LMS or through other Centrelink HRM systems.

Table 8: Centrelink IT graduate intake, 1999 to 2002

	1999	2000	2001	2002
Male-female	46-13	16-13	49-14	52-16
Under 25-over 25	n/a	n/a	n/a	44-24
Interstate-ACT	39-20	12-17	33-30	51-17
Total	59	29	63	68
As % of NSO staff (1)	3%	1%	3%	3%
As % of NSO I & T (2)	6%	2%	6%	6%
First year attrition	7%	3%	4%	n/a

Source: Data held by I & T People Support Team, NSO.

(1) Averaged out as 2200 approx. for calendar year 1999 and 2000, 2400 for 2001 and 2002, by interpolation from table 3.

(2) A fairer comparison is with the NSO I & T group of about 1100, which doubles the percentages.

## Continuing learning and development

In the *Annual report* (C 2001a), Centrelink signalled some of the important changes taking place in training and development generally.

Staff learning, it was reported, was to be business and competency based and accredited, supported by learning plans, and delivered innovatively. At the time, most (85%) of staff had completed a standard Centrelink learning plan, referred to as a Team and Individual Learning Plan (TILP). Staff TILPs are drawn up as part of the performance appraisal cycle and are fundamentally based on applicable local and national business plans.

Centrelink had also established a tripartite 'Learning Executive Group'. The People Management Team was to develop directions, the Service Integration Shop was to develop (technical) training, and the CVC would deliver nationally recognised learning and qualifications (as discussed above).

The current roles of the CVC and Service Integration Shop, especially in developing and maintaining Area network training that contributes to 'Getting it Right', are critical.

The Service Integration Shop is a relatively new NSO team with broad responsibilities for business process redesign, integration, and practice, in the service delivery network. This comprehends the quality and delivery of network training and the reference tools. All new

and revised training products relating to particular customer groups or new initiatives (including AWT) are now streamed through the Shop.

## Network training: getting it right

Part of the context for recent and planned network training and learning enhancements lies in Getting it Right, a business assurance process linked to two recent performance audits of Centrelink.

The first (ANAO 2001b), based on 1999–2000 fieldwork assessing the accuracy of the age pension claims process, resulted in a number of recommendations for rule simplification and streamlining, revisions for the business assurance framework and targets, better sampling and checking of work, and upgrading of technical skills and reference materials for CSOs. The second (ANAO 2001c), upon testing the skilling systems for CSOs, recommended the standardisation of operational learning plans, better monitoring of training needs analyses, and more timely and consistent delivery of technical training.

In the age pension audit, Centrelink refers to Getting it Right as a 'thorough revamping of quality control processes throughout the organisation'. The Getting it Right strategy drives all the initiatives being put in place to raise accuracy in the network.

The Board and Guiding Coalition approved the first rounds of the strategy in 2000. 'Minimum standards' for skill and accuracy went out to the network. Medium term priorities were endorsed for a workload management system, new performance indicators, a new quality assurance regime and tools, and accredited training. Funding was allocated for learning needs analyses, better electronic reference (e-reference) tools, a training database, and a national induction strategy.

Earlier this year, Centrelink signed off with Family and Community Services on a Business Assurance Framework, covering technical correctness, business outcomes, customer service offers and organisational performance. In the 2002 plan for Getting it Right, the prime action areas are policy and product improvement, management support and accountability, systems improvement, and staff support.

Improvements are to be made to Quality on Line, the work checking system, and good progress has been made with EDGE, the decision support system for Family Assistance claims. Customer risk profiling is being introduced, with a major training effort going into the March–September network training program (see figure 6). Links between competency based performance, progression, and pay, already evident in the 1999 Development Agreement, are to be strengthened in the 2002 Agreement.

The key staff support strategies, for Getting it Right in 2002, relate to enhancing the roles of checkers and technical experts, updating and simplifying e-reference, and enhancing technical skills for decision-making and (payment) accuracy. The e-reference device shrinks the number of separate reference materials that have to be consulted in decision-making, organising materials around a relatively small number of 'life events' that make sense to customers rather than a larger number of 'service delivery' products understood by staff.

Together, the Virtual College and the Service Integration Shop set the directions and provide the tools for the managers to upgrade technical skills in the network. Implementation of the national induction program (as above), which includes e-reference skills, has to be finalised. Importantly, it is intended that the model for the development and review of technical training in the network be based on the approach now being used in AWT training.

Figure 6: Centrelink AWT training program in Areas, March to September 2002

Training Delivery Date	Training program	Audience group	Media of delivery	Indicative delivery time
4 March to 19 April 2002	Working Credit Phase 1	All CSC and CC staff, Specialist and Professional staff	CEN	1 hour
2 April to 12 April	Manager and Team Leader overview	CSC and CC Managers and Team Leaders	Face-to-face training	One day
8 April to 31 May	AWT contextual overview training	All staff including Area and NSO	Face-to-face training	4.5 hours
3 May to 31 May	Working Credit Phase 2	All CSC and CC staff, Specialist/Professional staff	CEN	1 hour
	Vulnerable customers who may benefit from the Personal Support Programme	All CSC and CC staff - except Retirements, FIS Officers	CEN	1 hour
	Customers who will benefit from the DEVR measures	All other Specialist and Professional staff	Face-to-face training	One half day
	JSC and self-help training	All CSC and CC staff - except Retirements, Specialist and Professional staff	CEN	2 hours
	Extension to Mutual Obligation	CSC Families and Disabilities staff	Face-to-face training	2 hours
	Risk Profiling	CSC and CC Employment staff	Provision of written information	30 minutes
		All CSC staff - except Families, Specialist and Professional staff	Face-to-face training	One half day
		All CC staff - except Families	Self-paced E-learning Gridbox presentation	1 hour
1 July to 31 July	Community Connections	All CSC and CC staff, Specialist/Professional staff	CEN	1 hour
1 July to 20 September	Personal Advisors	Personal Advisors - new employees	Face-to-face training	30 days
		Personal Advisors - existing employees	Structured on-the-job learning	25 days
			Face-to-face training	20 days
			Structured on-the-job learning	25 days
29 July to 30 August	Servicing Parenting Customers	All CSC staff - except Retirements, JET Officers	Face-to-face training	One half day
		All CC staff - except Retirements	Face-to-face training	3 hours
		All other Specialist and Professional staff	CEN	1 hour
	Services for DSP Customers and activity tested customers with incapacities	CSC staff in Employment, Youth and Disabilities, Disability Officers and Occupational Psychologists	Face-to-face training	One half day
		CC staff in Employment, Youth and Disabilities, all other Specialist/Professional staff	CEN	1 hour
	Working Credit Phase 3	All CSC and CC staff - except Retirements	Face-to-face training	One day
	Shortened Claim Form	CSC staff in Employment, Youth and Families	Face-to-face training	One half day
	Customer Account	All CSC and CC staff	Face-to-face training	One half day
		Specialist and Professional staff	CEN	1 hour
	Literacy & Numeracy Supplement	All CSC and CC staff - except Retirements	Provision of written information	30 minutes
	Delivering services to indigenous new claimants or HSAVA non-active testees and person release customers	CSC staff in Employment, Youth, Specialist and Professional staff	CEN	1 hour
	Servicing Mature Age Customers	All CSC staff, CC staff in Families/Disabilities/Retirements	Face-to-face training	One half day
		CC staff in Employment, Specialist/Professional staff	CEN	1 hour



The network training program for March-September 2002 illustrates the training priorities and pressures. It necessarily includes a substantial component of AWT implementation training, while maintaining essential organisational training on matters such as workforce management tools, Getting it Right, shortened claims and risk profiling, and job redesign. The AWT-related part of the network training program appears as figure 6.

Training on the diverse AWT measures is targeted to various combinations of CSC and Call Centre staff, servicing particular customer and benefit (as at figure 1) groups. Most training elements are up to one day's duration, but the AWT program also comprehends 25-30 days of intensive training for new and existing staff taking up the personal adviser roles and proceeding to certificate III or IV qualifications. The main delivery modes for AWT training are structured on-the-job learning, face-to-face training and Centrelink Education Network.

CEN, the only APS interactive broadcasting facility, broadcasts throughout Australia on satellite television, gathering feedback through its keypad response system. In 2000-01, 675 program hours reached 300 Centrelink sites and 28 000 staff in total. CEN has become a major delivery mode for network training and learning needs analysis. A recent evaluation (C 2002c) is that benefits clearly outweigh costs and that, used appropriately for certain forms of interactive learning, CEN is a valuable facility for effective network training at lower cost.

The People Management Benchmarking Study (HRM Consulting 1999) coordinated by the PSMPC has estimated that Centrelink invested about \$1600 per employee annually on training and development. That figure, as would be expected from the nature of the enterprise, was above the APS norms found in the study.

About two-thirds of the investment was for structured training, which is broadly equivalent to the kinds of network training discussed above. The remainder was for ongoing learning and development, defined as the 'identification of agency and individual requirements for staff development, and the design, delivery or brokering of opportunities to bridge gaps in skills or behavioural requirements'.

Later internal estimates have suggested a slight decline in the per capita investment, but this is confounded by the cost reductions now implied by CEN, and the huge training load now required for AWT. Ongoing participation in ANAO-PSMPC benchmarking studies will serve to clarify and update the estimates.

## Team-individual learning and development

In the CSO audit (ANAO 2001c), the overall conclusion was that Centrelink had plans and structures in place linking business directions and skills, had allocated responsibilities for identifying learning needs, and recognised the need for Team and Individual Learning Plans (TILPs). However, as discussed above, recommendations were made in relation to the systematisation of learning plans and training needs analyses, and Centrelink responded that these were to be accommodated in the new national learning strategy.

Centrelink's national learning strategy for 2002-05 (C 2002d) is directed by the People Management Team, the Service Integration Shop and the Virtual College.

The learning priorities for 2002-03 are aligned with the eight objectives in the business plan. These include the national induction program, the AWT training program, nationally recognised learning for staff, leadership development programs, improving the technical skills for Getting it Right, training and accreditation for work checkers and for workplace-based trainers, and training for Centrelink agents.

Priorities will be reviewed annually, and the success of learning provisions will be measured with reference to increases in client and customer satisfaction, decision-making accuracy, and

productivity. A national learning evaluation model is to be developed to assess the quality and effectiveness of programs and indicate return on learning investment. This should include the comparative evaluation of major external training provisions for accredited and other learning, procured under the applicable Centrelink purchasing guidelines.

The present Development Agreement (C 1999b) includes 10-12 hours structured learning time per month (for Centrelink 2s). The national learning strategy reaffirms principles of access to quality learning, set-aside structured learning time, learning through a range of experiences and mediums, competency based training, and learning plans for all staff that are taken into account in performance assessment.

The Centrelink learning and assessment handbook (C 2001e) explains the 'team and individual' concept underlying the Team and Individual Learning Plan (TILP). Learning and development, as it should be reflected in TILPs, comprehends learning with the team, participating in formal and informal (training and management) programs, exploring the work environment, and the conduct of individual research.

Data on the number of ongoing employees who have completed TILPs and had them reviewed by their team leaders is collected and reported quarterly. The relevant benchmark in Centrelink's Balanced Scorecard of corporate performance, that 80% of employees should have completed and reviewed TILPs, was still being met at March 2002 (C2002 a).

As noted, Centrelink is to implement elements of a Learning Management Service by 2003, to record staff learning and training operations. In the case of accredited and AWT learning, individual staff members will be able to access their learning records (and gaps). There will be storage and reporting capacities for network learning activities, achievements and costs.

At this stage, the Service will not comprehend TILPs, but the medium term plan is to develop a comprehensive online strategy and applications for Centrelink learning and training.

The presence and reach of CEN is improving training and learning needs analyses for TILP purposes. CEN keypads enable 'real time' feedback, which can be analysed to improve following rounds of training. Here, it is acknowledged (figure 6) that CEN only captures some forms of training and therefore training feedback. For Family Assistance purposes, an online form of learning needs analysis is being developed, meaning that CSOs can give considered, 'asynchronous' feedback outside of the immediate context of training sessions.

With CVC, Business Practices and the Service Integration Shop are developing a 'tiered' model of learning needs to improve learning needs analysis, TILPs and training materials. The first tier relates to basic, self-contained knowledge that would be expected of a CSO, the second relates to the assessment of CSO research skills using the reference tools and the third relates to specialist skills and knowledge for customer referral.

While the learning measurement framework needs further development, the persistently high TILP count is significant, as is the consistent majority of CSOs in the Staff Poll who report that they have 'opportunities to learn and develop at work'. Accredited (VET) and other business learning will serve its ultimate purpose, to improve Centrelink as a provider and employer of choice, the more it visibly continues to be valued by the staff it is designed to empower.

Similarly, an extensive measurement framework for Learning Needs-Plans-Management is of limited use if the job framework is sub-optimal. Job redesign has a substantial capacity to give CSOs a more reasonable scope of work and therefore a more manageable load in acquiring and maintaining essential decision-making and processing skills.

About ten CSCs recently tested the concepts of regrouping work and redesigning jobs, the trial winning wide staff and team leader support. Efficiency (backlogs and waits for

appointment) and effectiveness were improved, personalised service was reinforced, and more attainable learning spans and learning needs emerged.

On this basis, a 'functional' or cross-service and customer-focused model for CSO jobs is to be introduced, with some training in the full network-training program to September 2002. The engagement of customers, and the initial determination of their income support and social and economic participation requirements, would be handled by 'start up' and 'participation' advisers, with the 'customer support' (or contact) officer providing maintenance. Logically, and for the purposes of Getting it Right, the functional chain should conclude with a 'senior practitioner' role to ensure the quality of CSO service offers, sound decision-making, and business and service outcomes.

The categories and classifications in the Development Agreement for 2002 will be compatible with the 'functional' jobs model. As the new 'customer support' cadre evolves, career and classification equivalence will be assured across the large groups of CSOs in Area and Call.

## **The PSMPC connections**

As discussed above, the open recruitment provisions of the new PS Act have important implications for Centrelink recruitment policies and practices, especially as the organisation is moving to bulk recruitment. Also, the general approach to workforce planning is of interest to the Commission.

Under the Act, the PSMPC is also charged with supporting continuous improvement in APS people management and APS-wide training and career development opportunities.

The checklist of PSMPC people management services (PSMPC 2002) includes collaboration with agencies on people reforms, promoting the SES Leadership Capability Framework, people benchmarking, building the capability of practitioners, and spreading good practice. In training and development, there are the PSMPC leadership and skill development programs, particularly SES Leadership Programs, Senior Women in Management (SWIM), and General Development Programs.

As noted, Centrelink has participated in the PSMPC benchmarking rounds. These exercises are valuable, especially if they support collaborative learning and, in Centrelink's particular case, afford comparisons with large payment and service agencies as well as APS agencies.

The Commission's coordinator for competency-based training belongs to the Board of Studies for the Virtual College. Centrelink is not a heavy user of the PSMPC leadership and skill programs, although inbound participants from SWIM and other programs are welcomed.

A successful Centrelink initiative (C 2001a) is the Inbound-Outbound development program. In 2000-01, 80 network managers did a one-week Inbound program, and a smaller number of NSO staff took part in Outbound, or SES Outbound, an induction program for new SES staff. The program continues to expand, with Youth Inbound offering younger staff members new development opportunities.

At 2000-01, Centrelink noted (C 2001a) that it was integrating the organisation's approaches to leadership development programs, and checking in-house and externally sourced programs for consistency with the nine identified Centrelink leadership qualities. In the 2002-03 learning priorities, it will also be important for these and other programs to emphasise the contemporary APS values, code of conduct, and leadership framework.

# Concluding remarks

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Reconsidering the terms of reference, these are concluding remarks from the submission.

## Recruitment conclusions

These remarks relate to staffing and recruitment trends (refer to term of reference (a) [i]), prospects for young people (refer (a) [ii], [iii]) and effectiveness of recruitment (refer (a) [iv]).

## Staffing and recruitment trends

Absorbing large efficiency and amalgamation dividends, Centrelink lost staff over its first three years. The challenge was to create a new customer-focused organisation, aspiring to be a provider and employer of choice, during an intense period of policy and program transition in family assistance and community services.

To deliver AWT, the new business plan aspires to customer and community access, better business operations, correctness and accuracy, customer-appropriate services, efficiency and effectiveness, better agency links and governance, and support for employees and agents.

After falling to 22 178 at mid-2000, total Centrelink staffing rose to 24 356 in 2000-01 before dropping slightly in the year to date. Pending the assessment of budget 2002 implications, the only major recruitment planned up to the end of 2002 was 700 AWT staff.

Compared with the APS norms, Centrelink has higher proportions of women (66% vs 51%) and part-timers (16% vs 8%) but a lower classification profile. From 1997-98 to date, two-thirds of all ongoing staff have been Centrelink 2s, the prime service delivery grade.

## Employment regionally and for young people

The majority of Centrelink employment is in decentralised jobs with opportunities for training and career progression. Most CSCs and Call Centres are located outside capital cities, with new Call Centres boosting job opportunities in regions with high unemployment.

Centrelink has a younger and more even-aged profile than the APS as a whole. The proportion of under-25s in the ongoing Centrelink workforce dropped from 7% to 4% over 1997-2000, but was pushed up to 6% in 2000-01 by vigorous Call Centre hiring.

Centrelink has a youth employment strategy, rather than specific recruitment targets for young people or graduates. The under-25s occupy about 19% of all jobs in the labour force, compared with 6% in Centrelink. The age profile of all ongoing Centrelink recruitment (25% under 25) is now much younger than that for all ongoing staff (6% under 25).

The statistics may suggest that the youth job share in Centrelink will continue to rise, but youth prospects vary by work group. Call, and certain Areas, have relatively youthful workforces. In other Areas and regions, with higher local unemployment, a more experienced, older workforce may be recruited to CSCs, and will tend to stay on longer.

In ongoing review of the youth strategy, the improving employment prospects for young people will come up against the opening up of the recruitment process to the merits of experienced workers with desirable life and customer skills for Centrelink business.

## Effective recruitment strategies

Influenced by new business requirements for AWT, and the new APS recruitment and employment conditions, Centrelink is adopting a more strategic approach to recruitment.

The strategy includes standardising the recruitment processes, attracting high quality recruits and matching their skills to the business, improvements in decision-making by delegates and in evaluations, and identifying savings from new recruitment processes.

A panel of recruitment providers has been appointed for AWT recruitment needs, beginning with the recruitment of about 700 participation advisers and other specialists from the middle of 2002. This exercise will signal a more general shift to the strategic use of the panel and the bulk recruitment processes for most of the larger Area-based recruitment needs.

The shift in recruitment should be accompanied by more rigorous evaluation of recruitment processes, and better predictive workforce planning (the workforce management system).

## Training and development conclusions

These remarks relate to accredited training and careers (refer to terms of reference (b) [iv]–[vi]), trends and methods in training and development (refer (b) [i]–[iii]), and efficiency and effectiveness of training (refer (b) [vii]–[ix], also (c) and (d)).

### Accredited training and careers

A successful IT graduate recruitment program for National Support Office has developed since 1999. NSO, with an older age profile than Areas, recruits skilled managers from Areas-CSCs, and middle managers (and graduates) on transfer from other Canberra APS agencies.

Centrelink has become an important APS organisation in the national vocational education and training (VET) system, and is now adopting an accredited induction and training model for all new ongoing recruits. Certificate III or IV training across Areas will be conducted for the first wave of AWT personal advisers this year. The new accreditation model should enhance the Centrelink employment offer and prospects regionally for young people.

Centrelink Virtual College (CVC) is upgrading standards to meet the new ANTA registration and reporting standards, particularly important if Centrelink Learning Centres are to provide more of the off-the-job training. Implementation of the Learning Management Service (LMS) is required to assist in meeting standards and systematising data on VET numbers and profiles. Other qualifications held by staff could also be incorporated in the audits.

The new Centrelink 'careers vision' plots job and qualification pathways in the identified customer services, business services, and I & T work streams, which will also be represented in the new Development Agreement for 2002. The strategy is to position Centrelink as an employer of choice, with valued learning opportunities for marketable skills and qualifications. The national learning strategy and enhanced training and learning provisions in the Development Agreement will reinforce the careers vision. Regional training equity, assisted by the national reach of the Centrelink Education Network, will be enhanced.

### Trends in training and development

The Getting it Right program for correctness and accuracy of decision-making has had a significant impact on the management and content of network training since 2000. With the Business Assurance Framework now in place, the staff support strategies for Getting it Right

2002 will enhance the roles of checkers and experts, update and simplify the e-reference tool, and raise CSO technical skills for decision-making and (payment) accuracy.

The Virtual College and Service Integration Shop set directions for the upgrading of technical skills. Implementation in 2002 of the competency-based national induction program for AWT and all future recruits should lead to a systemic improvement in technical skills and standards. Also, it is intended that the ongoing model for the development and review of technical training in the network be based on the approach being used in AWT training.

The current AWT training program illustrates the balancing required between training for new government initiatives and equally essential ongoing organisational and skill training. Training, including certificate-level training for AWT inductees, is delivered through structured on and off-the-job learning and via Centrelink Education Network (CEN).

Recent estimates put the annual training and development expenditure at \$1600 a head, two-thirds for structured (network) training and the remainder for ongoing learning and development. Through participation in PSMPC or other benchmarking exercises, and through the LMS and its successor, there is the potential to improve the measurement and monitoring of the training and development effort.

## Efficiency and effectiveness in team and individual learning

The learning priorities for 2002–03 are aligned with the business plan. These include the new induction program, AWT training, nationally recognised learning, leadership development programs (mainly in-house, but with reference to PSMPC standards), improving the technical skills for Getting it Right, training and accreditation for work checkers and workplace-based trainers, and training for Centrelink agents.

The success of learning provisions will be measured with reference to increases in productivity, accuracy and customer satisfaction. A learning evaluation model is critical, to improve the direct assessment of training effectiveness and return on investment.

A 'team and individual' philosophy underlies the Centrelink Team and Individual Learning Plan. Over 80% of staff continue to have completed and reviewed TILPs. CEN feedback is improving the learning needs analyses underpinning TILPs. Staff data, when entered into the LMS, will systematise learning needs analysis.

Training consistency and quality is being improved by streaming new and revised technical training through the new Service Integration Shop. With Business Practices, Service Shop is developing a 'tiered' model of learning needs (from basic knowledge, up to reference skills and specialist skills) to refine learning needs analysis, TILPs and training materials.

Centrelink's persistently high (over 80% of staff) TILP count is significant, as is the consistent majority of CSOs reporting 'opportunities to learn and develop at work'. In refining the learning measurement framework, the ultimate purpose will be to ensure that staff continue to value accredited (VET) and other business-oriented learning, hence improving Centrelink's position as a provider and employer of choice.

Finally, job redesign ought to give CSOs a more reasonable scope of work and a more manageable task in maintaining essential decision-making skills. Following the successful CSC trial, a 'functional' jobs model is to be adopted in the CSC network, whereby customer engagement and determination of participation requirements will be handled mainly by 'start up' and 'participation' advisers, who then hand over to the 'customer support officer'. A 'senior practitioner' is on hand for expert advice to the frontline staff. The 2002 Development Agreement will be compatible with the functional jobs model.

# Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AFFA	Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australia
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
APS	Australian Public Service
ASN	average staffing number(s)
ATO	Australian Tax Office
AWT	Australians Working Together
C	Centrelink
CC	Call Centre
CEN	Centrelink Education Network
CES	Commonwealth Employment Service
CSC	Customer Service Centre
CSO	Customer Service Officer
CVC	Centrelink Virtual College
DEETYA	Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
DETYA	Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
DEWR	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
DEWRSB	Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business
DSP	Disability Support Pension
DSS	Department of Social Security
FaCS	(Department of) Family and Community Services
FIS	Financial Information Services
hr(m)	human resources (management)
I (&) T	information (and) technology
JSCI	Job Seeker Classification Instrument
LMS	Learning Management Service (System)
NA	new apprenticeship
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NSA	Newstart Allowance
NSO	National Support Office
PS	Public Service
PSMPC	Public Service and Merit Protection Commission
RTO	registered training organisation
SES	Senior Executive Service
SWIM	Senior Women in Management
TAFE	technical and further education
TILP	Team and Individual Learning Plan
VET	vocational education and training
YA	Youth Allowance

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