NCVER

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Publisher's note

Additional information relating to this research is available in *The role of vocational education and training in welfare to work—Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1986.html>.

To find other material of interest, search VOCED (the UNESCO/NCVER international database <http://www.voced.edu.au>) using the following keywords: disabled person; parent; unemployed; unemployment; welfare.

About the research

NCVER

The role of vocational education and training in welfare to work
by John Guenther, Ian Falk and Allan Arnott

The Welfare to Work initiative aims to move people from income support to paid work. While the primary emphasis of this policy has been on getting people into jobs, many of those targeted need to engage in training in order to get sustainable employment; this poses a new challenge to vocational education and training (VET) providers.

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) commissioned two studies to investigate the role of VET in welfare to work: one by Kate Barnett and John Spoehr called *Complex not simple: The vocational education and training pathway from welfare to work*, which can be found at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications.1987.html> and this report, *The role of vocational education and training in welfare to work* by John Guenther and colleagues. This report is based on 62 interviews with welfare clients, training providers, government agencies and enterprises, and will be of most interest to those who are directly dealing with the clients of the Welfare to Work programs.

The report focuses on what makes training programs effective for the target groups in the transition to employment and points out that there are many challenges to be faced—notably the personal circumstances of the clients and the constraints associated with contractual obligations and funding arrangements.

Key messages

Effective transitional programs must address the needs of the specific client groups. They must:

- develop employability skills

- involve considerable pastoral care from the training providers

- provide on-the-job experience and preferably a career pathway

- be flexible and allow for the personal constraints of the clients, for example, transport, childcare and illness.

Tom Karmel
Managing Director, NCVER

Informing policy and practice in Australia's training system …

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Acknowledgements

This project was complex and diverse, and employed a range of experienced researchers from around the nation. Their roles in conducting six case studies are acknowledged below. Details of the case studies are provided in the accompanying support document available at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1986.html>.

✧ Jo Balatti (James Cook University): Providers' support for mature aged trainees

✧ Stephen Black (Meadowbank TAFE): Mature aged trainees preparing for aged care work

✧ Karen Borgelt (Allsorts Consulting and Training): Parents' experiences of a mutual obligation program

✧ Jane Gunn (Protea Training): Comparing services that support people with disabilities moving from welfare to work

✧ Anthony Tyrrel (Performance First): Policy perspectives

✧ John Churchill (Performance First): How do enterprise registered training organisations respond?

Executive summary

Development of Welfare to Work in Australia

In the 2005–06 federal budget the Welfare to Work policy was implemented and took effect from 1 July 2006. This initiative is driven by a desire to reduce dependency on income support payments by moving those who are considered able, or potentially able, into paid employment. Parents of children over the age of six receiving the Parenting Payment, long-term unemployed people, mature-age people on the Newstart Allowance and people receiving the Disability Support Pension are the groups targeted by this policy.

The Welfare to Work initiative is responding to: an ageing population and the economic impact of this, particularly in relation to skills and employment; a perception that a significant number of very long-term unemployed people have the capacity to work; steep increases over the long term in the number of Parenting Payment and Disability Support Pension recipients; and significant and sustained skills shortages in some occupations.

The initiative focuses on 'helping people move into work' and includes a mix of increased obligations and compliance tests, together with a range of additional services to assist those making the transition from welfare to work. While the Welfare to Work initiative is described as a 'work first' approach—that is, the priority is getting people into work rather than preparing them for work—training is acknowledged as having a role to play in assisting some people to get ready for work.

But where does training really fit into this policy initiative? How ready and able is the vocational education and training (VET) sector to respond to the growing numbers of people who are now required to look for work, many of whom have low skill levels and may be disadvantaged in the labour market for a number of reasons. What are the barriers to people engaging in training as they move from welfare to work? What are providers already doing in response to these issues? This research attempts to answer these questions and offers some guidance for VET stakeholders—training providers, policy-makers, trainees and employment service providers—about these issues.

Methodology and research aims

This research uses a mixed methods approach, combining case study techniques, numerical data and empirical observations. The researchers have compiled a 'statistical profile' of key training and employment indicators for Welfare to Work priority groups. These have been used to inform an analysis of qualitative data derived from a series of semi-structured interviews with clients, training providers, government agencies and enterprises—each with an interest in Welfare to Work and training—across six sites in South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria. A total of 62 interviews were conducted. The research was undertaken in the early months of the implementation of the Welfare to Work initiative, between June 2006 and February 2007.

Summary of findings

Welfare to work profiles

A set of profiles was developed to show employment, qualifications and VET participation rates for each of the Welfare to Work groups in every Australian state and territory. The profiles show that *people with disabilities* are relatively under-represented for all indicators shown. That is, their participation in the labour force, their participation in vocational education and training and their qualification levels are all lower than might be expected in the general population. The profiles show that *mature-aged* people are well represented in terms of vocational qualifications. However, the profiles do not show us how relevant or up to date their qualifications are, and it is difficult to say whether more training is a priority for this group. In terms of VET, *lone parents* are well represented among students. The proportion of lone parents with VET qualifications is high, but analysis shows that this group is more likely to achieve certificate I and II qualifications (and also less likely to achieve bachelor qualifications) than the population as a whole.

Intervention cases

Six intervention cases highlight different aspects of training in Welfare to Work contexts from a variety of stakeholder perspectives.

Case 1: Mature-aged trainees in a TAFE course
This case identifies a range of prerequisite needs for a particular group of clients. These needs are described in terms of the importance of a supportive learning environment, flexible training provision, an interactive system of teaching and learning, and training that leads directly to a job.

Case 2: Parents in a Work for the Dole program
This case reports on the challenges faced by mutual obligation service providers and the tensions in supporting students to achieve learning outcomes, while at the same time meeting the sometimes competing requirements of the funding body.

Case 3: Perceptions of two disability support services
This case contrasts two different approaches taken by providers, with both approaches being described as having merit. The first focuses on the needs of clients in a case-managed process. The second relies on achieving outcomes within the 'work first' framework set out for Job Network members.

Case 4: Perspectives of training providers working with mature-aged clients
This case highlights the high degree of diversity that exists within the client group and the importance of ensuring that training responds to the group's multiple needs.

Case 5: How enterprise registered training organisations respond
This case explores how enterprise registered training organisations can facilitate positive outcomes for clients who are disadvantaged in terms of employment opportunities. It highlights a model that shows signs of success outside the Job Network system.

Case 6: Policy perspectives
This case reports the views of Australian Government department heads to articulate the overarching policy expectations held of the VET sector in the context of the Welfare to Work strategy. The case highlights the significance of a 'work first' agenda as a key element of the strategy.

What works

The research reveals that training can be an effective tool in the pathway from welfare dependency to employment. Effective transitional training programs were those that:

✧ support the development of a range of employability skills

◇ include the active support of the provider, for example, through follow-up and one-to-one attention

◇ provide on-the-job experience and build career pathways

◇ are flexible, not only in terms of training provision, but also take into account needs of children, adapting to illnesses and disabilities, and being mindful of transport constraints.

Issues for Welfare to Work stakeholders

In the context of Welfare to Work, providers and clients face a number of challenges before they can effectively engage in learning that supports skills for the workforce. For clients, barriers associated with transport, child care, health, the competing pressures of the needs of children, the demands of Centrelink and, sometimes, feelings of inadequacy all contribute to a diminished desire to undertake training. For service providers (including Job Network members, Work for the Dole programs and training providers), barriers such as contractual obligations, 'red tape', participant behaviour and a struggle to find adequate and appropriate resources contribute to difficulties providing an environment where skills for vulnerable labour market entrants can be delivered.

Implications and conclusions

Several changes need to occur at a variety of levels to raise the profile of training in the Welfare to Work initiative. First, key performance indicators and star ratings—a way of rating the performance of employment service providers—for Job Network members and Work for the Dole providers must change to reflect the importance of skills acquisition among the Welfare to Work target groups. Second, employers need additional incentives to encourage them to provide a combination of formal and non-formal training to vulnerable new labour market entrants. Third, employment-disadvantaged people require a lot more intensive support to encourage them to overcome the multiple barriers they face when looking for work. A case management approach that deliberately includes skills development should be incorporated. This will require additional resources. However, the costs involved are potentially offset because the likelihood that these people will remain unemployed or underemployed for extended periods of time is reduced. Fourth, in order to meet the anticipated needs of the growing number of Welfare to Work labour market entrants, the VET sector needs a coordinated response to assess the likely skills needs and training demand for this group. Finally, the VET sector needs to work collaboratively with other specialist training providers to provide a range of training options tailored for the particular needs of employment-disadvantaged groups.

Context

Introduction

In 2005 the Australian Government introduced the Welfare to Work reform program into the 2005–06 budget. This initiative was designed to increase workforce participation and reduce welfare dependency and was a key plank of the previous federal government's labour market reform (Costello 2006). The main features of the reform include the obligation of parents (who receive a welfare payment) of children aged 6–15 years to seek part-time work, and increased services for those seeking work. People with disabilities (receiving Disability Support Pensions) who are assessed as being capable of working 15–29 hours per week are obliged to seek work. Newstart recipients over 50 years old are obliged to seek full-time work—the same as younger recipients. As part of the additional services provided through the program, more vocational education and training (VET) places are available and the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program has been expanded. The reform recognises that, while work is a desired outcome, 'some people will require access to education or training before being able to seek a job' (Commonwealth of Australia 2005, p.9). The Australian Government's Welfare to Work overview shows that the bulk of new places are in the areas of prevocational assistance and employment preparation. The underpinning rationale for the Welfare to Work initiative is described in terms of the need to increase workforce participation in order to maintain Australia's standard of living. The assertions are based in part on the *Intergenerational report* (Commonwealth of Australia 2002), which assessed the impacts of increasing labour force participation on budget spending into the future.

Training is often seen as an integral part of welfare-to-work strategies (Commonwealth of Australia 2005; OECD 2006c). This research aims to provide a national picture of VET's potential role in the Australian Government's Welfare to Work reforms. The picture is made up of three key components. First, the research reviews Australian and international literature on issues faced by the three client groups (parents, mature-aged people and people with a disability—all of whom are receiving a welfare benefit) and other key stakeholders (employment service providers, employers and training providers). Second, the research produces a set of VET welfare-to-work profiles highlighting the existing training data, service provision and demographic context of the client groups for each Australian jurisdiction. Third, the research produces a set of six 'intervention cases' that may point to 'what works' in service delivery and training provision, with an equal emphasis on providers and clients. The cases include one in which there is a policy focus.

Literature review

The literature review presented in this report briefly examines the development of a welfare-to-work initiative in Australia and considers the rationale for training in this policy context. The impact of the initiative on the targeted priority groups is explored and the question is posed: are training providers equipped for the demands of Welfare to Work trainees? Additional analysis of the literature is provided in the support document.

Rationale for Welfare to Work in Australia

A number of contextual factors have led to the current policies for the Australian Government's Welfare to Work initiatives. These include:

✧ an ageing population and the economic impact of this, particularly in relation to skills and employment. The 2002 *Intergenerational report* (Commonwealth of Australia 2002) suggested that, as a result, higher labour force participation was required

✧ a perception that a significant number of very long-term unemployed people have the capacity to work (Commonwealth of Australia 2005, p.6)

✧ steep increases over the long term in the number of Parenting Payment and Disability Support Pension recipients (Commonwealth of Australia 2005). The Australian Government argues that these increases are unsustainable

✧ significant and sustained skills shortages in some occupations (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2004).

Welfare to Work programs are designed to address skills gaps and shortages in a labour market where labour demand is high. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2006c, p.39), reporting on the results of a five-country study into welfare-to-work initiatives suggests:

> Policies concerned with workforce development and skills upgrading initiatives, while sitting within the adult learning agenda, address a narrower, more modest objective. That objective is to improve the skills, competencies and qualifications of low-qualified incumbent workers, and thereby respond to 'skills shortages' and 'skills gaps' experienced in local labour markets and within organisations.

The imperative for new welfare-to-work initiatives in Australia is no different. The need for training in this context also comes at a time when skill levels are arguably higher than they have ever been, rather than at a time when educational standards have been considered 'poor'. The reasons for this are multiple. Firstly, not all sectors of the Australian community are sharing in the knowledge economy (Cumming 1997; Falk & Guenther 2002; Statistics Canada & OECD 2005). Secondly, there is a strong argument that some sectors of the community are inequitably under-represented in education and training participation data (Baldwin 2003; Boughton & Durnan 2004; Golding & Pattison 2004). Beyond these two reasons, a third reason provides perhaps the greatest impetus: national skills shortages are forcing industries to look beyond the 'easy to access' labour markets to the more difficult and as yet untapped markets, where considerable investment in training and skill development is required (Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Education References Committee 2003).

Training as a vehicle for welfare to work

Training has for a long time been seen to be a 'way in' for people to access jobs. It is widely acknowledged that improved employment outcomes are achieved by those who engage in further education and training, and particularly for those who gain qualifications. For example, Robinson (2001) reports increased retention and lower levels of unemployment for those who complete traineeships and apprenticeships. It is generally accepted that literacy and numeracy levels are directly associated with employment and economic wellbeing outcomes (ABS 1997; Falk & Guenther 2002; OECD 2004). The employment benefits of adults engaging with learning are also widely reported in the literature (Doyle & Kerr 2000; Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia 2001; OECD 2001, 2003a; NCVER 2006a). Similarly Birch et al. (2003) and Ryan (2002) assert that the financial returns for engagement in adult learning generally, and vocational qualifications more specifically, are significant and measurable.

Despite the above discussion about the need for training, there is little emphasis on this in the Australian Government's Welfare to Work strategy. This is reflected in the budget, where less than 10% of the $3.6 billion budget for the program is dedicated to training. It also appears that the strategy does not encourage Job Network, training providers and job seekers to engage in pre-employment learning activities beyond basic occupational health and safety training, because key performance indicators (KPIs) and associated 'star ratings' (a rating system for comparing the effectiveness of Job Network members in achieving employment outcomes) do not specifically mention training at all (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2006b, 2007). However, many of these pre-employment learning activities prepare people for work by providing a range of employability and life skills that are important for obtaining employment (for example, Falk & Balatti 2003; Schuller, Bynner & Feinstein 2004).

Watts (2006, p.7) argues that:

> Welfare-to-work establishes a way of churning low-skill labour in and out of that part of the labour market characterised by low pay, low skill and precarious employment, a sector now left even less regulated or protected than ever before.

Having said this, a separate Australian Government initiative—*Skills for the future* (Prime Minister of Australia 2006)—potentially offers some Welfare to Work groups the opportunity to access certificate II or Year 12 equivalent qualifications.

While it is still 'early days' for the Welfare to Work program in Australia, a number of questions remain unanswered about the efficacy of the program in terms of: meeting the skill needs of clients, employers and industry more generally; meeting the challenges of building a more skilled labour force into the future; and managing the impact of a potential downturn in the Australian economy and the labour market.

Welfare to Work priority groups

Welfare to Work in Australia specifically targets four 'priority groups' (Commonwealth of Australia 2005)

✧ parents returning to work

✧ people with disabilities

✧ mature-aged people

✧ the very long-term unemployed (those unemployed more than 24 months).

Each group has distinct disadvantages in terms of access to the labour market and there are subgroups within the defined demographics that are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed for a long period of time. The focus of this research is limited to the first three of these groups.

Parents returning to work

In this research parents returning to work are defined as parents (and carers of children) who have previously worked and because of child care responsibilities have been out of the workforce for two years or more. This group, according to the Australian Council of Social Service (2003), is predominantly women, who face a unique set of barriers to full-time employment (for example, child care). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2005d), the ratio of women to men who are underemployed is about three to two. The definition does not exclude men and it does not exclude partnered parents, but the literature suggests that lone parents are more likely to have greater difficulty accessing employment than others (ABS 2006a). This may have as much to do with associated education levels as it has with status as single parents (Headey, Warren & Harding 2006), but it is not a phenomenon that is unique to Australia (OECD 2003b).

Mature-aged people

In this research mature-aged people are defined as: people aged 45 and over currently looking for work. Conceptions of the cut-off age for 'mature-aged' differ. Costello, for example, argues for 55 (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2005). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2006a) uses 50 as the cut-off and the Australian Government also uses this cut-off (Centrelink 2006a; Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2006a). However, because of the practicalities associated with statistics—particularly those published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics—we adopt 45 as the cut-off age (ABS 2005c; Hudson 2006b).

People with disabilities

For the purpose of this research we define people with disabilities as people unemployed who have a disability, medical condition or addiction. There is little argument in the literature about what constitutes disability. Many Australian agencies (ABS 2004; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2006) have adopted the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) definition, which describes 'disability' as an umbrella term for any or all of these components: impairment, activity limitation and participation restriction, as influenced by environmental factors (World Health Organisation 2002). Australians are also directed in their interpretation of 'disability' by the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Commonwealth of Australia 2006), which in some ways could be considered to be a broader definition, based on loss of function, disease, illness or disorders or the potential for the above.

Are training providers equipped for the different demands of Welfare to Work trainees?

Even if VET is shown to be a valuable tool for facilitating a transition from welfare to work, questions remain about the VET sector's capacity to cope with the demands of trainees who may be offered training. Typically Welfare to Work clients will place greater demands on trainers for a number of reasons, including their physical and mental disabilities; low education levels; low motivation; and difficulties associated with juggling care and other responsibilities with training. These demands are recognised in the recent *TAFE futures* report (Kell 2006). One submission to the report suggested that: 'the demand for support services, such as counselling, was seen as "going through the roof" with the advent of the welfare to work reforms commencing in July 2006' (p.25). The report concluded that there was a need for restoration of 'specialist equity programs' in response to this new demand (p.36). The recent TAFE Directors Australia report *Investing in productivity* (TAFE Directors Australia 2007), while recognising the imperative for training to 'activate skills development' and engage with those outside the workforce, fails to identify any specific strategies to address the skills needs of Welfare to Work target groups—the subject of this research. This important omission is perhaps an indication that Australia's largest VET provider (reportedly with 86% of all VET enrolments) is not ready for these demands. The focus of upskilling in the literature (for example, OECD 2005; Australian Industry Group & Allen Consulting Group 2006; Kell 2006; OECD 2006c), then, is on workforce development, not on developing the skills of those outside the labour market.

The readiness of private registered training organisations as training providers for Welfare to Work clients is also unclear. Given that training is at the periphery of emphasis in Welfare to Work, it is unlikely that many private registered training organisations will engage in training of Welfare to Work clients. An exception to this may be Job Network organisations with training arms. In many locations Mission Australia, for example, acts as a Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) provider, a Job Network member and a Work for the Dole provider and is therefore ideally placed to support Welfare to Work clients. Internationally, there are precedents for linkages between social partners, government and training providers, which could be used as models for engagement of employment-disadvantaged groups in meaningful employment-preparation programs (OECD 2005). Australia does not feature in these international examples.

Methodology

This research uses a 'mixed methods' (Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998, 2003) approach, combining case study techniques (Yin 2003a, 2003b), numerical data accessed from reliable Australian sources (ABS and NCVER) and empirical observations. The researchers have compiled a 'statistical profile', which has been used to inform analysis of qualitative data derived from a series of semi-structured interviews with Welfare to Work clients, training providers, government agencies and enterprises— each with an interest in Welfare to Work and training—across six sites in South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria. The profile summarises employment and training data for each of the three Welfare to Work groups: parents returning to work; mature-aged people; and people with a disability. The empirical data are brought together in six 'intervention cases'—case studies of Welfare to Work strategies in each geographical context. Data were collected from 84 respondents in 62 interviews at the six study sites. Transcribed interview data were analysed using NVivo 7™ qualitative research software.

The method builds on previous research conducted by Charles Darwin University on pathways to employment and training for employment-disadvantaged groups in the Northern Territory (Northern Territory Council of Social Service 2004).

The research design answers seven research questions:

✧ What are the demographic profiles of the target groups for the research (following the models established in Northern Territory Council of Social Service 2004, pp.7–15)?

✧ What are the issues faced by parents, older people and those with a disability in making a successful transition into employment?

✧ What do we know about what makes training effective for these groups?

✧ What is the existing state of training provision for people in receipt of welfare in Australia? Are there any examples of where this is working well?

✧ What are the relevant findings from international research regarding welfare-to-work education and training programs?

✧ What do VET providers require to ensure they deliver the most effective training possible for these specific groups of people? Are some providers better placed than others to respond to these needs?

✧ How can VET programs be designed to dovetail well with non-VET programs to give a complete 'package' of assistance to the affected groups?

The research was conducted from June 2006 through to February 2007.

Findings

The findings presented in this section reflect the development of the 'welfare to work profiles' and the empirical evidence from the six intervention cases.

Welfare to Work profiles

Table 1 summarises the relative position, in terms of training and employment, for Welfare to Work priority groups (people with disabilities, mature-aged people and lone parents), along with comparison groups—partnered parents (who are not strictly excluded from Welfare to Work programs) and the general population.

Table 1   Summary of statistics for Welfare to Work groups and comparison groups (various sources) for Australia*

Australia	People with a disability	Mature-aged people	Partnered parents	Lone parents	General population
Total 15–64 population '000	**2 339[1,2]**	**5 129[4]**	**3 574[4]**	**474[4]**	**13 850[4]**
% of total 15–64 population	19.2[1,2]	37.0[4]	25.8[4]	3.4[4]	100.0
% of group participating in labour force	53.2[1,2]	72.6[4]	81.0[4]	62.4[4]	65.5[1]
% of group unemployed	8.6[1,2]	3.2[4]	2.6[4]	12.9[4]	4.8[4]
% of all VET students who are members of this group	5.9[3]	19.0[3]	24.4[5]	7.5[5]	100.0
% of group with VET qualifications	11.8[1,2]	17.6[5]	18.2[5]	17.4[5]	15.9[6]

Note: * More detailed data for each Australian state and territory are shown in the support document.
Sources: 1. ABS (2004); 2. ABS (2006c); 3. NCVER (2006b); 4. ABS (2006d); 5. ABS (2006b); 6. ABS (2005a).

Drawing on this table it is evident that *people with disabilities* are relatively under-represented in terms of employment, training participation and qualifications. That is, their participation in the labour force, their participation in vocational training and their qualification levels are all lower than might be expected compared with the general population.

The employment and training picture for *mature-aged people* is relatively strong compared with the other Welfare to Work priority groups. The profiles show that *mature-aged* people are well represented in terms of vocational qualifications. However, the profiles do not show us how relevant or up to date their qualifications are, and it is difficult to say whether more training is a priority for this group. There is a perception among mature-aged unemployed people that the reason they cannot find work is because of their age (ABS 2005b) and there may be a reluctance on the part of some employers to take full advantage of the depth of knowledge and experience offered by more mature people (Hudson 2006a). The value of training for this group as a vehicle for transition from welfare to work is uncertain (OECD 2006b).

In terms of VET, *lone parents* are well represented among students, with 7.5% of the total student cohort being made up of lone parents. VET qualification rates among this group are slightly higher compared with the general population. The table does not, however, show the levels of qualifications being achieved. A more detailed analysis of the Survey of Education and Work (ABS

2006b) shows that lone parents are more likely to achieve certificate I and II qualifications (and also less likely to achieve bachelor qualifications) than the population as a whole. Lone parents are also highly disadvantaged in terms of employment and labour force participation. Partnered parents, on the other hand, are more likely than the general population to be engaged in employment and have vocational qualifications. This demonstrates that there are some differences in the qualifications held and possible training needs between these two groups, although the Welfare to Work policy does not distinguish between them.

Six intervention cases

A major part of this research project involved a qualitative study involving a series of illustrative 'intervention cases'. The six cases presented in the sections below offer examples of training interventions from the perspectives of clients, service providers, government agencies and training providers. Names used throughout have been changed to protect the identity of respondents. The support document contains more detailed versions of these case studies.

Case 1: Mature-aged trainees preparing for aged care work

This case study is considered significant within the umbrella of Welfare to Work initiative due to the current demand for and supply of labour in the field of nursing generally and aged care work in particular. Nursing generally suffers from acute staffing shortages in Australia (Jackson & Daly 2004) and indeed globally (Oulton 2006), but there are many unemployed mature-aged people who may be particularly suited for training for nursing, and especially in aged care. The situation in aged care nursing will become ever more acute with the ageing of the Australian population, with a projected 21% increase in the over-65 population in the next 30 years (Booth et al. 2005, p.9).

'Assistants in nursing'—also known as personal carers—are not qualified nurses, but they are nevertheless considered to be part of the 'nursing family' (Australian Nursing Federation 2005, p.3). Many later train for the Certificate IV in Enrolled Nursing and some later undertake a degree to qualify as registered nurses. Assistants in nursing largely work in the aged care sector, mainly in nursing homes, where staff shortages are particularly acute due in part to the low status and image of aged care nursing (Pearson & Nay 2001). Richardson and Martin (2004, p.31) indicate there is a 24% turnover of aged care workers each year, and a more recent survey indicates these workers are twice as likely as other employed women to be dissatisfied with their jobs (Healy & Moskos 2005, p.iv).

The site for this case study is a large technical and further education (TAFE) college located in the Sydney metropolitan area. The Certificate III in Aged Care Work is regularly conducted at this college, which is conveniently located near a major hospital. This particular course was promoted in the local media to attract mature-aged women, and the promotion stated that '12 government-funded places are available free of charge'. This included enrolment fees and approximately $100 of materials. The funding source was the 2006 New South Wales Government's 'Partnering—Training for Older Workers' program. It was advertised as a 'career development opportunity for aged care workers', although in fact only one of the students interviewed in this study actually worked in the aged care sector; all the rest were unemployed or not working at the time (one was recuperating from an operation).

The course was for one semester (18 weeks), commencing mid-July 2006. Sessions were conducted for three days each week, 9.00 am to 3.00 pm. In practice, for many students it was four days a week as there was an optional 'flexible' study day, which many students felt they needed to attend. The certificate III course is nationally accredited to comply with the requirements of the aged care sector.

The experiences of two students illustrate the experiences of some mature-aged people in this case. Julie, in her early 50s, recently found herself unemployed for six months after a successful work history in mainly secretarial and receptionist work. Her early schooling had been fractured badly and she mentioned going to a total of 26 schools. This was the first formal course she had

undertaken since her school days. On her first day in the course, she broke down in tears and spoke with the class teacher: 'I was very emotional, lots of crying … I didn't know if I was able to cope with all the study … I wanted her to know because, in a sense I was saying … be a mentor, please help me.' She explained further: 'I always felt I was lacking compared to everyone else … these niggly doubts in me that everyone was a bit better.' By midway through the course, however, her personal transformation had been remarkable. She was getting distinctions in her assignments and claimed: 'I do feel on a level playing field now … I really feel mature, this whole course has opened me up as a person.' Her marks and her demeanour were so positive that privately one of the teachers on the course had offered her a prized traineeship in enrolled nursing. Julie now felt extraordinarily confident in her abilities, 'I honestly feel I could go on and do anything, I really do … well, I could even do medicine …' It was clear in the course that Julie was not a passive learner, she enjoyed the active engagement with teachers and students and even went as far as to officially complain when one teacher appeared patronising and condescending to students. Although interviewed midway through the course, there could be little doubt that Julie would pass highly, become an assistant in nursing and then pursue whatever further studies she wished to undertake. One dampener, however, was that her financial position was so poor she was unable to take up the enrolled nurse traineeship because it was Sydney-based for a year and rents were too high.

Caroline, in her late 40s, and a single mother with a 10-year-old son, was originally trained as a photographer, but in recent years she had only intermittent and short-term employment and no work for the past eight months. Initially she too felt inadequate in the course and explained that mature-aged students were 'a bit slower than normal'. She said she needed to shuffle some things out of her brain so she could fit more information in, 'you've really got to push it in there'. At the midway point of the course she was working hard and coping well. Like Julie above, her confidence improved greatly: 'Oh, it's boosted my confidence … got me out of the house … given me something new, a new direction, socialising with people … so it's a real boost to my confidence, absolutely.' What Caroline really enjoyed was studying with a mix of other students, young and old, Australian and non-English speaking background to the extent that she commented, 'we've become a little family'. She said of the mature-aged group generally: 'we know what we want, been through it' and that in class she personally got frustrated easily and was prepared to make her views known. The real problems for Caroline related to finance and child care. She lived one hour's drive from the college, and petrol and parking costs were such that coming in for that extra 'flexible' day was a financial squeeze. In addition, she also had after-school child care costs plus her regular living expenses. She worried that even when she qualified as an assistant in nursing she would have problems with shift times and low pay.

The two students, Julie and Caroline, together with comments from the other eight students in the course, demonstrate a number of needs that have to be met for successful training outcomes in this course. For a start, these courses need to be accredited, practice-based and lead directly to jobs. These students could see a direct link between the studies they were undertaking and jobs in aged care work at the end of the course. An emotionally supportive learning environment is also essential. The two students featured here and other students had fears and anxieties relating to poor self-esteem and confidence in a formal learning environment. Many of them hadn't experienced this type of learning since they were at school. One teacher said, 'I think they need a lot more nurturing.' At the very least these students required understanding and additional support from teachers in the early stages of the course until they became confident in their abilities. Very important also is the bonding between students, the 'we' feeling ('a little family') that enables them to feel they are valued members of the group. Almost without exception, these mature-aged women stated they valued being in a class with younger and culturally and linguistically diverse students. As one student said, 'It's not a competition, most of the group are pretty supportive of each other.' Importantly, not one of the mature-aged women wanted to be taught in a 'mature-aged-only' class. Most said it would be boring. In addition to being flexible to accommodate the busy 'other' lives of mature-aged students, there needs to be an interactive pedagogy. These students were not prepared to be passive learners in a didactic classroom. They had opinions, a voice to be heard, based on their experiences, and they wanted to engage in genuine dialogue with teachers and students. For

some students, additional support services are needed. Some, especially those from non-English speaking backgrounds, required English language support, others required literacy and numeracy assistance. And finally, there are financial needs to be addressed. Many of these students would not have been able to afford course fees, had they been charged, and they were struggling with petrol, parking, child care and living expenses.

Case 2: Parents' experiences of a mutual obligation program

One of the intervention cases examined the perceptions of parents returning to work. The case reports on the findings from two providers of Work For the Dole programs under the mutual obligation provisions of the Welfare to Work program introduced in July 2006 (Centrelink 2006b). While Work for the Dole does not offer accredited training as part of the program, it does offer training credits (worth up to $800 for accredited training for those who complete the program and these may take from 310 to 1100 hours, depending on age and unemployment status) to be earned (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2006c). This provides support to those who need or wish to use training as a tool to move from welfare into work.

Twelve parent participants and two program managers were interviewed for this case study. Each of the parents interviewed was extremely stressed about their mandatory entry into Work for the Dole programs. Up until July 2006 participation had been voluntary. Currently, these parents receive additional benefits from the Australian Government which they will lose if forced to take up paid employment. Those who have a low level of education feel that they will be forced into menial work at less pay than they receive through their current benefits and fear the high cost of child care which they will rely on if they find paid work. Those interviewed considered that threats of cutting off their payments if they did not conform to the Work for the Dole rules compounded their problems rather than motivated them to achieve.

A number of parents stated that they were not receiving the real help that they believed they needed to be able to succeed. They felt ill-equipped mentally or educationally to cope in the workplace. Many did not own computers and had few information technology skills. Others have not been able to keep up with technology and felt that they would be humiliated if they were put in a work situation where they had to use a computer.

Several mothers stated that it was not their choice to become single parents or to have to rely on Parenting Payments. They said that they went into motherhood expecting to be able to responsibly raise their children and now are experiencing a great sense of fear, guilt and, in some cases, depression about potentially putting their children at risk (for example, because of lack of direct parental supervision for extended periods of time) in order to find paid work or meet their Centrelink obligations.

While these issues may not seem to directly relate to training, they cause such stress and concern to participants and, in particular, to parents, that all of the interviewees felt that even if training were widely available to them, they would not be able to concentrate while these worries or the need to handle the manifestations of these worries existed. The providers also commented on increasing domestic violence cases, drug- and alcohol-related issues and Work for the Dole participants involved in crime or the effects of crime. They speculated whether such issues would hinder effective adult learning if training were available through the Work for the Dole program. One parent stated, 'Those who are able to get work would get work eventually, with or without the program. The help that is most needed is for the long-term unemployed, to help them build their self-esteem and to make them feel included so that they feel that they have a valuable contribution to make and will want to work. Then and only then will the program work for those people.'

It is clear that the Work for the Dole program is not a training program. It is a mutual obligation program where participants are required to work a predetermined number of hours in exchange for their Centrelink payments. Work for the Dole providers are expected to achieve key performance indicators and targeted numbers of participation outcomes—which do not include training

outcomes. They reported that they do not have the time, staff, money or freedom within their contracts to ensure that training is delivered or training outcomes are achieved. They commented that training is supposed to be delivered by the Job Network providers. Because of numerous problems, including the lack of skills in Job Network providers, meaningful training is rare.

While Work for the Dole providers in this case recognised the importance of training for mutual obligation clients, they were effectively restricted from being able to provide the required training because of contractual requirements that emphasised program participation or employment outcomes to the exclusion of learning outcomes. Parents themselves, because of their fears and limited financial capacity, were unable to access needed training programs that might have been alternatives to Work for the Dole mutual obligation activities. Training, therefore, in this welfare-to-work context is: at the periphery of participants' needs or expectations; outside the core scope of Work for the Dole providers; and effectively discouraged by the obligations and key performance indicators mandated by providers' contracts.

Case 3: Comparing services that support people with disabilities moving from welfare to work

Organisation A specialises in supporting people with a wide range of disabilities. It has done so for over ten years and has an established reputation in the capital city, metropolitan and regional areas in the state in which it is located. As well as being a Job Network member, the organisation is a registered training organisation providing training through computing courses, work placements and one-to-one support. In addition, the organisation has a Disability Employment Service and a Personal Support Program and two Australian Government-funded programs to help people with significant barriers, such as drug use, recent criminal activity and mental health issues. The organisation also provides workers' compensation and rehabilitation services, and psychological services, which enables them to deliver clinical therapy or assessments. Clients who are referred to this organisation are able to use any of these services, depending on their need.

In addition to these 'in-house' services, the organisation uses a number of other training providers, including TAFE and agencies which provide short courses in personal development and communication skills. While not funding them, they have assisted people to apply for and gain entrance to undergraduate university courses.

Organisation A has over 200 clients across seven sites. Of these, the manager estimated that approximately 75% were long-term unemployed (over two years) and about 15% of the total would be classified as 'mature-aged' (aged over 50 years). The organisation provides intensive one-to-one assistance through a dedicated case manager and the provision of a support worker on site at job placements, assisting clients to learn tasks and remember sequences and safety requirements. Training in this organisation was defined as 'formal, informal and experiential'. The manager spoke of instilling work experience through case management and considered that to be training, but informal: '… you get a certificate, but it's not competency based training, it's experiential'.

'Client focus' was identified as the main reason for the organisation's success. Case managers and other staff get to know the clients extremely well, in part because they carry out their own assessments. They use a case management model 'from start to finish', with a dedicated case manager responsible for coordinating their program. The manager explained that, although this case management approach was labour-intensive, it was financially viable. Clients received good service and the program gave the organisation a great deal of success and strength.

One of the characteristics the organisation sought when recruiting case managers was the ability to boost clients' self-esteem. Case managers were described as 'standing by [clients], believing in them, and ensuring their activities and programs are to enhance the quality of life and are not to their detriment'.

It was suggested that an improvement which could be made to assist people to move from welfare to work would be the installation of a Job Seeker Account into the Disability Employment Service

to fund training, materials, drivers' licences, clothing and other items to remove or reduce the barriers that clients experience in finding work. Organisation A, a not-for-profit organisation, currently uses its own core funding for these activities.

In contrast, Organisation B, which also had a contract for people with disabilities, appeared to be struggling to provide flexible and responsive services. The manager interviewed placed great emphasis on the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 'star ratings' as a measure of outcomes effectiveness (2007), or key performance indicators, and the role that these played in attracting clients. In addition, due to financial constraints, the organisation's capacity to provide any kind of training had been reduced, to the point where the manager said the organisation was unable to provide clients with as much as a bus ticket.

The concept of 'work first' was emphasised in this organisation, and the client identified that possession of skills or abilities played an important role in placing clients in a position. Training in this scenario would not be provided unless employment for the client was guaranteed and requested by the employer. Training then was not perceived as a prerequisite for satisfying and safe employment.

Unlike Organisation A, Organisation B used a number of external agencies to assess clients' capacities to work. The manager suggested that this process had gaps and inconsistencies and needed to be reviewed, as clients' skills and abilities did not always match their initial assessment profile. For example, some clients were described as being competent in the use of English but had requested an interpreter to assist them.

Organisation B described their services for clients with a disability as being similar to those provided for their clients who were assisted under the 'general' contract.

> We offer really the same services we offer to the general contract, with a 'few add ons'. When I say 'add ons' we tend to work more closely with the doctor, we tend to look more closely at referring for more Job Capacity Assessments, we do look at the need for training. But the bottom line for Job Networks is that Centrelink's policy is 'work first'.

The interviewee described the shift in provision of training. The following quote refers to previous practices:

> We could have people come in and say 'Well, I've been a taxi driver and now I want to be a fork lift operator' and we'd send them off to get a forklift ticket … They'd come in and say 'Well I can't do this but I want to do that' then we'd look for a training course and we'd send them to [names several local registered training organisations], whoever was around, and spend quite a large amount of money on them in some cases. But then we'd look for work for them with their new skills.

The organisation now operates differently:

> But the money for that was withdrawn. Even to the point of being so tight they took away our ability to give people bus tickets to come in for interviews with us.

> Under the new regime if someone comes and says 'Look I have an employer who wants to offer me a job as a store person but I need a fork lift licence', we'd ask the employer to confirm that offer of employment, then based on that offer of employment we could offer the training. So that's how we're operating at the moment, and that's a policy right across the board at the moment, that's not just our organisation.

The manager at Organisation B suggested that the tax-paying public would approve of this change in practice, as it means that clients who in the past may have become involved in a long series of courses which did not lead to employment would now be placed in an existing vacancy and trained in that specific role. After mentioning taxpayers, the interviewee indicated that the Australian Government had taken the view that the 'work first' model was a more accountable use of funding.

The same interviewee identified the individual client's motivation as the key factor in his success at gaining an 'outcome'. This Job Network member provided some additional support to the client with disabilities by working more closely with the doctor, Centrelink and working 'to reduce the number of hours [of work] clients were required to do'.

Both organisations indicated that there were problems with the small number of clients they were receiving through the referral process. There had been an expectation that the Welfare to Work reforms would create a new stream of clients and additional staff had been put in place to manage them. While the number of clients predicted had not materialised, the amount of time required for administration under the Welfare to Work contract was seen as excessive.

Case 4: Providers' support for mature-aged trainees

This case study primarily concerns how service providers, both of training and associated services, perceive the role of vocational training in securing employment for mature-aged unemployed people. Because the data for the study were collected very early in the implementation of the Australian Government's Welfare to Work initiative, this case does not attempt to evaluate the impact of any Welfare to Work changes.

Service providers and clients interviewed were from two locations in regional Queensland. The region is considered to be prosperous and there is mounting concern about imminent skill and labour shortages. There are six Job Network members operating in the area. The largest training provider is the TAFE institute. Other training providers focus on small ranges of offerings. It is also not uncommon for Job Network members and employers to source training from other parts of the country. There are also state-funded training programs administered by the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations under its Skilling Queenslanders for Work Initiative that are run for mature-aged unemployed in the region.

This case study describes how providers view the experiences of four mature-aged clients who now have paid or voluntary employment after having been on Welfare to Work programs. The stories illustrate different ways in which the unemployed people engaged with the world of training. They illustrate different attitudes to training, take-up of different kinds of training, and different outcomes from the point of view of training providers.

George has not done any formal training since leaving school and is now doing volunteer work. Fourteen years ago, while in his late forties, George accepted a redundancy package after having worked for 22 years for the same employer in a low-skilled job. While employed, his employer had not required him to do any formal training. In the first seven years after leaving that job he undertook, at his own cost, training to obtain a licence to operate a forklift (which he never used) and applied for many jobs. Employment was intermittent, partly due to ill health and always casual. He lost interest in looking for paid work and became convinced that his age had become an unsurmountable barrier. For the last seven years he has worked full-time as a volunteer. He finds satisfaction in the role, feels he's earning his dole money and will not look for employed work. George has never considered undertaking a TAFE course. He explained, 'I'm not one for study'.

Mary attained a Certificate in Aged Care and two years later, she is still employed where she completed her placement. Prior to the training, Mary had been long-term unemployed and from a background where education and training were not valued. Her trainer recalls Mary coming to the course 'with tattered clothes, tattoos and barefoot'. Strong encouragement and support from the trainers continued throughout the course, including the placement. Her employer on placement had contacted the trainers alerting them to Mary's bad language and rough manner. By the end of the course, her trainers had noted an increase in self-esteem and a desire to have her family and friends do training.

Sam has full-time employment after having completed JobSearch training. Unemployed after 25 years with the same sales company, Sam left his work to relocate to another city. He was aware that he had very good people and literacy skills, very limited computer skills and no contacts in his new city. He

was also aware that his personal criteria for job satisfaction were different from what they would have been even a decade earlier. After 13 weeks of unsuccessful attempts at finding employment, he undertook a three-week JobSearch training course. This was sufficient for him to understand how the 'employment game' had changed. Within four months of relocating, he had a job which met his new requirements. If he had not been successful, he would have continued looking for work in a related field rather than going back to retrain or doing courses to improve his computer skills.

Sue has paid part-time work and is enrolling in community welfare training after successfully having completed other unrelated training. Sue has raised four children and has never had regular employment. Her first formal training was in business-related courses. Although it did not lead to full-time employment, her success in passing the course provided the confidence to consider other training. It did lead her to part-time paid work and to becoming part of a community network in which she does voluntary work, which she believes is providing her with more skills.

The role of VET in getting mature-aged unemployed people into the workforce is not necessarily the same as it is for other sectors of the unemployed population. There are clearly age-related issues that impact on how VET supports the process of getting a job. Furthermore, it is clear that the large diversity amongst mature-aged unemployed people makes the task of producing generalisations very difficult. For example, the long-term unemployed face issues, needs and therefore interventions that are very different from those faced by people who have been unemployed for a shorter time. The unemployed who have rich stores of skills, knowledge and contacts that are valued by the employer market are in a different category from those who have limited or almost non-existent stores.

The role of vocational education in helping mature-aged people enter the workforce is very dependent on context. Training is just one element of the Welfare to Work interventions. For many, it may not be their preferred first choice of strategy in securing a job. The profiles suggest that, for mature-aged people, this may be because they already have a strong qualification base and perhaps do not see the need for further training. One of the biggest challenges for service providers therefore is to reach those mature-aged unemployed people whose prospects in the job market would be improved by training, but who as yet have not undertaken training. Here the issues are those of how such people perceive themselves as learners, how they perceive the demands of vocational skill courses and what service providers should do about it.

Case 5: How do enterprise registered training organisations respond?

Enterprise registered training organisations are a part of the vocational education and training sector and through their training opportunities and their parent company's employment decisions contribute to moving the Welfare to Work target groups into work. Employers may target the Welfare to Work target groups for various reasons, including a tight labour market, the need for staff to work flexible shifts, or a commitment to improving the outcomes for local communities. Enterprise registered training organisations are therefore significant players in the VET sector's response to Welfare to Work.

Enterprise registered training organisations are successful in the transition to work because the accredited learning pathway is developed parallel to pathways to employment. They base their training interventions on the needs of their businesses, with a direct pathway into employment. In most of these organisations the accredited training is developed in response to business needs, rather than in response to the needs of the 'students'. Some enterprise registered training organisations will develop competency assessment processes that mirror the performance assessment processes already in place in the workplace. In other words, if you are doing your job, then you are demonstrating the competencies packaged up into qualifications.

A large mining company in Western Australia has employment policies and training practices that provide accredited training pathways and sustainable employment options for local Indigenous community members. Many of these community members fall into the Welfare to Work target

group categories, identifying as parents returning to the workforce, people with substance abuse problems and people with a range of disabilities, typically including those relating to sight, hearing, speech or some other physical disability (ABS & Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2005; Howard 2007).

The mining industry in Western Australia is having some difficulty accessing the labour it needs to meet the growing demand for its products. Over the past 20 years the local Indigenous community has not substantially benefited from the exploitation of their land's resources, although there are signs that this situation is changing (Fowler 2005; Holcombe 2006; Young, Guenther & Boyle 2007). There are a number of key reasons for this mining company to develop and implement a sustainable Indigenous employment policy. These include the effects described in the Taylor report (Taylor & Scambary 2005): the economic effect of local Indigenous communities taking a political stance such as picketing of a proposed mine site, the need for a local workforce, and a genuine belief that economic development should benefit the local communities.

The Learning and Development Manager for the mine claimed:

> [the mine] is deeply committed to getting many, many more Aboriginal people into our business. It's the right thing to do. There is a lot of evidence around the place that where we have an affluent society and a poor society, the affluent society is actually making the poor society poorer, and more ill. So it's the right thing to do from a moral point of view and its also good business sense. It gives us access to more land and they are a workforce of the future. It would be untenable to have the next 40 years like the last 40 years with Aboriginal people missing out on the economic boom going on extracting the resources out of their country. We need to not only hand them over money but give them skills, investment advice, and support for how they manage their personal finances.

Bob is an Indigenous apprentice in the mining company. He has just completed his first year working for the company and is enrolled in the enterprise registered training organisation. At school he described himself as 'a little terrorist' and commented that school was '… pretty much a waste of time, you just go down and have fun and play around in class'. In conjunction with the local school the enterprise registered training organisation funded a homework centre for local Indigenous kids. Asked to comment on the importance of the homework centre, Bob commented:

> … it was a pretty big help … and … helped me on the right track. You catch a bus from school to a little office and there's a lot of chairs and tables and internet access to help you.

In Year 10 he was offered a place in a certificate I program in the local TAFE college covering welding. Once he had completed that program, he was successful in applying for an apprenticeship in the mining company. Asked about the impact of the certificate I in developing his pathway to employment he commented:

> When I first started I didn't even know how to oxy cut and hand tools and stuff weren't pretty big to me so when I started it all started falling into place and I got the hang of it. It was cool.

> I wouldn't have got even past first stage of the selection [for the Apprentice position]. If I hadn't done Certificate I, I wouldn't have got to where I am now. I wouldn't have my car, I like my car. I wouldn't have anything good. I am trying to tell my little brother 'pull your head in at school' so he can get into an apprenticeship, I am trying to lead him into the right path, so he's not a little menace at school. He's talking about doing what I did and asks me questions about the course and how the selection process … I said just have good grades and sit away from the boys. It's hard, I did it and if I can do it I know he can do it.'

Bob was optimistic about his future and talked about moving to work off-shore on rigs.

Philip is an older trainee plant operator enrolled in the company's enterprise registered training organisation. He talked about gaining skills that would allow him to move to working on a mine site and to earn a good wage. The team he works with uses graders, loaders, dozers, rollers, water

tankers, support trucks and low loaders. Philip lived in a local town with his family and travelled out to the training site each day. He was optimistic about the future and realised that he would have skills that could allow him to work in other places—not just the Pilbara.

Martha had a history of casual employment in the local town in retailing and fast food. She commenced a traineeship in the mining company and now has two years of continual work and training behind her. She has specialised in human resources roles within the company and utilises their human resource management system. She will have completed a Certificate III in Business in a collaborative partnership between the local TAFE college, her group training company employer and the mining company.

While there is no doubt that job opportunities are the most significant driver for the success of this case study, the messages about hands-on and early intervention must be heard. The company accepts that, to provide pathways for young Indigenous Australians into their workforce, they must start with interventions in early school and in the community. The funding of Indigenous community mentors, after-school homework centres, VET in Schools programs, and comprehensive support once in the workforce are all critical to success. Structured Training and Employment Projects (STEP) pathways were provided to support Indigenous job applicants who had been unsuccessful in applying for work with the company, in order to improve their chances next time. These may have been to improve work skills, gain general fitness or tackle addictions.

When asked about his biggest challenge in his progression to work Bob answered:

> Probably the boys, when they finished school they had all this drinking, partying on. I just shut them out for a bit till I got through to my apprenticeship. I can balance that now.

The success of these case studies in moving disadvantaged groups into work illustrates the role of embedded enterprise registered training organisations in aligning accredited training to the development of work skills. The message for the VET industry as a whole is to look at how providers can learn from the experience of enterprise registered training organisations and maintain their relevance while the 'work first' policy agenda for welfare recipients is driven by a buoyant economic situation.

Case 6: Policy perspectives

Interviews for one case study were conducted at three Australian Government departmental head offices. The purpose of this case study was to draw out the overarching policy expectations for the VET sector within the framework of the Australian Government's Welfare to Work strategy. The departments will be referred to as Department A, B and C. The activities of these departments are a mix of policy development and service delivery. The case presented here reflects the stated views of interviewees, who are naturally constrained somewhat in their ability to reflect their own views because of their positions as senior-level public servants.

It was clear from discussions with Department A that they are pursuing a 'work first' agenda. The view was that, with the economic situation as it is, the opportunity to move the Welfare to Work groups into work should be a priority. In this context the department saw the VET sector providing some very basic skills, but acknowledged that in many circumstances no training may be required. The VET sector was described as a 'tool to achieve the work first policy'. There was no expressed expectation of the VET sector, and training needs discussed were often focused on individual pre-employment capacity-building rather than on traditional longer-term skill development. Moving into work and receiving on-the-job training were seen as good outcomes. It was perceived that there is a need for the VET sector to see how it can add value to this scenario.

The discussion with Department B emphasised that its priority is to the broader and longer-term skill development of Australia. Welfare to Work is seen as a response to the current part of the employment cycle. Under the Department B response to Welfare to Work, additional places have been made available in many training programs: 'it is more like an enhancement of our existing

mechanisms rather than a whole set of new structures'. The emphasis is on short-term remedial intervention (literacy, numeracy and English as a Second Language programs were mentioned) and Australian Apprenticeships.

The perception of Department C, from the training point of view, was that for those under 21 the emphasis was on capability development, while for those over 21 it was on work. There was a strong emphasis on 'pathways to work'. Although Department C is committed to the work first agenda, its representatives pointed to local variations in job markets and the need to have flexibility in policy application to meet these variations. At the local level the organisation believed that it has well-developed relationships with the VET sector. There was also a view that the 'VET sector is complex, so diverse and so scattered', and as such is difficult to engage, other than locally.

Department C felt that a 'clear line of sight' from policy, through implementation, to a unified VET sector would mean better outcomes. The example of large numbers of parents with new obligations to take up work in 2007 was given: 'We have got all these parents coming next year and somebody should be telling us, or the parents, where the skill gaps are and telling them now what they should be training in …'

This case highlights the strong emphasis from a policy and service delivery perspective that Welfare to Work is primarily about work and that training is a support for this strategy. The case study also highlights a perception for some in government that it is difficult to engage with the VET sector. There is no doubt that this is because of the complexities in the system itself and the wide array of client groups engaging with it. It is reasonable to suggest that the VET sector is not as clearly delineated as the higher education or compulsory education sector, either in terms of participants or expected outcomes. Related to this is a view that the training needs of the expected influx of Welfare to Work groups into the labour market have not been properly considered.

What works well?

From data drawn from the above case interventions it is possible to identify five key factors that contribute to 'what works well' in terms of the provision of effective training in the context of the Welfare to Work programs that were studied. We do not offer these key factors as universal principles—we acknowledge that these factors are dependent to some extent on the local conditions from which they are derived. The data describe the content and outcomes of a range of formal and non-formal training programs used in support of Welfare to Work. The following summarises the most frequently identified factors that contribute to training effectiveness.

Training supports life-skills and identity formation

It appears that the largest single factor contributing to effective training for clients transitioning from welfare to work relates to the building of personal capacity and a change in identity through the acquisition of life skills. Welfare to Work participants reported that effective training meant overcoming their fear and lack of confidence and building their self-esteem. This was expressed in a variety of ways, but one student's comment is perhaps representative of the process of identity formation that many other students underwent.

> I actually feel now that I am mature … but I've always been a confident person but I always felt I was lacking compared to everyone else, because I always thought everyone else, well I know everyone else is not educated, but even just doing their HSC or whatever, I just somehow had these niggly doubts in me that everyone was a bit better … but now it's almost like I [am] on a level playing field now. I never felt that before, and just on the weekend I actually said to myself, I really feel mature … this whole course has really opened me up as a person.

Apart from this general view about the importance of building self-confidence, other respondents reported that they had improved communication skills, were better at relating to other people and were generally engaging more confidently in their community.

Training supports clients' social and employment networks

Effectiveness in training was also achieved when clients' social and potential employment networks were expanded, supporting the importance of social capital resources for pre-work preparation and training more broadly. This was described in terms of socialising with other trainees/course participants; better engagement with the community; reducing isolation; and making connections. For example, one training provider for mature-aged students suggested that:

> [The program] helps them to know some of the people in the industry, therefore they have contact with other people so even though it's not a huge industry up here yet, they come in contact with somebody who they know in class but that gives them that connectedness which helps form a success and helps in establishing relationships and a feeling of being part of a group which is very good for long-term unemployed.

Another provider described this same thing in terms of 'interactions':

> You are talking about people who can interact in a classroom environment and they interact with other people who are employed in the industry which inspires industry knowledge. So they are getting various aspects of information, as well [as] getting an educational perspective—a hands-on perspective and they can see where things correlate.

Quite clearly these networks suggest that effective training builds the social capital of clients and this may be just as significant as the skills that are learned during the training that occurs. The data suggest that these networks are vitally important for the wellbeing of the participant, as well as being an important precursor to employment.

Service providers actively support clients

Another aspect of successful or effective programs identified by respondents relates to the support given to clients. The supports are designed to assist the trainee to make a transition to unfamiliar environments and are necessary to assist clients overcome their identity, self-confidence/self-esteem barriers (discussed earlier). The type of support described by both clients and providers included: introducing someone to a new workplace, offering counselling services, peer support groups, tutorial support groups and English language help for non-English speakers. One disability support provider described this support in terms of case management:

> We have a one-to-one case management model from start to finish. So, in other words, at any point in time … during the course of a person's service with us they have a dedicated case manager responsible for co-ordinating their programme. That's not the way all disability services operate but it's the way we choose to operate. We find it gives us a lot of strength and a lot of success.

Case management, as a form of support, was not referred to by providers of services for mature-aged people and parents returning to work. Support in these contexts was less formal.

Effective training builds on job experience and career pathways

A fourth factor contributing to the success of Welfare to Work training programs concerns 'on the job experience'. This is closely related to the idea of a meaningful pathway into either further education or work. For example, one enterprise registered training organisation respondent rejected the notion of 'generic work experience', favouring instead a more structured career-based program developed for a specific work environment.

> We don't like work experience programs. We like the business structured program in which we can have some real input and we can see some of the results and we can then promote the career opportunities within the manufacturing environment.

Trainees commented that they wanted a direct connection between training and work, whether through work experience or employment. For example, one trainee commented that:

> What I need to do is to pass this course to get certification and then … try to apply as quickly as possible … what I actually need to do is … when I do work experience in a nursing home which is scheduled in November.

Flexibility is essential for clients

One final factor identified relates to flexibility, particularly on the part of the training provider. The demands of child care (for example, with parents returning to work) or episodic illnesses (for people with mental and physical health issues), access to services (for people without transport), and low levels of literacy and numeracy mean that a flexible approach to training delivery and support on the part of training providers are required. In terms of training delivery, providers recognised that flexible delivery—providing access to learning resources when and where it suited trainees, including online if necessary—was essential. Similarly, trainees commented on flexibility, not only in terms of the timing and method of delivery, but also in terms of being supported and assisted through the learning process. One student commented on this in terms of being able to ask questions and accessing supportive staff:

> [At] the end of the day we are all adults and they … offer enough and through the flexible delivery and the councillors and the teachers you can always ask questions. Sometimes it is more [about] getting things right [and] explaining things than doing the actual work so I find this: sometimes a lot of time is spent on 'how do we do this' and 'why do we do it' and '[in] what time frame do we do it' but it's all there you only have to take the opportunity to get through it.

Issues for providers

Providers included those organisations that provided training or were involved in service provision or support for clients who were in transition from welfare to work. The issues described below relate to concerns they raised for themselves as providers.

Matching clients to training and work

One of the challenges faced by providers in the context of training in Welfare to Work was that of matching their clients to appropriate training and work. For example, one provider stated that:

> It's difficult to send someone on a course if you're not sure they can actually do the job. You find you need to work experience them first to see if this is a realistic job. So there's a lot of work put in before you put someone on a course.

Contractual obligations

One concern related to the contractual obligations and conditions imposed by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations[1] in relation to funded programs. While contracts *allowed* for the provision of training, in most instances the focus of programs was on 'work first' and key performance indicators reinforced this emphasis. The result so far reported has been that training, even when indicated as important or crucial, is often/usually sacrificed in favour of a 'rush to work

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[1] In December 2007 the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations was abolished and its functions assumed by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

placement'. In the case of the enterprise registered training organisations interviewed, specific job skill training was provided in the workplace after work placement.

Awareness of Welfare to Work

Some providers were unaware of the full provisions of the legislation and were unable to comment fully on their role within this legislative framework. Many of the enterprise registered training organisation providers surveyed had no knowledge at all of the initiative. It should be noted that most interviews for this project were conducted within six months of the commencement of the legislation.

Participant behaviour

The social contexts from which Welfare to Work clients come sometimes result in challenging behaviour that can be difficult for some providers to manage. In particular those who have mental illnesses or those with interpersonal relationship difficulties sometimes pose a threat to the safety of trainers.

'Red tape'

Some respondents described difficulties they had dealing with government and VET bureaucracy. This 'red tape' sometimes prevented them from getting on with their jobs of providing meaningful training for their clients. For example, one disability service provider commented: 'I don't want to be bothered with all the red tape and that sort of stuff but I'm a bit nervy that the whole new Welfare to Work thing is just creating more red tape'. In other words, Welfare to Work requirements may in some instances be hindering a provider's ability/capacity to deliver needed training for Welfare to Work clients.

Resources

Resources in any training context can be a challenge, particularly when those resources are dependent on funding with attached constraints. The diversity of the student/client cohort in Welfare to Work scenarios adds to the challenge. For example, one mature-aged provider commented that: 'I have an Indigenous student and I want to give her assistance so as to help her. She is actually doing the course for the second time because there was no funding for tutor support for her. When they finally got round to giving her some funding, it was two weeks before the course was closing.' These frustrations recur in a variety of contexts, not just the mature-aged sector.

Issues for Welfare to Work participants

We interviewed people who were at various stages of the transition-to-work continuum: some who had completed training and had some work experience; some who were engaging in training, not having had any work experience; and yet others who were in a mutual obligation program with some prospect of training (such as Work for the Dole programs). We also asked providers about their perceptions of their clients' needs. The themes emerging here reflect this range of viewpoints.

Confidence and self-esteem

Confidence, self-esteem and other identity issues were the most commonly reported challenges faced by respondents as they began the transition from welfare to work. Conversely, respondents (clients and providers) also reported most frequently that the main benefit of training and work experience was the boost to their self-confidence and self-esteem and, hence, to their personal identities as learners and workers. Given the significance of network formation (see earlier section, 'Training supports clients' social and employment networks'), as a factor contributing to 'what

works', it would be reasonable to deduce that a combination of factors related to social capital (networks, trust and norms) may add to the challenges faced by clients.

Transport

Access and transport-related issues posed a challenge for many clients for a number of reasons. For some living in regional areas, public transport was seldom available at suitable times—or they had to wait for long periods before they could get a connection. Comments such as 'There are a lot of stops, so it takes out a lot of the day in just travelling backwards and forwards' were typical of those made about transport and access to training or work experience. For others, loss of a driver's licence or an inability to obtain one, proved a barrier to participation in training or work.

Child care

Access to child care was also identified as an issue, particularly for parents returning to work. Clients who belong to other groups and who have young children face similar challenges as they make the transition from welfare to work. The costs associated with child care are also a barrier:

> [There is] no child care in my local area and even if there was, [it would be] too expensive. I have my mother to look after the kids but she can't do it forever because of failing health. Don't know what I'm going to do if she can't look after them.

Physical health

Physical health and injuries were highlighted as barriers to participation. This was not only mentioned by those working with people with disabilities but also among those who were mature-aged.

Mental health, stress and fear

Mental health emerges as a recurring theme among all Welfare to Work groups. This was described in a number of ways: from depression to anxiety, paranoia and schizophrenia. A mature-aged provider commented: 'Depression is one of the biggest [issues] and they don't see themselves out of that cycle. Another one is anger, not a mental illness but it is very prevalent out there among mature-aged people who are not in work, anxiety is another one.' Several clients also reported being stressed by being forced to engage in mutual obligation activities.

Costs

Costs for Welfare to Work clients include a number of issues including transport, access to education, child care and workplace clothing. These issues affect all groups.

Time pressures and priorities

One concern, which was most often mentioned by parents returning to work, related to time pressures and family priorities. The competing priorities and obligations of culture, family, mutual obligation activities and training created stress for many respondents, particularly parents with child care responsibilities returning to work.

Motivation

Providers observed that among clients motivation was an issue with which they had to contend. One provider commented: 'I think in all groups, it is the motivation of the students. Sometimes, it's hard to get them motivated.' This word can be used euphemistically to blame clients for their failure to engage in training or employment. It may be that self-motivation is in fact associated with self-esteem in this instance. However, providers also commented on the external motivation or pressure to participate as a result of the Welfare to Work arrangements. Each group identified different challenges with motivation. For example, motivation for parents returning to work was challenged by the competing needs of young children and the pressures associated with meeting

Centrelink requirements. Motivation for mature-aged people was affected by a perception that they are close to the end of their working lives. With retirement approaching, they may be weighing up whether it is worthwhile engaging in programs that will lead to an uncertain employment future.

Literacy and numeracy

Both providers and clients reported literacy and numeracy challenges. The challenges depended to some extent on the group concerned. For example, migrants reported difficulties with English language literacy; deaf people described the challenges of communicating where oral literacies were demanded in training contexts; Australian-born people also had difficulties with literacy requirements, while mature-aged people discussed the challenges of information technology literacies. Providers also identified literacy and numeracy barriers. One enterprise registered training organisation reported that potential recruits were filtered out in the selection process partly on the basis of the literacy and numeracy standards of applicants.

Substance abuse

Substance abuse in one form or another—including alcohol and drug abuse—was described by providers as a barrier to effective participation, particularly among mature-aged groups. For example, one provider noted that: 'Some mature-aged [people] have habits like alcohol, dead set in their ways with it … they get to the stage where they are alcoholics.'

Conflict and interpersonal relation difficulties

Issues associated with conflict and interpersonal relationship difficulties were described by clients and providers in several ways. In some cases these issues were related to domestic violence. In other cases they were related to mental illnesses or problems with expressions of anger in training situations.

Discussion and implications

The overarching question driving this research is: 'how can VET best play a role in transitioning people from welfare to work?' The assumption in the following discussion is that the current 'work first' policy setting will remain in place for the foreseeable future—at least in the current part of the economic cycle where tight labour market conditions prevail. One of the key roles of VET in the Welfare to Work context can and should be to build the skills of people entering the workforce—those making the transition out of welfare dependency into employment. What can VET providers do to better position themselves for people making this transition? What policy settings need to change in order to prevent current labour market entrants from being vulnerable when the current economic cycle turns down? What can be done to encourage employers to train new labour market entrants? What can be done to remove the barriers to employment and skill development for clients? While this research cannot answer all these questions, it does shed light on some of the issues and offers a way forward in key areas. The following sections consider the implications for stakeholder groups in the Welfare to Work context. For each group discussed, there are overarching implications for policy-makers, which must be considered in the context of the group concerned.

Implications for Job Network members

There is very little incentive for Job Network members to offer training to JobSearch clients unless it directly leads to a job—and quickly. The core business of Job Network members is clearly about getting people into work. Performance is currently determined on the basis of job outcomes (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2007). Key performance indicators and star ratings therefore work against preparatory employment training (refer to cases 2 and 3). Apart from some disability support services, intensive case management and customised training to better prepare clients for work cannot be provided unless additional resources outside those provided by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations are allocated for this purpose. Without wanting to detract from the core business of Job Network members, in order to better meet the skills needs of JobSearch clients and employers, key performance indicators that focus on skills assessment and development would be helpful in promoting training. This could be relatively simple to implement and could be done early on in the JobSearch client's journey with the Job Network member. Job Network members already capture information about clients' skills in order to link them to employment opportunities and in order to assess their eligibility for Language Literacy and Numeracy Programs or other intensive support options. However, what may be required is a more thorough training needs assessment by a training professional, so that learning opportunities for all clients can be explained in terms of preparation for employment *and* in terms of reducing vulnerability and increasing employability, after they do find employment. Therefore a key performance indicator that identified the skills *acquisition* before and on employment would help address this issue.

Implications for employers

Once a JobSearch client is employed, training is then left to the goodwill and the capacity of employers, which may or may not be motivated to upskill these new employees when their job

status is potentially very tenuous. Linking skills-related Job Network key performance indicators to employer incentives for training new labour market entrants could be a way of ensuring that the skill needs of clients and employers were more adequately met. Based on the findings of this research, those incentives should not be restricted to formal training programs such as certificate courses. According to what clients and providers say 'works', flexible approaches to training that build life skills and extend social networks are vitally important in order to address the confidence and self-esteem issues faced by many clients.

The enterprise registered training organisation model (refer to case 5) may offer a way of better integrating training with employment through structures that support skills acquisition on the job. While the current focus of enterprise registered training organisations is clearly on meeting the human resource needs of their organisations, case 5 demonstrates how, with appropriate incentives (such as the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations Structured Training and Employment Projects program for Indigenous people), the needs of employment-disadvantaged groups can be better met. Further, the enterprise registered training organisation model, which integrates accredited training with work experience, could offer new vulnerable labour market entrants more opportunities for sustained employment. Further research to determine whether this is indeed the case is warranted. For those employers who are not registered training organisations, closer linkages between Job Network members and training organisations could facilitate better skills acquisition outcomes.

Implications for clients

New labour market entrants who attain employment without any additional skills may remain vulnerable and at risk of returning to welfare when the currently strong economic conditions subside (refer to case 6). 'Work first' thus may be a 'quick fix' to a problem without a sustainable basis, either in terms of skills shortages, intergenerational poverty and unemployment, or the human capital needs of Australia. The evidence from this research suggests that clients in Welfare to Work groups experience significant barriers that limit their capacity to re-engage with the workforce. As we have seen, many providers and clients interviewed for this project identified multiple barriers to employment. These include confidence, self-esteem, physical health, mental health, stress and fear, substance abuse and conflicts. Training itself does not provide a direct solution to these barriers. However, it is evident that, with appropriate support, training can, for example, change an individual's self-concept and provide him or her with options to address some of the other barriers. The key is support. The case management model used by many providers of disability services may be a way to address this support requirement for both parents returning to work and mature-aged people. We noted earlier that effective training builds the social capital of clients, and this may be just as significant as the skills that are learned during the training that occurs (see earlier section, 'Training supports clients' social and employment networks'). This study supports other research (for example, Field 2005; Black, Balatti & Falk 2006) in its finding that effective training builds the social capital of clients. Moreover, it supports recent NCVER work (Balatti, Black & Falk 2006) which shows that these social capital outcomes are as significant in achieving training and even employment outcomes as the skills that are learned.

Systemic issues that act as barriers to the transition from welfare to work need to be addressed. These include the 'poverty traps' associated with loss of support benefits (refer to case 2). The demand and cost of child care also acts as a barrier and, particularly for parents returning to work, child care needs to be accessible and affordable. For mature-aged labour market re-entrants and for people with disabilities, apparent employer prejudices against these groups need to be broken down. While the profiles developed in this research show programs among both federal and state and territory governments to address this, these prejudices take sustained and continuing efforts to remove. There is also a perception among clients that they stand to lose a lot (because of the costs associated with training and the loss of benefits associated with gaining employment and consequent time pressures). However, the 'gains' from learning and skills acquisition and consequent employment are not

generally recognised. 'Work first' in itself does little to promote the intrinsic value of learning and can be seen as a punitive measure to push people into work at any cost.

Implications for training providers and the VET sector

A strategic and coordinated approach is required to ensure that the skills needs of industry are matched with those of the potential labour market entrants. This requires: an analysis of the current skill stocks of potential and current labour market entrants; an analysis of the most urgent and immediate needs of industries that will be employing such people; and an analysis of the capacity of the VET (and adult and community education [ACE]) sector to teach those skills. No single training provider is in a position to effectively do this. There may be a case for a broad representative group of public and private providers (perhaps under the umbrella of industry skills councils and other key peak bodies in the VET sector) to come together to develop strategies that will ensure these actions occur. The evidence from the literature (for example, Kell 2006; TAFE Directors Australia 2007) and the particular concerns of some respondents (refer to case 6) suggest that the VET sector is as yet not in a position to offer this kind of strategic advice to governments. It seems that the focus of the VET sector and industry is still on upskilling the existing workforce instead of upskilling those currently outside the workforce (Australian Industry Group & Allen Consulting Group 2006). Internationally, there is an argument that a broader focus on upskilling new labour market entrants is required (for example, OECD 2006c).

VET can and often does play a role in transitioning people from welfare to work and better preparing them for work (refer to cases 1 and 4). A number of factors supporting effective training delivery have been identified from the findings of the intervention cases. These include: training that supports life skills and identity formation; training that supports clients' social and employment networks; active support for trainees; training that builds on-the-job experience; and flexibility, in terms of access and delivery. These are all the kinds of support discussed in the previous section. Off-the-shelf training packages delivered for one-size-fits-all classes will not satisfy these criteria, and so training providers must build in processes and structures to ensure they do (Preston 2004; Schuller, Bynner & Feinstein 2004; Guenther 2005). Case 3 contrasts two examples from the disability sector that show how this may or may not work. This will require accessing additional resources to fund the kind of support and flexibility required. This also demands a strategic and coordinated approach—ensuring that the right balance of motivators and incentives are applied to encourage people into training that builds their confidence and self-esteem and produces a range of employment and identity benefits. As noted in the earlier section on what works, offering training— even though it may be very good training—may not be enough to facilitate a transition from welfare to work. Training must be coupled with appropriate incentives, the removal of barriers and changed employer expectations, in order to provide adequate motivation.

In some cases VET needs to work at levels outside and below the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) structure to ensure that basic life skills, identity formation and re-formation and foundational literacy and numeracy skills are imparted to clients in preparation for the transition to work (refer to case 2). Work for the Dole programs could potentially be used for this purpose, but in its current form key performance indicators restrict providers from being able to offer formal or non-formal training to this end. There may be a case for registered training organisations partnering with specialist ACE training providers to facilitate the kinds of skills necessary and at the same time meet the needs of employers. There may also be a case for the explicit inclusion of many of these prevocational skills into the existing AQF I level.

Research implications

This project comes at a time when there are a number of elements of uncertainty about how the Welfare to Work initiative will develop and how it will impact on the labour market, clients and

training providers. This uncertainty leads to a number of opportunities that researchers in the field of vocational learning should consider for the future. In particular, it will be useful to gather information about: the extent to which employers are training Welfare to Work labour market entrants; what kinds of registered training organisations (for example, private/public/community-based/enterprise-based) are delivering the best and most sustainable outcomes for those making the transition from welfare to work; the long-term outcomes of training for employment-disadvantaged groups; and the policy options that could be put into place to better promote the importance of skills acquisition for Job Network members and other mutual obligation service providers. Beyond these qualitative data, the profiles developed for this research can be used to extend the understanding of trends for each of the Welfare to Work groups. Further, the research community should be included in a discussion with stakeholders in the broader VET sector to facilitate the promotion of learning for employment-disadvantaged people in the context of Welfare to Work.

Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to determine the role VET plays in the context of the Welfare to Work initiative. The six intervention cases demonstrate the important role VET can and does play in assisting people to transition from welfare to employment. However, the kinds of skills needed for the three Welfare to Work target groups considered here (parents returning to work, mature-aged people and people with disabilities) are quite distinct from those needed for people who do not face employment disadvantages. In particular, foundational employability skills that increase motivation, improve confidence and self-esteem and which support individuals' literacy and numeracy needs are required.

In the context of Welfare to Work, providers and clients face a number of challenges before they can effectively engage in learning that supports skills for the workforce. For clients, barriers associated with transport, child care, mental health, physical health, substance abuse and the competing pressures of the needs of children, the demands of Centrelink, together with their own feelings of inadequacy, all contribute to a reduced propensity to undertake training. For service providers (including Job Network members, Work for the Dole programs and training providers), barriers such as contractual obligations, 'red tape', participant behaviour and a struggle to find adequate and appropriate resources all contribute to the difficulties in providing an environment where skills for vulnerable labour market entrants can be delivered.

However, the imperative of training as a vehicle for the transition from welfare dependence to work remains. Assuming that the current 'work first' approach remains in place, a number of changes need to occur at a variety of levels to raise the profile of training. Firstly, key performance indicators and star ratings for Job Network members and Work for the Dole providers must change to reflect the importance of skills acquisition among the Welfare to Work target groups. Second, employers may require additional incentives to encourage them to provide a combination of formal and non-formal training to vulnerable new labour market entrants. Third, employment-disadvantaged people require more intensive support to encourage them to overcome the multiple barriers they face when looking for work. A case management approach that deliberately includes skills development should be incorporated. This will require additional resources, but the cost of these may be offset because the likelihood that these people will remain unemployed or underemployed for extended periods of time will be reduced. Fourth, in order to meet the anticipated needs of the growing number of Welfare to Work labour market entrants, the VET sector needs a coordinated response to enable an assessment of the likely skills needs and training demand for this group of people. Finally, the VET sector needs to work collaboratively with other specialist training providers to provide a range of training options tailored for the particular needs of employment-disadvantaged groups.

While Welfare to Work may be appropriate in the current strong economic context in Australia, the research team is mindful of the tenuous employment situation that exists for many Welfare to Work labour market entrants, when a 'work first' approach effectively excludes the possibility of critical skills development for the individuals concerned. Learning—whether formal or non-formal—plays an important role in the development of fulfilled people in an inclusive and engaged civil society. Education and training has the capacity to reduce the social divides that differentiate those on welfare from those who are in work.

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Support document details

Additional information relating to this research is available in *The role of vocational education and training in welfare to work: Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1986.html>. It contains the following information:

◇ Literature review

◇ Welfare to Work profiles

◇ Links to Australian Government and state and territory Welfare to Work programs

◇ Intervention case reports.