Hard to reach learners:
What works in reaching and keeping them?

Hard to reach learners:

What works in reaching and keeping them?

Lisa Nechvoglod and Francesca Beddie

Table of Contents

Foreword

The ACFE Board commissioned this piece of research from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) as a part of the *New Learner Markets – Hard to Reach Learners* project. We asked NCVER to carry out a literature review of national and international research highlighting best practice for engaging and retaining hard-to-reach learners in learning programs.

The ACFE Board was keen to look at practices outside of Victoria to see if we could learn from the best practice of others working with the same or similar types of learners.

We know that Victorian Adult Community Education (ACE) organisations are highly successful at engaging some of the most disadvantaged and hard-to-reach learner groups. There are still some groups that are under represented in the education system and require different engagement and retention strategies. For example, we know how hard it is to engage vulnerable workers or people with a history of poor learning experiences.

I am sure that ACE organisations will find the content of the report of good practical value. While many of the strategies outlined are currently being used by ACE organisations, there are some terrific case studies of different and innovative local, national and international best practice. The guiding principles around reach and engagement provide a worthwhile reminder when developing new programs or reviewing current operations.

I would like to thank the NCVER for the preparation of this report and recommend that you refer to it from time to time as a useful guide to ensuring best practice.

Rowena Allen
Chairperson
Adult, Community and Further Education Board

Executive summary

This study was commissioned by the Victorian Government's Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board, as part of a suite of initiatives to assist adult and community education (ACE) providers operate effectively in the new funding environment. It distils best practice from the literature and provides case studies which show the application of best practice. The examples provided throughout the report are drawn from Australian and international sources.

The report begins by defining who are hard-to-reach learners and presenting information on their location. Understanding local conditions is an essential element in the development of effective training.

Best practice principles are then discussed in two contexts:

• A set of principles broadly applicable to all hard-to-reach groups is described along with the strategies and techniques that flow from them.

• Several particular groups are also considered. These groups – vulnerable workers, young people, Indigenous Australians and people with a disability – are less likely to immediately engage in a demand-driven training market, and more detailed information about them may be useful to ACE providers moving into these markets.

Concluding comments provide suggestions for applying best practice, as well as the possible challenges for ACE providers trying to engage hard-to-reach learners while operating effectively in the new environment.

In suggesting the principles to guide strategies for engaging hard-to-reach learners it is important to consider the journey the learner is undertaking. Determining the needs and desires of learners and being able to meet these will encourage them to be lifelong learners, not just to learn for a specific end. Helping learners develop persistence calls for a strong connection with the communities and local economies in which learners do or will engage. ACE providers have these connections, which can give them a head start in offering meaningful services to hard-to-reach learners. They may, however, find it useful to think further about how to engage the new learner markets.

Best practice for hard-to-reach learners means putting the learner at the centre of the process. The relationship they develop with each of the phases of education is very important to seeing their journey through. Course design needs to take into account the requirements of the community or groups that are being targeted. The importance of the initial contact between learners and teachers cannot be underestimated and needs to be positive and supportive. While undertaking training, learners need access to appropriate and timely support services to decrease the barriers that might prevent them from engaging and continuing their learning. Learners need assistance to develop persistence strategies to overcome barriers that are beyond the influence of providers and support services.

When thinking about hard-to-reach learners and course delivery, best practice suggests including the learner in determining the design and content of the course to help engage and maintain their interest. Making the content interesting and relevant is also key. E-learning can provide a flexible and interesting delivery method for hard-to-reach learners. Flexibility in design, content and delivery can increase self-directed learning and ownership which in turn cultivates learner persistence. Learner persistence is also promoted by ensuring learners identify their own goals and make decisions about their learning.

Location is important. Delivering the course in the right place helps overcome barriers to learning such as transport, develops the social capital of the local community and can link in with other services located in the area. Rural locations pose particular challenges due to isolation, distance, lack of learning programs and access to a reliable internet service. They require special solutions that might include partnerships with local employers.

Building learner skills benefits hard-to-reach learners by enhancing their confidence as well as their competence. The Victorian Government has developed an important resource for ACE providers; *A-frame: A framework for pre-accredited teaching and learning*, which supports quality program design and encourages a focus on the skills that are likely to achieve positive results for learners and their communities.

Finally, developing links with employers helps providers design training that is useful for them and their employees as well as engaging low-skilled workers, who may not ordinarily consider undertaking training.

The final phase of the process for attracting hard-to-reach learners relates to learner progression, completion and career guidance. Learner progression can be encouraged by building on the past achievements of learners and encouraging them to progress to higher levels of education. Here, Recognition of Prior Leaning (RPL) is a valuable tool which, if aptly applied also encourages positive attitudes to learning by recognising participants' existing experience and knowledge. For Indigenous learners, RPL is a way of embracing Indigenous knowledge.

Mentoring has a role to play in supporting learners to finish courses. The mentoring relationship can extend into the workplace and has been shown to help overcome some of the early challenges of transition to work leading to sustaining employment. Career guidance also plays an important part in helping learners chose the right pathway and to see the purpose for learning.

The practices outlined in this report provide a basis for ACE providers to consider how they might engage in the new environment and build relationships with hard-to-reach learners. The case studies presented are intended to provoke thinking about what ideas from best practice might be applicable in the Victorian context. These include considering: new ways of taking the learning to the learner and helping communities build their social capital; how to develop learner persistence as well as links with employers that can help to provide better opportunities for some of the lowest paid.

It will come as no surprise to ACE providers that the strong message running through the literature surveyed in this report is that partnerships between learning providers and other support services seeking to help the disadvantaged make the journey for reluctant learners less bumpy and more likely to succeed.

Essential best practice

Table 1: Essential best practice that supports hard-to-reach learners engage in education

	Offering learners…	Practitioners who…	Providers that…
Best practice that supports hard-to-reach learners	Inviting and supportive environments that help them feel comfortable.	Deliver clearly structured training using methods that suit the skill of the learners.	Provide access to appropriate support services.
	Training that builds confidence and skills.	Use a curriculum that is linked to the real-life demands of learners' lives.	Have partnerships/links with other organisations that can support learners.
	Flexible learning environments that provide useful learning relevant to their requirements.	Work with learners to identify their learning interests and appropriate assessment procedures.	Link with employers to provide training that supports employees as well as meeting the requirements of the employer.
	Inclusive course design and assessment that encourages them to persist.	Support learners by identifying their learning needs and respond to these in the course.	Operate on a sustainable business model and seek and secure adequate funding to support training delivery.
	Links with employers to support movement from training to employment.	Provide flexible course design and delivery.	Carry out rigorous evaluation of training programs and reflect on findings.
	Mentors who can support them to achieve their aims and aspirations.	Embed literacy into other learning as appropriate to support learner achievement.	Give appropriate career guidance to engage and retain learners.
	Strategies to build persistence and overcome barriers that are outside the control of training providers.	Take account of variations in learners' reading and writing skills in designing assessment.	Provide taster courses to draw in hard-to-reach learners and provide a positive learning experience.
	Access to appropriate support services that help to reduce the barriers to learning.	Build soft and hard skills of learners to encourage confidence.	Understand the learner market which is the target for the intended training.
	Appropriate course material and design that takes account factors such as cultural background and age.	Provide next steps for learners to engage in higher levels of education and training.	Provide support for learners to overcome barriers thereby reducing attrition.
	Timely career advice to assist them with transition pathways and give purpose to their learning.		Develop programs collaboratively with the community.

Introduction

Changes in the labour market – effects on skills and education

In recent decades there have been significant changes in the structure of the economy, with a decline in manufacturing and an increase in service industries. This has influenced the types of skills required in the labour force. Workers whose jobs have disappeared or been redesigned to suit market conditions, have found themselves without the necessary skills and therefore in precarious positions. A solution to this problem has been to increase worker qualifications and to align skills with the new economy. This strategy aims to enhance productivity, as well as help avoid the social exclusion of those who do not have the required skills.

The relationships between low participation in education, poor labour force attachment and weak social participation are strong; they can cause individual hardship as well as lower social cohesion and loss of community resources. Thus, the development of human capital and the growth of the economy are closely linked to overcoming social exclusion (Booth and Snower 1996).

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has suggested that changes to patterns of participation in education will boost the productivity of the economy (OECD 2006). The Australian Government suggests that an additional year of education may raise productivity by between three and six per cent for a country (Commonwealth of Australia 2009). Australian governments at both federal and state level are therefore encouraging the development of human capital through programs to support and encourage the uptake of qualifications. Of particular interest to them are the disengaged or hard-to-reach groups.

For these groups, in particular those without year 12 or equivalent qualifications, it may be difficult to address economic and social issues simultaneously. Raising participation in training is not enough to get people into sustainable employment – the evidence shows that to achieve this requires attainment beyond entry-level training. The predicament is that pre-vocational courses are more effective in engaging people who have left education behind, particularly those identified as hard-to-reach. In the end, however, it will be completing a qualification that counts (Cully 2008). To this end, pre-vocational training needs to be recognised as the *beginning* of the education journey for many disengaged learners, not the whole journey.

Victorian context

Around 1.6 million adult Victorians do not have any post-school qualifications (ACFE 2009). This presents a problem, because people with low skill levels are more susceptible to changes brought about by economic and industry restructuring (Heckman 1997). Other evidence shows that individuals with low skills are more likely to suffer health problems including mental health issues and social isolation. Lower wages and poverty are also closely associated with lower levels of education.

Skills reform

The Victorian Government has introduced reforms that centre on improving the state's overall level of qualifications by providing eligible people with an entitlement to study. The entitlement model relies on training providers being flexible and responsive to the needs of learners. This provides new opportunities for providers, including those in the adult and community education (ACE) sector. ACE already has a strong record of reaching out to groups considered hard-to-reach and the Victorian Government policy will provide the chance to build on this capacity.

This policy direction has been re-emphasised in the 2009 policy statement on adult education, *A Stronger ACFE – Delivering Skills for Victoria*, which acknowledges the role of ACE in reaching out to people who have not completed year 12 or equivalent qualifications or who may have other barriers to pursuing a pathway to post-school education and training.

Purpose and structure of the report

This study was commissioned by the Victorian Government's Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board, as part of a suite of initiatives to help ACE providers operate effectively in the new funding environment. It distils best practice from the literature and provides case studies which show the application of best practice. The examples provided throughout the report are drawn from Australian and international sources.

The report begins by defining who are hard-to-reach learners and presenting information on their location. Understanding local conditions is an essential element in the development of effective training.

Best practice principles are then discussed in two contexts:

- A set of principles broadly applicable to all hard-to-reach groups is described along with the strategies and techniques that flow from them.

- Several particular groups are also considered. These groups – vulnerable workers, young people, Indigenous Australians and people with a disability – are less likely to immediately engage in a demand-driven training market, and more detailed information about them may be useful to ACE providers moving into these markets.

Concluding comments provide suggestions for applying best practice, as well as the possible challenges for ACE providers trying to engage hard-to-reach learners while operating effectively in the new environment.

Characteristics of hard-to-reach learners

Who are hard-to-reach learners?

Some caution should be used when defining hard-to-reach learners. Brackertz (2007) criticises the term hard-to-reach as being too vague and sometimes connected with negative statements about the target populations.

Definitions of hard-to-reach do not always take into account specific local context or of the diversity within a group. This leads to simplification or an inference of homogeneity (Brackertz 2007). Also, hard-to-reach learners can be in several groups considered disengaged or disadvantaged, compounding the difficulty of having clear definitions.

Some suggest the reason people are hard to reach is because little effort has been put into recruiting them (Brackertz 2007). There are also people who simply do not know about programs or courses and are incorrectly included in the hard-to-reach category.

Attitudes to learning

Dickie's (2000) segmentation of the learner market provides an overview of potential learners and their attitudes to learning, instead of taking the more conventional starting point of observing the hard-to-reach learner from the point of view of their disadvantage. Dickie suggests the learner market consists of:

- passionate learners (21 per cent)
- almost there (6 per cent)
- learn to earn (17 per cent)
- learning on hold (11 per cent)
- make it easier (16 per cent)
- done with it (14 per cent).

Of these segments the last two categories probably contain the majority of hard-to-reach learners, although those who have put learning on hold can find it difficult to get started again. According to Dickie (2000) the make it easier group often includes:

- women aged 45 years and over
- people with a disability
- people not in the workforce and not actively participating
- people with low income
- those with no post-school qualifications.

The *done with it* group includes:

- people aged 45 years and over
- people who have the main responsibility of caring for a dependent
- people from a non-English speaking background
- people with a disability.

This segmentation provides a useful starting point from which to further refine who might be included in the hard-to-reach learners category. It should, however, be noted that everyone in these categories has low qualifications and is, therefore, within the purview of this study.

Engaging with learning

Refining further the definition of hard-to-reach learners, Pittham (2009) suggests:

"…[hard-to-reach learners are] those learners who do not self-refer or readily seek to engage in adult learning programs or courses. They are difficult to recruit, to the extent, that if there are softer targets available locally, little effort is made to make contact and connect with the hard to reach and thus their voices can remain unheard and their needs and wants largely ignored (Pittham, 2009)."

Considering these characteristics, broad groups in Australian society may be identified as hard-to-reach learners. They include:

- Indigenous Australians
- people with a disability
- early school leavers
- vulnerable or low skilled workers
- unemployed and underemployed people
- culturally and linguistically diverse people (CALD)
- under-represented learner groups
- disengaged young people
- socially and economically disadvantaged people
- people isolated and marginalised from the community
- some older people.

The diversity of these groups, with their differing barriers and support requirements, complicates the task of identifying what practices are beneficial to reach them.

Taking a cross disciplinary approach

Barriers to learning are often not only educational but also social and financial. So as well as tackling motivational issues stemming from low self-esteem and poor previous learning experiences as part of the engagement strategy, effective results in training will also depend on good support from other parts of the system. This is the reason for a strong emphasis on partnerships in the best practice presented below. It also points to the potential benefits for cross-disciplinary approaches, drawing for example on the experiences of social workers and primary health practitioners in engaging their clients.

Programs such as the Victorian Government's 'Neighbourhood Renewal' initiative are examples of a cross disciplinary approach.

Neighbourhood Renewal aims to build social infrastructure and encourage investment to build local economic capacity. Developing community hubs such as neighbourhood houses, shop fronts, information resource centres and enterprise incubators is one way to attract services that help improve residents' employment and learning opportunities. The Hubs allow employment and other support organisations to maintain a local presence in the community and provide residents with better access to services.
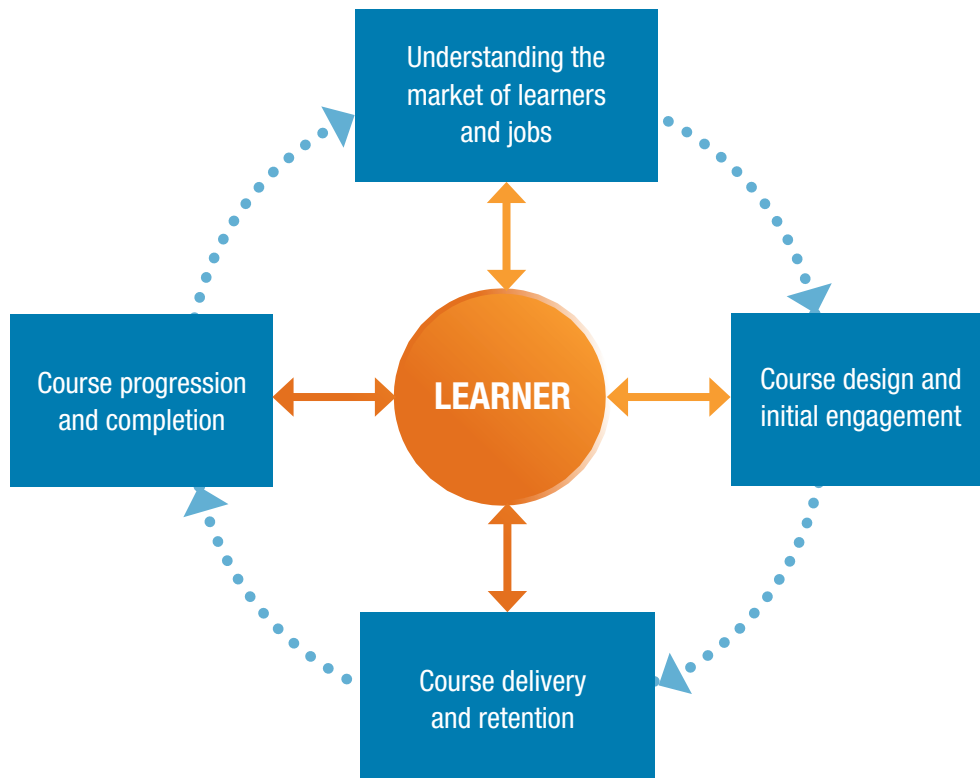
Best practice principles

This section of the report distils into principles what the literature identifies as 'best practice' for encouraging the successful engagement, participation and completion for hard-to-reach learners in education.

Achieving best practice will require tailoring of the principles to suit particular circumstances as well as ensuring these approaches are combined as needed with other social support. Access to appropriate and timely support is critical to the success of hard-to-reach learners in education.

Figure one below shows that best practice for hard-to-reach learners centres on four stages that all have an interdependent relationship with the learner at the centre. While all of these principles need not always be applied to ensure success, tailoring of the principles to suit particular circumstances and ensuring the right combination of these approaches will support the best outcomes.

Figure 1: Best practice principles

Understanding the market of learners and jobs

Course progression and completion

LEARNER

Course design and initial engagement

Course delivery and retention

Understanding the market

Knowing the target community where learners are located is critical (Bowman 2007). Consultations with communities can help overcome the complex issues of multiple disadvantage and low social cohesion often experienced in disadvantaged locations. According to Vinson (2007), understanding the social and economic dimensions of locations is vital to developing training that suits learners' needs. Such knowledge can also contribute to the capacity of the whole community. The ACE sector, as a whole, is well-positioned to serve this purpose because it has strong local links within disadvantaged communities. ACE also has much experience in building networks from its connections with other service providers.

Where are hard-to-reach learners located?

A recent study by Tony Vinson (2007) maps the areas of disadvantage in Victoria. He argues that understanding geographical disadvantage is key to beginning to understand and address the recurring characteristics of highly-disadvantaged locations. Vinson (2007) found there were certain conditions of disadvantage which were grouped together. However, the most prevalent condition when examining sustained disadvantage was limited education.

The map in Figure 2 shows the areas of advantage compared with those experiencing disadvantage based on Vinson's latest research for Victoria.
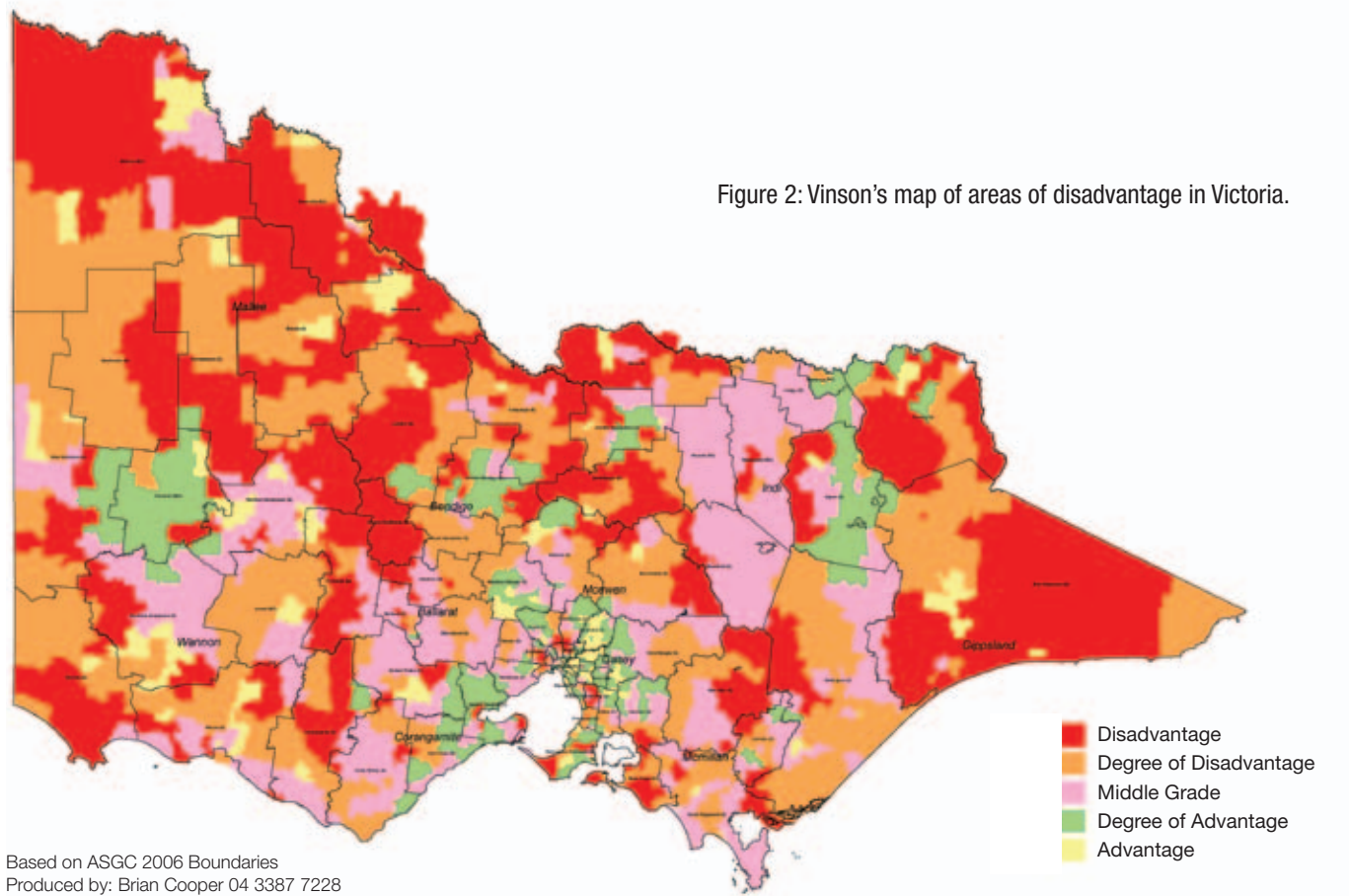
Figure 2: Vinson's map of areas of disadvantage in Victoria.

Legend:
- Disadvantage
- Degree of Disadvantage
- Middle Grade
- Degree of Advantage
- Advantage

Based on ASGC 2006 Boundaries
Produced by: Brian Cooper 04 3387 7228
© Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia

Why location matters

The link between the location of hard-to-reach learners and the providers trying to reach these learners is very important. Good access to providers is a key for several reasons. Links with the local community help build support networks within the community and connections to the local economy of the area assisting social cohesion and helping ameliorate the compounding factors of disadvantage. The familiarity of the local area also assists reluctant learners to feel comfortable and therefore more likely to participate in training.

Figure 3 shows the location of ACE providers in Victoria. Figure 4 overlays Vinson's 2007 map showing location of disadvantage with the location of ACE providers.
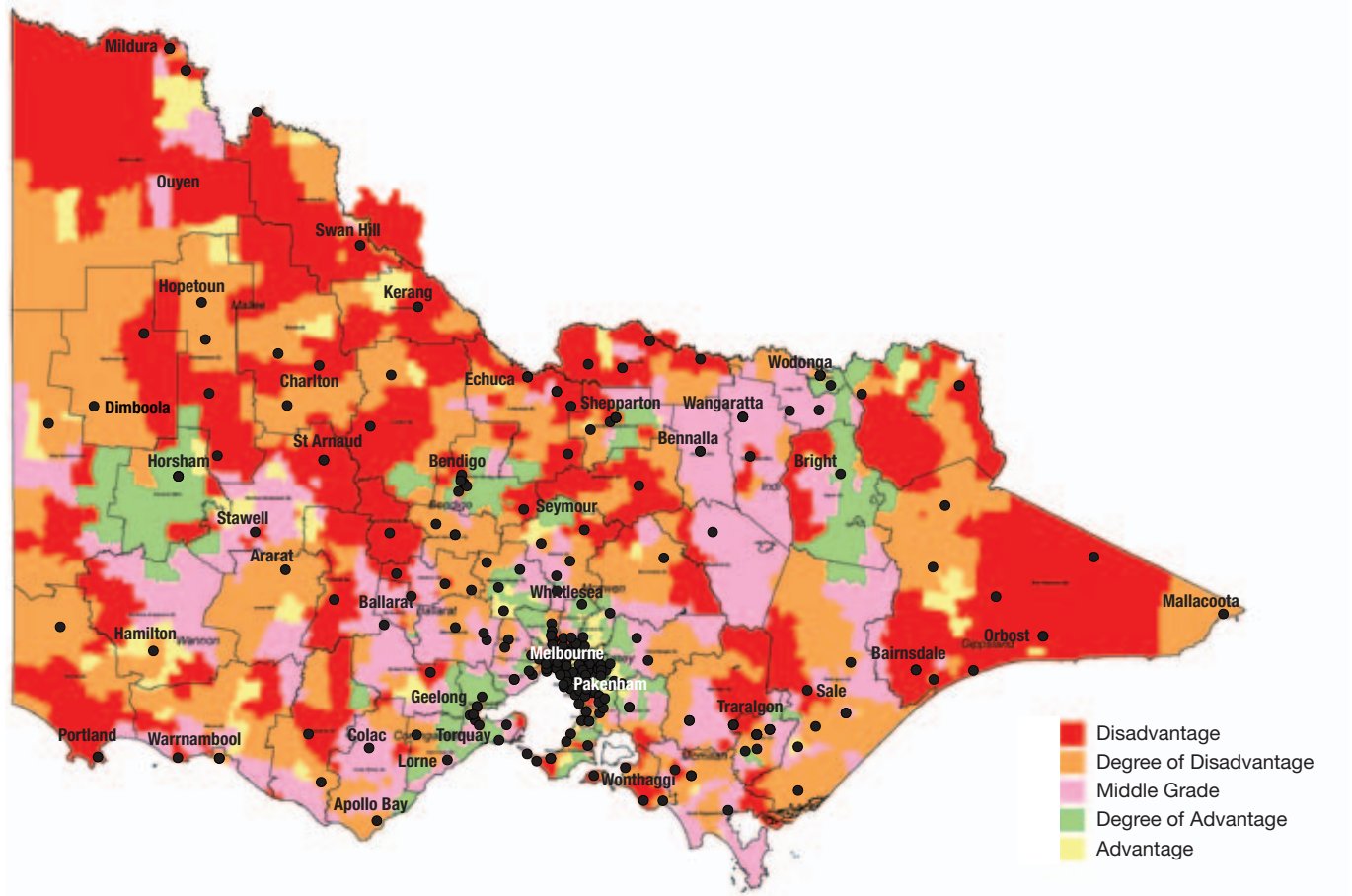
ACE in Victoria is well-positioned in this regard because their learners tend to be drawn from the local area, whether they are located in metropolitan or rural areas (Volkoff and Walstab 2007).

Figure 3: Location of ACE providers in Victoria.

Figure 4: Areas of disadvantage and location of ACE providers.

Descriptive statistics

The information that can be drawn from the maps of disadvantage shown above underlines the value of using existing data to gather market intelligence.

A recent study by Rushbrook and Pickersgill (2008), In training we trust: *Communicating regional training need and demand to vocational education and training providers*, considered this point in a case study of the Riverina Region. The authors looked at ways in which vocational education and training (VET) providers gather information about training needs. They found that a combination of formal mechanisms such as client partnerships and advice from industry bodies, with friendships and

networks between employers, communities and VET providers were effective. They also noted that training providers only made limited use of available statistics to build profiles of program demand. Their chapter on descriptive statistics shows how they used demographic, employment and qualifications data to build a picture of the region's training needs.

Community consultation

Consultation is a way to gain a greater understanding of the social and economic dimensions of a community. Wide community consultation has been shown to be useful for developing training programs that attract new types of learners and are relevant to their specific requirements (Bowman 2007).

Another way to connect with communities is to identify key community figures and engage them to assist with the consultations and help to establish trust and confidence (Macleod, Taylor, Zwart and Sachdev 2005). Such learning champions are particularly helpful when trying to engage culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, Indigenous people and low skilled people in the workplace.

Sometimes it may be necessary to use people-to-people recruitment. According to Macleod, Taylor, Zwart and Sachdev (2005) word-of-mouth is more likely to encourage potential learners from minority groups. Case Study 1 highlights the benefits of employing special project workers to consult with communities about training. This project managed to successfully re-engage hard-to-reach groups, including single parents, ex-offenders and homeless people with learning and employment opportunities.

Case Study 1

Family and Community Education (FACE) workers (UK)

The aim of the project is to engage people on government benefits including single parents, homeless people, ex-offenders and others. This was achieved by:

- employing trained project workers (FACE workers) who have had experience in community engagement
- FACE workers getting to know the local community and providing information and advice sessions to the community about training options
- FACE workers gaining the trust of target groups and individuals
- FACE workers consulting with the community on what it needs and wants
- FACE workers identifying suitable training for the needs of the community based on consultations and identifying suitable funding
- identifying flexible training at no cost in response to the needs expressed in consultations with the community
- providing support such as access to childcare and transport to overcome barriers.

Outcomes:

- learners re-engaged with jobs
- increased confidence of individuals who were then open to further learning opportunities.

Best practice principles cont'd

Marketing techniques

Dickie (2000) suggests a variety of strategies and tailored marketing techniques that are useful for recruiting potential learners. These are not just advertising slogans; they are sophisticated approaches to offering programs. As identified earlier the two segments that probably contain most of the hard-to-reach learners are the *make it easier* and *done with it* categories.

For the *make it easier* group, the focus of marketing needs to be on the benefits of training. Dickie (2000) recommends:

- increasing attention on the expected gains and decreasing attention on the expected cost of engaging in learning
- repositioning skills to show learning as an attractive option which offers personal benefits as well as means to keep up with a rapidly-changing world
- addressing barriers to learning – real and perceived e.g. provide flexible learning options, mobile learning centres
- increasing the social pressure to engage in skills development e.g. use media to run a campaign to encourage training
- improving people's ability to engage in learning e.g. access to childcare
- providing information on low-cost, positive learning experiences to overcome the barriers e.g. how-to-learn products.

To engage the *done with it* group Dickie (2000) suggests devising messages that:

- create interest in learning and skills development
- emphasise the relevance of learning for developing new skills for work e.g. 'don't get left behind'
- address values that may be of more interest to the group e.g. reposition learning as part of a healthy family life
- help people whose appetite has been whetted e.g. make information about learning options readily available, overcome access and distance issues and address language and disability barriers.

Links with other organisations/partnerships

Partnerships are often critical to the success of projects seeking to engage learners (Bowman 2007, Guenther et al 2008).

Making links with other organisations can help to widen participation in two ways:

- the partner organisation may have useful information about the target group and may have already established trust and confidence and be able to promote and encourage participation from the target group (Bowman 2007)
- partners may be able to provide support and expertise.

Partnerships also offer the potential for integrated learning and employment solutions (Allen Consulting Group 2006). Having strong links with employers can provide purpose and therefore be very important for engaging hard-to-reach learners and encouraging them to complete their studies (Giddy, Lopez and Redman 2009).

Case Study 2 draws out good practice for ACE and other VET providers seeking to build partnerships. These arrangements may be particularly useful in the new policy environment, for example to facilitate seamless pathways from entry-level training to higher qualifications.

Gelade et al (2006) observed that ACE personnel often placed more importance on intrinsic community benefits and their ability to help disadvantaged learners, while other VET organisations were used to having to place greater emphasis on numbers of completions. The research found that these different outlooks and views on what constituted outcomes for learners could, in partnership, lead to better results for learners and the community. It could also enhance the organisation's ability to attract new business.

There are, however, issues with partnerships. Central to these are the nature of the VET sector and the competition for funding that is present in this environment. Another is that partnerships can be difficult to maintain and take time, effort

and money. Despite these issues, partnerships, particularly for the ACE sector, may be very useful because organisations can work together to provide lifelong learning options for learners once they are engaged. In this way partnerships may overcome the limited ability of particular providers to supply the variety of training that learners desire.

Case Study 2

Partnering with other VET providers (AUSTRALIA)

Gelade et al (2006) considered how ACE and other VET providers could collaborate successfully. They found that:

- successful partnerships are highly dependent on having lead personnel based in each of the collaborating organisations who are strongly committed to the partnership effort

- the development phase is a particularly crucial time; those partnerships that fail appear to do so within the first two years

- partnerships also fail because of misunderstandings between organisations about the aims and objectives each has for the collaboration, and the expectations about what learners involved can achieve

- a key factor in promoting positive relationships between organisations in a partnership is maintaining respect both for each other and the varied stakeholders involved

- good communication, shared understanding of goals and the ability to be flexible in relation to both teaching and administrative aspects are among the most crucial aspects of good practice in successful partnerships or collaborations between ACE and other VET providers.

For more information see
www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1708.html

Summary:

Best practice in understanding the market

- Understand the community that you seek to engage.

- Understand the social and economic dimensions of the community so training can be tailored to suit the needs of learners.

- Conduct community consultation to help to develop appropriate and relevant training programs that encourage retention of learners.

- Use appropriate marketing techniques that draw in the target audience.

- Develop partnerships with other relevant organisations to improve the success of the project. Partnerships can also offer the potential for integrated learning and employment solutions.

Course design and initial learner engagement

Learner engagement and relationship with staff

Initial learner engagement is important for fostering an interest in learning. Many hard-to-reach learners experience anxiety and apprehension when entering a learning organisation, possibly related to previous negative experiences. Offering an environment that is non-threatening, welcoming and relaxed is an important engagement and retention factor. ACE has a good reputation for providing this environment (Gelade, Catts and Gerber 2003).

A comfortable learning environment depends to some extent on the relationship between the learner and all staff at the training provider. During initial contact it is vital to establish confidence and trust between teachers and learners (Champney, Davey and Lawrence 2005). This should be continued with positive and supportive relationships based on mutual respect to maximise the chance of successful learner engagement, retention and completion.

Persistence strategies

Nash and Kallenbach (2009) suggest that developing persistence strategies in learners is very important. If people are encouraged to stay the course they learn to draw on their existing skills, become more self-sufficient and are therefore less likely to leave learning. They are then better able to deal with those barriers that are beyond the control of providers.

There is opportunity to develop persistence in learners during their first interactions with learning, whether this is in taster courses or Certificate I or II courses. These lower-level courses may not always be enough to lead to sustainable employment but they provide the foundations for continuing learning and developing the other skills that help learners persist. In this sense, developing persistence is about fostering the:

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

One strategy to build persistence in learners is to develop group learning cohorts which foster a sense of belonging for participants, provide mutual support and enhance their sense of security (Nash and Kallenbach 2009). Case Study 3 highlights the use of peer support to encourage learner confidence and enhance their persistence.
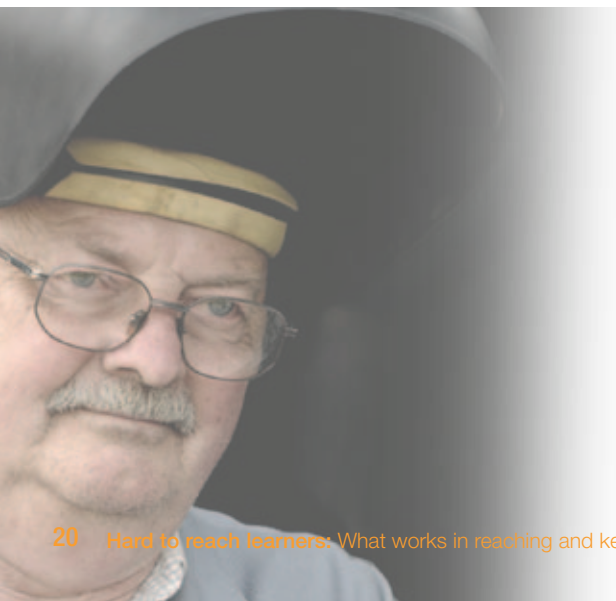
Case Study 3

Peer support in community colleges (USA)

A community college encouraged peer support for new learners by appointing 'student ambassadors'. The role of the 'student ambassadors' was to talk to students about the expectations, challenges and benefits of the course. Often this was done in the learner's native language, overcoming language barriers and making them feel accepted. Through these best practice techniques the ambassadors made new learners feel comfortable, encouraging them to ask questions that they may not have asked if peer support was not available. The 'student ambassadors' gained from this experience as well, reporting increased confidence and self-efficacy (Nash and Kallenbach 2009).

Reframing adult literacy and numeracy course outcomes: a social capital perspective (Balatti et al 2006) notes that for new adult learners the benefits from participation in courses may not be reflected in course results but, in the first instance, in their socioeconomic wellbeing. The study examined the outcomes experienced by 57 learners as a result of their participation in accredited adult literacy and numeracy. Eighty per cent of the learners reported a positive impact on their social environments, education and learning, employment and quality of working life, even though not all achieved improved literacy and numeracy skills. These skills did, however, build once the learners were able to interact with their peers and join networks which gave them opportunities to learn, or to implement what they had learnt.

Best practice principles cont'd

Case Study 4

Strategies to improve persistence (USA)

Research by the United Kingdom's National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy (NRDC) and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), its sister organisation in the United States, suggests that the following strategies can improve learner persistence.

Making a safe learning environment:

- a good teacher-learner bond establishes a sense that you are all in this together – find common interests
- know your learners' names – and use them
- learn a few words or key phrases in the learner's language
- acknowledge that learners' lives are complicated, and that their reasons for dipping out are valid
- make time for chats and to give informal advice
- have informal contact with other staff who teach the same learners.

Creating a community in the classroom:

- let learners know that you notice if they do not come to class; find out what the problem is; telephone the learner if it happens again
- increase interaction by working in groups or pairs
- set up a voluntary buddy system – having a fellow learner who can call and tell you what you missed can be very useful
- have a 'catch up' plan for learners who miss a class
- ask a former learner to come back and talk about motivation
- have learners talk about their goals, motivations, hopes and fears at an early stage; learners see that other learners have similar goals and perhaps similar worries.

Personalising learning:

- establish clear learning paths and communicate these to learners
- make learning relevant to learners' lives
- plan activities that make learners feel they have a personal investment in their learning – keeping journals, writing personal histories.

Setting and revisiting goals:

- include a lesson on goal setting, and find out what goals learners' have
- ask learners to identify positive and negative forces that might affect their work towards their goal; draw up individual action steps; revisit these goals and action steps regularly
- use formative assessment to demonstrate progress and show learners how they are 'learning to learn'.

Supporting self-directed learning:

- encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning by working independently
- mark homework promptly, and give verbal comments as well as written; give comments not just ticks and crosses
- work on improving learners' study skills.

For more information see:
www.nrdc.org.uk/persistence

Taster courses

Taster courses are a way of engaging people worried about committing to doing a full qualification. They are often called 'soft entry' points into the system because they encourage learners to engage with learning in smaller, non-academic courses, with little pressure (Bowman 2007).

The increase in learner confidence and self-esteem helps people building pathways to access the infrastructure and services that exist in their communities (Hoffmann-Ekstein 2007).

Case Study 5

Learndirect online taster courses (UK)

Learndirect offers short online taster courses to entice learners and make learning easy.

Go to < courses.learndirect.co.uk/providers/tasters/nowrap/epic/wwtaster/index.html>.

Embedding literacy

Statistics show one in five Australians do not have the necessary literacy skills to effectively participate in sophisticated modern life (ABS, 2008). Many of the hard-to-reach groups include people who have very low levels of literacy or whose first language is not English. If hard-to-reach groups are to be encouraged to undertake training this issue needs to be addressed.

A best practice technique for achieving this is to embed literacy in the course (Casey et al 2006). Embedding language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills development with other skills training provides an integrated experience for learners.

An evaluation of LLN programs undertaken in 2006 (Casey et al 2006) identified four main features that are found in effective delivery of embedded literacy learning:

- teamwork between LLN and vocational teachers
- staff understanding
- connecting LLN with vocational content
- policies and organisational features at institutional level that support LLN practice.

The same study however, found that there can be value in delivering basic numeracy classes separately from vocational content (Casey et al 2006).

Summary:

Best practice for course design and initial learner engagement

- Providing tailored support services (educational and other) helps overcome barriers to participation and increases retention.
- Positive initial contact and establishing good early relationships between teachers and learners is vital to establishing and building confidence and trust.
- Research has shown embedding literacy in VET courses supports learners and develops literacy in a non-threatening contextual environment.
- Developing learner persistence helps overcome barriers that training providers may not have any ability to remove.
- Reducing other barriers such as transport and childcare is important for engaging hard-to-reach learners because they often experience multiple barriers.
- Taster courses in non-accredited learning help hard-to-reach learners build confidence and skills to move into accredited training.
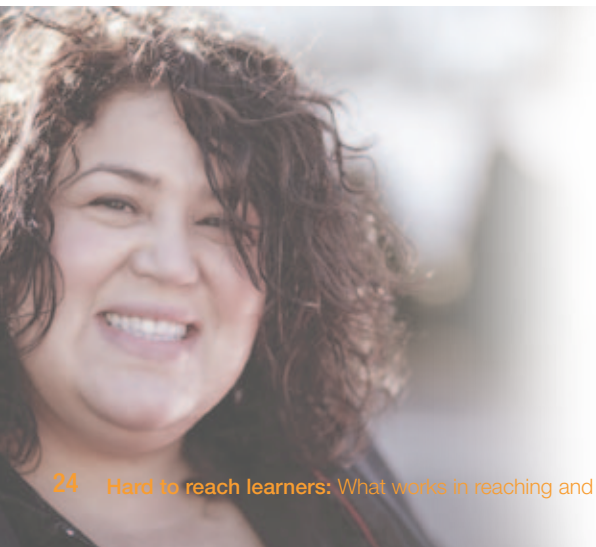
Course delivery and retention

Appropriately experienced staff

Qualified staff who have experience with hard-to-reach learners and understand their needs are very important to the success of learners (Falk and Millar 2001). It is they who can make the content interesting and relevant to the learners. Building trust with learners is important; to support this, learners should be encouraged to engage with the design of the course and content covered. Providing content that is interesting to learners is also essential.

Flexibility in content delivery

A flexible and adaptable approach to course design and content, to reflect and respond to the needs of learners helps to retain learners in courses (Champney, Davey and Lawrence 2005). Being flexible can also cultivate learner persistence by ensuring learners identify their own goals and make decisions about their learning. This increases self-directed learning and ownership.

Location

Having the course delivered in the right place has also proven to be important because it reduces barriers such as the cost and availability of transport and enables connection with the local community. This also helps develop the social capital of the local community and allows for links with other services in the area, providing a more holistic service to learners.

Assessment

Assessment plays an important role for hard-to-reach learners. Sensitive and careful assessment can help to engage and retain learners. Adjusting assessment procedures supports learners, encourages confidence and trust and enables learners to feel safe and competent.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

RPL is a useful way to assess the prior skills and knowledge of learners and can assist in attracting hard-to-reach learners. RPL can build learners' confidence and may reduce the time they need to gain a qualification. RPL can also assist by showing potential learners that learning has practical aspects that can be used in everyday life and working situations.

Structured programs have been developed, such as the 'Life Experience Counts' program which is widely available in New South Wales, through which people who participate can:

- gain a basic understanding of the RPL concept
- identify the skills and expertise they have gained from life experience
- produce a simple portfolio that demonstrates their skills.

According to the OECD (2007) RPL is an important element in developing and supporting the knowledge and skills base necessary for Australia's social and economic future. RPL ensures that existing knowledge and skills are recognised; provides an opportunity for individuals to continue upgrading their skills and knowledge and supports development of confidence and self worth in individuals. Also, RPL can be useful as a mechanism for learners to access formal learning pathways.

Specific challenges in rural locations

Rural locations provide unique challenges for engaging and delivering courses to hard-to-reach learners. They include isolation, distance, limited program offerings and having access to a reliable Internet service.

Specific barriers for rural learners include transport, access and childcare (Brooks et al 2001). Attracting a viable number of learners to a program can also be a challenge and can lead to a lack of choice in what is available and may increase cost (Tulett 2001). Specific issues for providers include reduced contact between teaching staff to support professional development and sharing of resources and ideas.

Best practice principles cont'd

Addressing barriers for rural learners in Shropshire (UK)

In January 2005, following an approach from the Department for Education and Skills, Switch on Shropshire (a partnership project establishing broadband access centres), established a Testbed Learning Community (TLC) project in Craven Arms.

Craven Arms is a small rural market town. It had a population of less than 3000, no formal further education provision and no culture of learning. As a result of other projects Craven Arms had established links with a nearby Further Education provider, identified barriers to learning and the need to develop a learning culture in the community. It focused on hard-to-reach, reluctant and disengaged learners.

Consultations were carried out with the local community and travel was cited as an important barrier to learning. Therefore the TLC was located at the Craven Arms Community Centre a pivotal point in the community. More than 80 per cent of people who took part in the initial research chose the community centre as the learning venue. The TLC established links with local residents, employers and education providers. As a result, the program successfully delivered tailored learning to hundreds of local residents and businesses.

Factors for success

- Establishing a steering group with strong representation from individuals from the local community and key agencies.
- An emphasis on learner-led activity, not provider-led.
- An operations team which managed learner recruitment, tutor relationships, learning progression and new course development.
- Engaging a Community Learning Organiser who managed and set-up a range of interest-led learning programmes and worked in partnership with local community organisations and learning providers.
- Providing and ensuring easy access to support, information and learning opportunities for all members of the local community.
- Establishing links with local employers and learning providers to enhance course provision.
- Learner recruitment strategies including direct mail-outs to local businesses, flyers distributed through schools and the local café, advertising in the local press, foot traffic in the community centre and word-of-mouth.

In its first six months (during 2005) the TLC delivered more than 30 courses to 100 learners including legislative compliance (basic food hygiene), practical (hedge laying) and ICT (European Computer Driving Licence) courses. All were offered based on learner need and local demand. Many legislative compliance courses were provided at low or no cost to the employer.

An important part of every learning experience in the TLC was the Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) session. This session helped each learner identify where they wished to go next and arranging referral of the learner to the most appropriate provider to meet their individual needs.

Case Study 6

Key outcomes:

The TLC responded to local need by connecting learning demand with course provision. In the first 15 months of the program 489 learning opportunities were delivered. Most learners were between 30–60 years; the youngest was aged eight, and the oldest 90.

The program established links with local businesses and courses were run to suit local need. For example, hygiene and safety, basic first aid, and health and safety programs run in the workplace were popular with small catering companies which were not usually able to afford to release staff for training.

Interest and participation in courses grew steadily, indicating a shift in the attitude of Craven Arms to a town which seeks and values learning.

The TLC empowered the community by developing self-organised learning groups. These included the Genealogy Group, which liaised directly with tutors, and a group of environment volunteers who wanted to pass on the skills they had learnt to other volunteers.

Gelade and Fox (2008) found that enterprises in rural and regional areas have adapted to the lack of training provision by relying heavily on their own workplace training systems or meeting immediate skilling needs by tailoring a solution using a mix of options from TAFE institutes, private registered training organisations and in-house trainers. This highlights the need for providers to consider how best they can take their services to the learners (including those who employers are paying for the service provision), especially when geographical distances between the learner and the learning institution are great.

E-learning

The use of different methods of delivery and mixed methods can attract hard-to-reach learners, especially when content is based on their interests (Bowman 2007). E-learning in particular offers flexibility to learners who may otherwise find it difficult to attend training centres. However, for learners whose skills and confidence are low, e-learning needs to be accompanied by human contact and support (Tulett 2001).

In her review of 14 e-learning projects, Bowman (2007) suggested that the use of local community leaders to support the projects and provide expertise via tutoring and information to others was very useful in ensuring success. Effective tools that may have other applications were developed by the projects including the professional development programs for community leaders, the *E-learning on a shoestring Resource Kit.*

Bowman (2007) suggested that to engage learners in e-learning successfully it was essential to provide considerable support, allow adequate time to induct the learners and offer relevant course topics. The Australian Flexible Learning Framework has developed a *Resource Kit for Creative Community Engagement* to assist providers and learners with e-learning.

Further information on resourcing e-learning can be found at creativecommunity.flexiblelearning.net.au

Building the skills of learners

Best practice in working with hard-to-reach learners includes building both 'soft' and 'hard' skills to enhance learner confidence as well as competence. This enables progression to further study or work.

- **Soft** skills are those which give the learner increased confidence, support better attendance and increase engagement with course content.
- **Hard** skills are the actual skills learners gain from undertaking the training that specifically relates to the topic of the course.

Embedding literacy supports the development of hard skills in learners (see earlier section). Also, building in incentives for learner persistence, such as mapping attendance and providing awards for best attendance, benefit retention (Nash and Kallenbach 2009).

Victoria's *A-frame: A framework for quality pre-accredited teaching and learning* is an important resource for providers aiming to develop employability skills and achieve positive results for learners and their communities. The eight employability skills listed in the framework are those identified by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Business Council of Australia:

- communication
- teamwork
- problem solving
- initiative and enterprise
- planning and organising
- self-management
- learning
- technology.

These skills are applicable not only to job seekers but to all those needing to improve their abilities to engage in the community and to develop learning persistence. Case Study 7 highlights the benefits of building both the soft and hard skills of learners.

Case Study 7

Get back to work (UK)

This project worked with people made redundant when a factory closed. Many redundant workers had a poor understanding of English. Based on consultations with the workers, IT training was provided. The aims of the project were:

- to improve their English literacy skills
- to provide transferable skills
- to enable workers to find suitable work.

Best practice elements

- Responding quickly to the community in need and consulting with them to find training to support transitions into sustained employment.
- Providing translators to enable the best interaction with the community.
- Recruiting trainers with community languages to break down barriers and enhance participation and retention.
- Providing a purpose for training by starting a weekly club for the community to access resources for finding work. The club also increased the support available by tapping into other funding bodies.

Participant outcomes

- Confidence to move to mainstream provision of training.
- Good attendance at language skills classes.
- Requests for other learning opportunities.
- Employment.

Offering training in the workplace

Building links with employers is a useful strategy to engage hard-to-reach learners. Embedded training can enhance personal as well as organisational development. The key is to understand the needs of employers and build these into the design and delivery of the training.

In Case Study 8 a brokerage team helped employers identify a provider which could deliver the required training. Suitable workplace training programs were developed in conjunction with employers and employees to meet the identified training needs. Flexible design allowed training content to change depending on the organisation's circumstances.

Surrey Essential Skills Flagship Network (UK)

The aim of the project was to bring essential skills and training to low-skilled workers in Surrey (south-east England) in their workplace. The Flagship Network focused on adults working in companies without the training capacity to meet these needs.

Key features of the program design

- Follow-up all employer leads through a direct phone call, e-mail or an intermediary broker.
- Brokers maintain excellent records of progress with all companies.
- Companies link with a provider which develops customised on-site training based on identified needs of employers and workers.
- Government funding for training is accessed thereby reducing the costs to employers.
- The training was contextualised by using workplace materials for learning activities. Some courses combined IT and language training.

Some challenges

- Finding training rooms, and finding replacement staff to cover those attending training.
- Sourcing extra funding to help those not eligible for government funding.
- Developing a training culture in organisations.

Overall benefits

- No travel for workers to get to training resulting in greater staff participation.
- Courses run at times that suited the needs of the organisation.

Employers supported training by:

- demonstrating a positive attitude towards workers completing training with line managers used to help recruit participants
- providing basic skills training prior to, or while, training for a qualification.

Benefits to employers

- Increased productivity.
- Workers required less supervision.
- Workers were better able to understand instructions and complete their own paperwork.
- Workers' confidence increased.
- Improvements to customer service standards and communication skills.
- Workers gained a nationally-recognised qualification.
- Workers who participated in the training developed bonds with each other and this created a positive environment.

Providers supported training by:

- communicating with employers to ensure the quality of the course
- developing strong relationships between the training provider's coordinators, tutors and the manager or key contact within the organisation
- addressing any problems or concerns promptly through regular contact with the company, particularly at the beginning of the course.

Overall results

- Surrey providers now collaborate very effectively, targets for widening participation in the workplace are being met, and contextualised materials for essential skills have been developed.
- Participation rates and achievement of learners have exceeded the target by more than 30 per cent.
- An effective brokerage model exists whereby all training 'leads' are dealt with by appropriate providers.
- Small and medium sized organisations, as well as large employers such as the National Health Service and armed services, were involved. Courses have been delivered to almost 100 small, medium and large organisations.
- A training provider co-ordinators' network and forum with regular scheduled meetings and training events was established. The expertise of the co-ordinators has proven to be a key to the continued success in engaging learners.
- A pool of specialist workplace tutors was recruited and trained to build capacity.
- Reduced redundancies among workers, since fewer people lack the essential skills needed for their job.
- High-quality contextualised teaching resources which are used to support delivery across the county.
- Some workers who attended training have sought further training. This included specific workplace skills training, nationally-recognised qualifications and IT training.
- Good relationship between tutors and employees led to increased attendance and interest in the training from other staff.
- Good customer service from the provider secures further training contracts.

Providing support services

Barriers to learning often extend beyond the educational sphere. They can include lack of childcare, poor access to transport to attend programs, little free time and the inhibiting financial costs of undertaking training. These types of barriers can be overcome by linking education providers with other organisations, such as childcare centres and the workplace, to provide services to overcome the barriers. Providing appropriate support services is particularly important for learners who experience multiple barriers. A strategy for assisting learners to overcome multiple barriers by providing one-on-one support and building confidence is described in Case Study 9.

It is also useful to provide practical learning support within the training provider to improve the learner's chances of finishing training. Support services should be flexible, accessible and tailored to meet learners' requirements.

Case Study 9

Peer support and mutual learning at White Lodge (UK)

The Adult and Community Support Service at White Lodge supports adults with a physical disability to develop interests and achieve individual goals. Services offered include therapy services, creative arts, leisure and life skills, IT skills development, supported volunteering, and support in finding employment.

The aim of the program at White Lodge is to enhance the skills of individuals, both volunteer and learner, so they can become more independent. This is achieved through providing:

- one-on-one support to overcome barriers and engage learners
- support designed for people with a disability and their families.

Best practice

- Link a learner with a volunteer who also has a disability. This provides a positive role model and also helps the volunteer learn new skills.
- Give learners transferable skills, such as learning to use a computer.
- Involving participants in social interaction benefits both the learner and volunteer.
- Develop more self confidence in both the learner and volunteer.
- Build the work-readiness of the volunteer.

Summary:

Best practice for course delivery and retention

- Employ adequately trained staff who understand the individual's learning needs and can change the delivery style to suit.
- Be flexible in the delivery style, design and content of the program so strong relationships with learners can be developed, putting them at the centre of the learning process.
- Use appropriate and sensitive assessment procedures to support learners and encourage confidence and trust.
- Build the skills of learners; this encourages learner confidence and willingness to try more difficult tasks.
- Consider the opportunities to offer training in the workplace. Build links with employers to provide training that suits both employers and employees.
- Ensure that RPL is available. It provides a way of validating the learner's experiences and enticing them into further learning.
- Rural locations provide specific challenges such as small class size which need to be considered if training is to be successful.
- E-learning provides flexibility and may be useful for attracting hard-to-reach learners who are unable to attend a learning centre by bringing the learning to them.
- Provide practical learning support within the organisation and make links with other organisations to broaden the range of support available for individual learners.

Learner progression, completion and career guidance

Progression and completion

Champney, Davey and Lawrence (2005) have identified five elements common to successful learner progression. These are:

- identifying progress
- mentoring
- support
- collaboration and childcare
- cost of learning and course style.

Building on learners' past achievements is a good way to encourage them to progress to higher levels of education. RPL can help by awarding qualifications or part qualifications based on experiences. Providing mentoring is another way to support learners, encourage them to finish courses and assist with successful employment. Providing learners with a vision and clear purpose for training can also help them to complete their training. Dickie (2000) advises using tailored marketing techniques which tap into the aspirations of learners and provide a purpose for undertaking training.

Career guidance

A 2002 study on information, guidance and counselling services recognised that career guidance can play an important role in better allocation of human resources in the changing world of work and in an ageing society (OECD 2002). Helping those who are disengaged from the labour force to see the links between education and employment and their own aspirations, leads to better results. (Champney, Davey and Lawrence 2005).

Case Study 10

Community-based career guidance, Morrisons (AUSTRALIA)

Morrisons, a long established Victorian ACE provider in Melbourne's outer-east, was at the forefront of responding to the OECD's recommendations that Australia develop a stronger culture of career development (OECD 2002).

An analysis of the Crossroads model (Beddie, Lorey and Pamphilon, 2005) identified the following benefits of explicit consideration of career development.

- Benefits stem from career guidance services conducted face-to-face in a community setting by people with appropriate qualifications in career guidance and adult learning. Those offering advice and guidance need to be familiar with local labour market conditions and the variety of formal and informal learning options available in the community.

- Career guidance and advice is most appropriate when it is community-based, affordable and impartial. That is, when it is one step removed from agencies offering other assistance such as welfare, job matching or training.

- Timely personal intervention in career decisions is needed, because most adults disengaged from the labour force are not likely to be proactive in seeking career guidance. In this context career advice or guidance should be offered as early as possible to enable people to make informed decisions about their options.

- Local conditions will determine how an impartial, community-based career guidance service operates. To be sustainable, they will usually require a partnership funding model, with contributions from various public agencies and some fee-for-service revenue.

- Providers need to develop their counselling skills and build their capacity for relationship building, negotiation, policy development, marketing, financial management and evaluation.

Evaluation

There is much value for providers in routinely undertaking evaluation of training. It is important to provide, where possible, measurable outcomes as a way to test the soundness of the training and also, potentially, to gain further funding. Feedback from participants helps training organisations build in changes to their delivery with a view to enhancing the learner experience and making training more suitable for the target groups. Good program evaluation can also provide results that improve the understanding of the outcomes for particular groups in the community.

Summary:

Best practice for learner progression, completion and career guidance

- Learner progression and success are more likely when what is meant by success, and how it will be measured, are identified and defined as part of the design and conduct of a learning program.

- Providing learners with mentoring support encourages them to complete their training.

- Providing follow-up support when learners are employed helps them to adjust to the work environment and encourages continued employment.

- Provide effective career guidance and advice about the potential of courses to lead to employment or further studies.

- Undertake evaluation to gain further insights into how to enhance the learner's experience, measure the outcomes of training and access further funding.

Specific learner groups

This section discusses four groups of learners who are likely to thrive in an ACE setting:

- **vulnerable workers**
- **young people**
- **Indigenous Australians**
- **people with a disability.**

Vulnerable workers

In Australia, some of the fastest growing areas of the economy have a high concentration of vulnerable workers. This includes service industries such as retail, accommodation and cultural and recreational services.

Vulnerable workers tend to be in low-paid jobs, are often under-employed, and face job insecurity and limited job opportunities. They might not be able to access entitlements such as superannuation, sick leave, maternity leave and have little if any access to training and development. For some, their vulnerability stems from low skills or poor qualifications.

Women and young people are over-represented in this group. To some extent this reflects the choices women make to balance family and work commitments or the nature of youth transitions. According to Pocock (2009), casual and low-paid women suffer financially and in terms of career development later in life because they missed out on training earlier in their careers.

Training is recognised as an important way to increase skills and move out of low-paid, vulnerable sectors of the economy. A recent study from Canada suggests that low wage, less educated, non-permanent workers were less likely to undertake employer-supported training than those in more stable, higher-paid jobs (Cooke, Zeytinoglu and Chowhan 2009).

Main barriers to training for vulnerable workers

Pocock (2009) suggests the following factors deter vulnerable workers from undertaking training.

- Lack of finances. Vulnerable workers cannot easily forgo the income they would otherwise earn to attend training, nor can they meet associated costs such as transport, course fees, purchase of materials and childcare.
- Time constraints due to home and work commitments.
- Many forms of vulnerable work are physically demanding leaving little energy for training.
- Due to the nature of vulnerable work there are limited chances for career advancement or a significant increase in pay as a result of acquiring new or different skills. Revisions of the incentives necessary for workers to undertake training are needed.
- A low level of employer investment in training.
- There is a high incidence of casual work among vulnerable workers which results in low skills utilisation.
- Vulnerable workers often work unpredictable or unsocial hours and have excessive time demands from work so undertaking training can be difficult.
- Vulnerable workers often experience job instability and high turnover so therefore do not undertake on-the-job training because they are not part of the standard workforce.
- Like the barriers experienced by other hard-to-reach learners, fear and low confidence also affect vulnerable workers.
- Low levels of literacy and numeracy can discourage workers from participating in training as they feel concerned about their skills in these areas.

Johnson et al (2009) also suggest the barriers to individual demand for skills development include lack of advice, information or career guidance.

Best practice

Given the list outlined above on the previous page what assists vulnerable workers to undertake training? Much of what is outlined below mirrors the best practice set out in overarching strategies.

Identify the rewards

An important factor in reaching this group is demonstrating the financial return to the worker. If undertaking training and gaining qualifications does not result in better pay, the vulnerable low-paid worker is likely to remain a hard-to-reach learner. Pocock (2009) emphasises the importance of reward for skill acquisition, suggesting that training alone is not a panacea to improve the circumstances of low-paid workers; other changes are needed.

Demonstrate the relevance

For training to be attractive to vulnerable workers there needs to be a link with the job. Employer support is also important (as seen in Case Study 8). This can take the form of access to flexible working hours and/or paid time to study.

Offer workplace learning

Locating training programs in the workplace greatly enhances access to learning, and can overcome the fear and lack of self-esteem often cited by this group as holding them back from undertaking training. The work environment is familiar and does not have the same connections with the formal education sector, thus providing a safe and accessible environment in which to learn (NRDC 2007). Encouraging a strong culture of learning in the workplace can also help workers to undertake training (Johnson et al 2009).

Include skills recognition and needs analysis

Take account of the existing skills and skills development requirements of the specific group of workers, so that they do not undertake unnecessary training and/or remedial needs are identified. The benefits of developing the basic skills of vulnerable workers are not limited to the workplace; these skills are used in other aspects of their lives and also benefit the community in which they live (NRDC 2007).

Consider the additional barriers faced by women

The link between vulnerable workers and gender is strong therefore any program design needs to consider the requirements of women. Flexible course delivery to allow women to balance their caring, working and learning responsibilities is an effective starting point. Facilitating access to services such as childcare can also reduce the barriers women experience (Johnson et al 2009).

Build in career advice

Supporting the development of career structures and reward for skills acquisition is also important. Best practice should include some form of advice or career guidance to enable workers to plan and develop skills relevant to the employment market. Recent research into training for Indigenous Australians, which has broader relevance, shows the importance of linking training and employment opportunities as well as providing high-quality mentoring for learners and employers during training and continuing into employment (Giddy et al 2009).

Case Study 11

Benefits of embedded workplace training (NZ)

This case study looks at a recent review of five workplaces in the health and disability sector in New Zealand that embedded training for care and support workers. The workers were generally low-paid, casual and considered low skilled. Many of these workers also had low levels of literacy and numeracy, making study a challenge.

The major benefits of embedding workplace training identified in the research are classified under three headings:

Service delivery and client benefits

Improvements in client outcomes, quality of care, a greater sense of professionalism, a greater awareness of client needs and what care and support workers should or should not do in relation to these were seen. Also, there was an increase in incident reporting and an adoption of a more holistic approach due to better understanding of the way care and support was delivered.

Organisational benefits

The benefits to the organisations included a reduction in employee turnover and improved retention, higher levels of quality assurance, the ability to attract higher quality and younger applicants, improved planning and work processes and improved workplace culture and teamwork. Also, organisations experienced efficiency gains, including better matching of workers against client needs.

Employee benefits

Benefits to employees consisted of the clarification of care and support worker role and its value to the workplace, a career pathway and greater likelihood of career progression and recognition of existing skills. Also employees experienced better wages, job security and working conditions, improved self-esteem confidence and job satisfaction and felt safer due to a better understanding of responsibilities and risks. A key achievement for employees was the gaining of a qualification.

Summary

The main challenge for ACE providers when trying to engage vulnerable workers is to design programs that are relevant to the workers, which attract them and gain the support of employers. Employer support is important because:

- workers undertaking training may need access to flexible working arrangements or other incentives to encourage participation
- training needs to provide rewards for employers and employees
- locating the training in the workplace makes it less threatening to workers.

Young people at risk

Pathways and transitions are very important for young people and can be a risky time where disengagement from education and employment can have long-term negative effects. This is particularly true when the young person has not completed school or post-school qualifications.

Engaging hard-to-reach young people requires specialised techniques which meet their specific needs. The policy direction announced by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in the *Compact with Young Australians* aims to increase young people's engagement with education and training pathways. It also places increased obligations on young people to be actively involved in education, training or work.

Australia's young people

A report for the Office for Youth of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), *State of Australia's Young People: a report on the social, economic, health and family lives of young people* (Muir et al, 2009) found:

- young people aged 12-24 years account for one fifth of the total Australia's population
- most live with their families in the city
- 6.4 per cent are Indigenous Australians
- one in five was born overseas and speaks a language other than English at home
- young people have a relatively lower rate of disability than the population as a whole
- one in four experiences some form of mental health issue during each year.

A report for the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) by the Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning at the 2009 University of Melbourne, *How Young People are Faring* (CPELL, 2009) found:

- 84 per cent of young people aged 15-19 years are currently engaged in education, training or the labour force

- of the 16 per cent not fully engaged, females are slightly more likely than males to be marginalised
- most in this age group have achieved either year 12 or a non-school qualification.

Main barriers for young people

There is a strong relationship between education and outcomes for young people and most are successful in the transition from school to work (ACER 2005). There are however, particular groups that do not do as well and may need additional support to progress to full-time employment or education and training. This includes:

- Indigenous Australian young people
- young people from rural and remote locations
- those from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds (Muir et al 2009).

Location

Location is an important indicator of education outcomes for young people. Almost 55 per cent of 24 year olds living in low SES areas have no post-school qualification (FYA 2009). Similarly, young people living in rural or remote locations are almost 50 per cent less likely to hold either a higher VET qualification or university degree than those in other areas. However, even though young people in rural locations are less likely to hold a VET qualification, it is still an important form of education for them, with about one third having attained a VET qualification (FYA 2009).

Poor literacy

Young people who are early school leavers or remain disengaged often have low levels of literacy and numeracy. Many young people who have low levels of literacy also experience low confidence and self-esteem. This combination can inhibit participation in education and work.

Other issues

There are other issues that disconnect young people from learning or stop them from re-engaging. These include:

- involvement in crime and the justice system
- learning and behavioural difficulties
- drug or alcohol abuse
- homelessness.

These are difficult barriers to overcome but linking with other support services may assist in providing the appropriate support to overcome some of these issues.

Best practice

Staff skills, participation and expectations

The ability to be flexible (within well articulated and clear boundaries) and responsive to the needs of young people is important. Staff that engaged effectively with young people and treated them as adults were found to be more successful (Cole 2004).

Participation in the development of the learning program supports learner engagement, particularly when combined with setting goals and developing clear expectations about the program.

Class size is also important with smaller classes better for young people. Where the young people are below the age of 18, the structure and management of learning environments need to reflect duty-of-care responsibilities.

Providing individual support

Supporting young people who have previously disengaged from learning as they re-engage is important. Mentoring by suitable individuals can offer excellent support that encourages and inspires young people to take on learning (Cole 2004). Mentoring can also be useful to develop study skills and habits that will help young learners to succeed. Another valuable support is one-on-one tutoring which helps specifically with the content of the learning and ways to tackle learning effectively.

Pathway planning

Pathway planning and career guidance can help young learners understand the links between education and employment as well as provide assistance to those who need support. Partnerships between schools and other service providers can also assist learners at risk during transition by providing better pastoral care and taking shared responsibility for learners. Hillman (forthcoming) suggests that a crucial factor in the success of low-performing school students is having a solid plan.

Case Study 12

Musical tasters in Guildford and Godalming (UK)

This program aimed to engage young adults who lived in disadvantaged areas in a taster session (two hours) centred on either art or music. The intent was to give those who attended a picture of what it would be like to do a higher education course in one of these areas, as well as a chance to practise and develop a new skill and explore jobs in the industry.

How young people were engaged

A challenge of the program was to locate young people to recruit to the program. This was achieved by contacting employment providers and local charities working with young people. Once young people were located recruitment was relatively easy because the course content was interesting to them.

Learning

Practical activities involving making music and art media design were used to engage youth in learning. Each of the sessions also covered some of the theory that would be covered in a course such as music theory, history or the biology and anatomy behind singing.

Pathways

Sessions explored potential careers and provided information on learning pathways so young people understood what was involved. Raising aspirations of the young people involved was a large component of the sessions. Learner packs were provided to the young people who attended, which included information on local course offerings and support services.

Summary

Young people are a diverse population. Most are either engaged in education, training or the labour force and most have achieved either year 12 or a non-school qualification.

Transitions from school to employment or further study for these young people are usually successful. However, certain groups of young people experience disadvantage; these include Indigenous Australians, young people from rural and remote locations and those from low SES background.

Best practice strategies that support younger learners include offering mentoring, small class sizes, relevant context and good pathway planning and support.

Indigenous Australians

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people together make up approximately 2.6 per cent of Australia's population (ABS 2006a). Indigenous Australians have diverse cultural backgrounds and care must be taken when trying to describe their common characteristics.

Indigenous people are mostly located in metropolitan areas but a substantial number live in remote or very remote areas. Thirty eight per cent of the Indigenous population is aged under 15 years. Only 19 per cent of the non-Indigenous population is in this age group (ABS 2006a).

Indigenous people often experience multiple disadvantages and have poorer outcomes in education, health, the labour force and earnings (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Services Provision 2009). Their life expectancy is also significantly lower than that of the non-Indigenous population and they are more likely to suffer poor health which can act as a barrier to participation in education and work.

In 2006, Indigenous people were less likely to have non-school qualifications; with the biggest gap in qualifications for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the 25-34 year old age groups (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Services Provision 2009). Unemployment rates for Indigenous people are also higher than the rate for non-Indigenous people and their labour force participation rates are lower, across all age groups. The differences in educational attainment are reflected in the generally lower incomes of Indigenous people.

Indigenous people living in remote areas are less likely to have a non-school qualification, less likely to be in the labour force, much more likely to be unemployed and more likely to earn a lower income than those living in non-remote areas (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Services Provision 2009).

Indigenous patterns of participation in VET can also contribute to disadvantage. Although they participate at a high rate (4.3 per cent of all VET learners identified as Indigenous in 2008), Indigenous people tend to undertake lower-level courses that have poorer employment outcomes. In addition, successful completion rates continue to be lower than the rates for all learners and withdrawal rates are higher (Saunders et al 2003).

According to NCVER (2007), Indigenous learners experience poorer employment outcomes with 62 per cent employed post study, compared with 67 per cent of the total learner population. These rates are even lower in industries such as finance, manufacturing, property and business services and wholesale and retail (Saunders et al 2003). Findings from a forthcoming paper drawing on Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) data show that after completing school, Indigenous young people are more likely to commence VET studies than attend university (NCVER (LSAY) forthcoming).

Main barriers for Indigenous Australians

Indigenous Australians face similar barriers to participation to non-Indigenous people who are disadvantaged, but their degree of disadvantage is generally higher and they also experience a complex mix of disadvantage. For example, Indigenous Australians face difficulties because of their lower literacy and numeracy skills, and while this is a severe obstacle to participation in higher-level education, tackling it is not enough to overcome disadvantage (McGlusky and Thaker 2006, NCVER (LSAY) forthcoming).

Best practice

Community ownership, identity and culture

Involvement with developing training and its ownership by the community are vital for success in providing training for Indigenous people. The more authority that communities are able to exercise in all aspects of training development and delivery, the more successful the training will be (Kral and Falk 2004). Likewise, it is necessary to establish 'true' partnerships with Indigenous learners. This provides a way for human and financial resources to be shared and reduce duplication of effort (Balatti et al 2004).

Incorporating identities, cultures, knowledge and values into training supports Indigenous Australians' learning. A valuable way of doing this is by embracing Indigenous knowledge in the recognition of prior learning (Kenyon, Saunders and Gibb 1996). Recognition provides a space in which Indigenous people feel comfortable with learning (Marika et al 2004).

Course design and delivery

Flexible course design, content and delivery are also very important for meeting local needs (Kral and Falk 2004). Achieving this requires flexible systems, policies and funding which support training providers to tailor training programs and training delivery to suit Indigenous Australians. It is essential to develop and improve the reliability, relevance and useability of information and communication technologies for training (Young, Guenther and Boyle 2007).

Staff

Having quality staff is vitally important. Commitment and understanding from all staff who are involved at various levels of the training system, from policy development to teaching delivery, is essential (Kemmis et al 2006).

Support

Extensive support is generally needed to retain Indigenous learners. In particular it is important to provide support to improve literacy and numeracy. (McGlusky and Thaker, 2006).

Connecting training and employment

Another aspect related to increasing retention in education is the connection between training and employment outcomes. To support positive employment outcomes a range of support services are required across financial, cultural and social needs. Partnerships with organisations outside of the training sector can also provide the necessary support in 'joined-up' services to alleviate the multiple barriers that Indigenous learners face in entering and continuing their participation in training (Miller 2005).

Attitudes of learners

Recent research by Wallace (2008) suggests that the relationship between learners' identity and the attitudes and experiences of their families and communities contributes to their behaviour and beliefs about undertaking education and training.

Effects of cultural attachment

Dockery (2009) examined the effect of cultural attachment on Indigenous participation in education and training. Dockery (2009) defines cultural attachment as the individual's engagement with customs and activities related to Indigenous culture. His findings show that in non-remote areas cultural attachment is complementary to successful participation in education, training and employment. However in remote and very remote locations, despite strong cultural attachment, the limited access to education and training disadvantages Indigenous Australians.

Successful transitions from training to work for Indigenous people (AUSTRALIA)

Case Study 13

Supporting the links between meaningful employment outcomes and training is essential for Indigenous learners. A recent report by Giddy, Lopez and Redman (2009) focused on the transition from training to employment for Indigenous people and suggests that improving employment outcomes can also lead to better social and economic wellbeing. The research highlights the importance of having jobs waiting for people on completion of their training. The authors identified the essential and desirable criteria that support successful outcomes for Indigenous employees.

The essential criteria were:
- having strong vision and understanding the importance of monitoring targets
- responding to the employment market
- maintaining strong relationships with community and business
- offering 'job related' and culturally-appropriate training
- collaborating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and the community
- providing holistic support (including mentoring)
- ensuring strong staff commitment.

Desirable criteria identified were:
- tailoring available funding to suit individual needs
- providing employment opportunities through internal enterprise
- learning from other organisations
- having alternative sources of funding.

The research found that these factors were interrelated. Organisations also highlighted the importance of having jobs waiting for people – that they need that light at the end of the tunnel.

See: http://www.ncver.edu.au/students/publications/2127.html

Summary

Indigenous Australians have particular requirements that need to be met to ensure greater success when undertaking training. These stem from multiple disadvantages which contribute to poorer participation, completion and employment outcomes.

Best practice centres on making training community focused, flexible and responsive to local needs and contexts. Flexibility in design and delivery as well as incorporation of Indigenous people's identities, cultures and knowledge are also important.

Utilising Recognition of Prior Learning is a valuable way of fully embracing Indigenous knowledge in the training sector. Staff with commitment and understanding are essential, as is the need for extensive support.

Developing partnerships with organisations outside of the training sector can provide the necessary 'joined-up' services to alleviate the multiple barriers.

Attitudes can also influence whether Indigenous people undertake training. Finally, supporting the link between meaningful employment outcomes and training is essential for Indigenous learners.

People with a disability

Increasing the participation of people with a disability is a focus of training and employment policy (OECD 2007). Recent research has shown that there are significant employment benefits for people with a disability completing a VET course (Polidano and Mavromaras 2010).

In the 2006 Census of Population and Housing, 21 per cent of the Australian population was identified as having a disability (ABS 2006b). The definition of disability is broad and takes into account of any form of disablement. People with a disability can include those with sensory impairment, intellectual disability, physical disability, social-emotional disorder and multiple disabilities. Participation in training, outcomes and learner characteristics vary by the type of disability reported. This suggests that different groups may require different support to successfully complete training.

Overall participation rates for learners with a disability have been steadily increasing though there are different patterns of participation across the levels of qualification. In 2007, 102,100 learners (6.1 per cent of the total public VET learner population) reporting a disability (NCVER 2008). Though there is variation depending on the type of disability, people with a disability generally have lower levels of previous education and undertake lower-level qualifications. Learners with a disability are less likely to enrol in AQF Certificates III and above (38 per cent in 2003) compared with all VET learners (46 per cent). Poor educational outcomes for people with a disability are compounded by other factors such as previous educational attainment, having more than one disability, or facing other barriers to participation or attainment.

Main barriers for people with a disability

Information on pathways, training options and career advice

Pathways into training for young people with a disability need to be developed before they leave school. Different pathways are needed for people who acquire a disability later in life. For some people specialist services may provide access to training.

Difficulties arise when suitable information about training options and good career guidance is not available for people with a disability (Barnet 2004). In her report on deaf learners in VET, Clark (2007) says that the available information is difficult for deaf people to use effectively due to the communication barriers they have. Additionally, Clark (2007) suggests that there needs to be a stronger connection between support and employment services, to assist the transition from VET to work.

The value of providing information about training options is demonstrated by the spinal cord injury pilot project, evaluated by West and Warth (2002), where a high proportion of the participants planned to undertake further vocational study on completion of the project.

Educational achievement

A study by Cavallaro et al (2005) examined the statistical data relating to people with a disability in VET.

It identified that people with a disability had lower levels of prior educational achievement than those without a disability. More than half (54 per cent) of VET learners with a disability left school at or before the end of year 10 compared with 39 per cent of all VET learners. Over 60 per cent of those with a learning disability or an intellectual disability left school at or before the end of year 10. This may represent a barrier to participation.

In 2003 the subject completion rate was 75 per cent for people who reported a disability compared with 82 per cent for all VET learners. The proportion of people with a disability who completed an AQF qualification (13 per cent) was also lower than for all VET learners (18 per cent) (Cavallaro et al 2005).

Karmel and Nguyen (2008) report on the effects of disability and educational background on VET completion rates. Their findings indicate that for some types of disability, completion rates were affected more by other learner characteristics (most notably prior education) than by the disability itself.

Employment outcomes

Recent research (Polidano and Mavromaras 2010) shows that there are significant employment benefits for people with a disability who complete a VET course. However, the benefits varied by disability type and people reporting a mental health illness experienced the least benefit. The 2003 Student Outcomes Survey (NCVER, 2003), indicates that graduates with hearing and visual disabilities had higher employment outcomes (64 per cent and 61 per cent respectively), while those with chronic illness, physical disability or other disability had the lowest (43 per cent, 45 per cent and 45 per cent respectively).

Best practice

Support

The level and type of supports required by people with a disability to participate successfully in training varies, with some learners requiring no support at all and others requiring significant support. As highlighted the type of disability affects participation, achievement and outcomes differently, and to try to build support services that are 'one size fits all' will not be useful. A recent report by Karmel and Nguyen (2008) supports these findings stating:

> *"Overall, the significant point to emerge is that it is not helpful to treat students with a disability as one group. The different disability groups have students with different background characteristics, and the direct effect of the disability on academic performance differs between groups (Karmel and Nguyen 2008)."*

An individual learner's chance of successfully completing their VET studies may be improved if they access additional support (Montague and Hopkins 2002). It may be useful for providers to consider linking with other services to provide appropriate support.

Practical experience

A common theme in the literature is that people with a disability whose training involves practical experience in the workplace are more likely to find employment (Clark 2007, Guenther, Falk and Arnott 2008, Dawe 2004). Training targeted to specific employment opportunities or career pathways is also more likely to lead to employment (Moskos 2007, Guenther et al 2008).

Partnerships

Partnerships between training organisations, employment agencies and employers are valuable in creating opportunities for work experience and targeted training opportunities. Several case studies have demonstrated how these strategies work (ATEC 2003, Ziguras and Kleidon 2005). Good partnerships can help in developing career pathways and training that is targeted to employment opportunities.

Case Study 14

Learner support (UK)

The aims of the project were to extend further education opportunities to people with a mental health issue who would not normally be able to access this training. For this purpose a specific course was designed to deal with the needs of people with a mental health issue and increase their attendance rates. Features of the program were that it:

- employed two dedicated staff, both with special skills in mental health
- developed a curriculum framework for people with mental health issues which led to increased self-esteem, confidence and communication
- provided one-to-one support for learners
- had small learner groups of five-six people
- offered courses in smaller components to support completion and positive outcomes for learners
- accessed support from external organisations to support learners with a mental health issue.

Benefits to learners

- Learners who have completed the course have progressed to either further mainstream study, found employment or are involved in voluntary positions.
- Increased self-esteem and confidence.

Benefits to providers

- Other learners are disclosing their disability more readily to staff employed for this project.
- Staff development sessions have been provided to other staff to raise awareness.
- Increased support for all learners which allows practitioners to teach more effectively.

Summary

Diversity among people with a disability makes it complex to provide 'one size fits all' solutions. People with a disability tend not to do as well in VET courses and tend towards lower-level qualifications. To some extent, these factors influence their outcomes. However, poor information on training options, pathways and career advice hinders effective participation in training and employment. Lower levels of prior education impact on the educational achievement of people with a disability in VET.

Best practice for people with a disability centres on providing good support on various levels, according to individual need. Also, providing practical experience can assist in securing employment. Partnerships are also important because they can create opportunities for work experience and targeted training opportunities for people with a disability. Recent research highlights the benefits of undertaking VET studies for people with a disability to gain meaningful employment outcomes.

Conclusion

The best practice principles outlined in this report provide the basis for ACE providers to effectively engage with and build relationships with hard-to-reach learners. Some or all of these principles may already be in place in the ACE sector. ACE, therefore, can draw on this experience, combining it with new learnings to operate effectively in the new environment.

ACE providers are frequently situated in the very places, both metropolitan and rural, where the target populations live and work. Providers can draw on their flexibility and innovation in the provision of courses specifically designed to meet the needs of individuals in a non-threatening environment. All these features are key elements that support positive engagement with hard-to-reach learners.

This report offers different ways to enhance current practices that help to engage communities and provide opportunities for meaningful consultation to develop the training experience for both learners and providers. Accessing data helps develop a sound understanding of the social, economic and geographic attributes of communities and helps all levels of government provide appropriate and meaningful services that truly connect with communities and meet their needs. Some providers may be able to enhance their practice by using the available statistics, which can help build profiles of program demand and the region's training needs.

Best practice for hard-to-reach learners centres on four stages that all have an interdependent relationship with the learner at the centre (see Figure 1). While all of these principles need not be applied all of the time to ensure success, tailoring of the principles to suit particular circumstances and ensuring the right combination of these approaches will support the best outcomes.

Strategies to engage and retain vulnerable workers; young people; Indigenous Australians and people with a disability were considered with more detailed information about these groups and the particular strategies that have been shown to be successful in engaging and retaining these groups, provided to assist ACE providers.

Case studies are interspersed through the report and are intended to provoke thinking about what ideas from best practice might be useful to Victorian ACE providers. The case studies highlight new ways of taking the learning to the learner, supporting communities to build their social capital, developing learner persistence and how to engage with employers to help to provide better opportunities for some of the lowest paid.

Taking the learning to the learners enables ACE providers to sidestep potential barriers which hold learners back. It also helps communities build their social capital thereby assisting social cohesion and helping to ameliorate the compounding factors of disadvantage. Developing learner persistence enhances both learner and community capacity by building the skills of the learner and developing learner confidence and goals for learning.

Research shows using RPL is another way to encourage hard-to-reach learners. Using innovative ways to recognise current skills and develop the areas that are required to award lower-level qualifications is useful for building pathways to higher-level qualifications and to encourage hard-to-reach learners into education.

Linked with this is the challenge of providing training that leads to sustainable employment. Research has shown that it is the higher-level qualifications that produce good employment outcomes. The difficulty here lies in the fact that the trying to get some hard-to-reach groups, who have little experience with education and training, into higher-level qualifications is complex. The important role played by lower-level qualifications as a means to provide a path to higher levels of education should not be overlooked. Providing adequate social supports to assist in reducing barriers has been shown to increase learner success.

Developing partnerships has the potential to increase the capacity of ACE providers and offer hard-to-reach groups the best possible learning experience. Linking with other services enables a more holistic service and can avoid duplication. For Indigenous learners 'joined-up' services can help alleviate the multiple barriers they face when entering and continuing participation in training (Miler 2005). Non-voluntary learners can also benefit from the holistic services offered by partnerships.

Building relationships with employers is another key area that may complement ACE practice. The literature highlights the many workers who have low-level skills and require further training to enhance both productivity and individual skills. Partnership with employers have been shown to benefit employers and employees but to achieve this training must be designed carefully and to meet the needs of both. Some of the benefits include overcoming resistance to learning from hard-to-reach learners located in workplaces by building a culture of learning; increases in productivity and worker satisfaction and interest in continuing further education. Benefits of training to low-skilled workers are not limited to the workplace, they flow to other aspects of their lives and also benefit the community in which they live (NRDC 2007).

There is much scope for ACE providers to play a role in reaching the learners targeted by the Victorian entitlement model. The strategies of creating non-threatening learning environments that underpin their track record in motivating reluctant learners will be important ingredients in achieving the goal of a more skilled and engaged community.

References

Access Training and Employment Centre (ATEC) 2003, *People with a disability: participation in vocational education and training: 2002 update,* Access Training and Employment Centre, Melbourne.

Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) 2009, *A Stronger ACFE – Delivering Skills for Victoria,* Department of Planning and Community Development, Melbourne.

Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFEB) 2009, *A-frame: A framework for quality pre-accredited teaching and learning*, Department of Planning and Community Development, Melbourne.

Allen Consulting Group 2006, *The Complete Package –The Value of TAFE NSW*, Department of Education and Training, Sydney.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2006, *Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians,* Cat. no.4713.0, ABS, Canberra. (ABS 2006a)

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2006, *Census of Population and Housing,* ABS, Canberra. (ABS 2006b)

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2008, *Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey Summary Results, Australia 2006* (Reissue), ABS, Canberra.

Australian Flexible Learning Framework 2007, *Resource Kit for Creative Community Engagement,* <http://creativecommunity.flexiblelearning.net.au>

Balatti, J, Gargano, L, Goldman, M, Wood, G and Woodlock, J 2004, *Improving Indigenous completion rates in mainstream TAFE: an action research approach,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Balatti, J, Black, S and Falk, I 2006, *Reframing adult literacy and numeracy course outcomes: a social capital perspective,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Barnet, K 2004, 'VET-ability: the capacity of the Australian VET system to be inclusive for people with a disability' in *Equity in vocational education and training: research readings,* ed. K. Bowman, NCVER, Adelaide, pp. 90–107.

Beddie, F, Lorey, B and Pamphilon, B 2005, *Enhancing career development: the role of community-based career guidance for disengaged adults,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Booth, AL and Snower, DJ 1996, *Acquiring Skills: Market Failures, their Symptoms and Policy Responses,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Bowman, K 2007, *Community Engagement; building creative e-learning partnerships. Strategic review of the Community Engagement Projec*t (2005 – 2007), http://pre2009.flexiblelearning.net.au/flx/webdav/site/flxsite/users/mhannan/public/Community%20Strategic%20Report.pdf

Brackertz, N 2007, *Who is hard to reach and why?* Institute of Social Research Working Paper, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne.

Brooks, G, Davies, R, Ducke, L, Hutchinson, D, Kendall, S and Wilkin, A 2001, *Progress in adult literacy: do learners learn?* The Basic Skills Agency, London.

Casey, H, Jupp, T, Grief, S, Hodge, R, Ivanic, R, Cave, O and Eldred, J 2006, *You wouldn't expect a maths teacher to teach plastering,* National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy. www.nrdc.org.uk

Cavallaro, T, Foley, P, Saunders, J and Bowman, K 2005, *People with a disability in vocational education and training: a statistical compendium,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning (CPELL) 2009, *How Young People are Faring 2009: At a glance, Foundation for Young Australians,* Melbourne.

Champney, J, Davey, M and Lawrence, S 2005, *Breaking down the barrier: Success in widening participation: a toolkit approach*, Learning and Skills Development Agency, London. www.LSDA.org.uk

Clark, C 2007, *Connecting the dots: A successful transition for deaf students from vocational education and training to employment,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Cole, P 2004, *Learning in Alternative Settings: What makes a sustainable program?* Paper presented at the Learning for Choices Expo, Sydney, 24 June, 2004.

Commonwealth of Australia, 2009 *Budget 2009-10, Ministerial Statement On Education, Employment And Workplace Relations Jobs, Productivity And Fairness – A Foundation For Recovery,* a statement by The Honourable Julia Gillard MP, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

Cooke, G, Zeytinoglu, I and Chowhan, J 2009, Barriers to training access, *Perspectives on Labour and Income* (Statistics Canada), July: pp. 14-25.

Cully, M 2008, *Working in harmony: The links between the labour market and the education and training market in Australia,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Dawe, S 2004, *Moving on from enabling courses: why do some students remain in enabling courses?* Adelaide, NCVER.

Dickie, M 2000, *A National Marketing Strategy for VET: Meeting Client Needs*, Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), Brisbane.

Dockery, M 2009, *Cultural dimensions of Indigenous participation in education and training,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Falk, I and Millar, P 2001, *Literacy and numeracy in vocational education and training: Review of research,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Gelade, S, Catts, R and Geber, R 2003, *Securing success: good practice in training people aged 45 and over who are disadvantaged in the labour market,* Workplace Education Research Consortium, The University of New England, Armidale for the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training.

Gelade, S and Fox, T 2008, *Reality check: Matching training to the needs of regional Australia,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Gelade, S, Stehlik, T and Willis, P 2006, *Learning collaborations between ACE and vocational education and training providers: Good practice partnerships,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Giddy, K, Lopez, J and Redman, A 2009, *Brokering successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes: Common themes in good-practice models,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Guenther, J, Falk, I, Arnott, A, Lucardie, D and Spiers H 2008, *Examining learning partnerships in northern Australia,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Heckman, J 1997, *Old Problem, New Despair, Boston Review,* Dec/Jan.

Hillman, K and Thomson, S (forthcoming) *Success despite the odds? Post-school pathways of low mathematics achievers in Australia,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Hoffmann-Ekstein, J 2007, *Pathways to Community Participation,* Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, Australia.

Johnson, S, Sawicki, S, Pearson, C, Lindsay, C, McQuaid, RW and Dutton, M 2009, *Employee Demand for Skills: A Review of Evidence & Policy,* UK Commission for Employment and Skills, London.

Karmel, T and Nguyen, N 2008, *Disability and learning outcomes: how much does the disability really matter?* NCVER, Adelaide.

Kenyon, R, Saunders, J and Gibb, J 1996, *Improving RPL: A training provider's perspective,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Kemmis, S, Thurling, M, Brennan Kemmis, R, Rushbrook, P and Pickersgill, R 2006, *Indigenous staffing in vocational education and training: policies, strategies and performance,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Kral, I and Falk, I 2004, *What is all that learning for? Indigenous adult English literacy practices, training, community capacity and health,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Macleod, D, Taylor, S, Zwart, R, Sachdev, D 2005, Widening adult participation in learning: *A systematic review of strategies,* Learning and Skills Development Agency, London.

Marika, B, Lane, C, Smith, H and Reinke, L 2004, 'Working towards an Indigenous training model: learning from Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare, Yirrkala', in *Equity in vocational education and training: research readings*, ed. K Bowman, NCVER, Adelaide.

McGlusky, N and Thaker, L 2006, *Literacy support for Indigenous people: current systems and practices in Queensland,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Miller, C 2005, *Aspects of training that meet Indigenous Australians' aspirations: a systematic review of research,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Montague, A and Hopkins, L 2002, *Supporting learners in training,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Moskos, M 2007, *Workforce participation in South Australia: barriers and opportunities: Report to the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology,* National Institute of Labour Studies, Flinders University, Adelaide.

Muir, K, Mullan, K, Powell, A, Flaxman, S, Thompson, D, Griffiths, M 2009, *State of Australia's Young People: a report on the social, economic, health and family lives of young people*, for Office for Youth, DEEWR, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

Nash, A and Kallenbach, S 2009, *Making it worth the stay: Findings from the New England Adult learner Persistence Project,* New England Literacy Resource Center, World Education, Boston.

National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) 2003, *Australian vocational education and training statistics: Student outcomes 2003,* NCVER, Adelaide.

National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) 2006, *Australian vocational education and training statistics: Students and courses 2005,* NCVER, Adelaide.

National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) 2007, *Australian vocational education and training statistics: Students and courses 2006,* NCVER, Adelaide.

National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) 2008, *Australian vocational education and training statistics: Students and courses 2007,* NCVER, Adelaide.

National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy, 2008, *Supporting Skills for Life learners to Stick with it! A guide for managers, practitioners and learners,* London. http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=165062

Nguyen, N (forthcoming) *Briefing Paper 2: Early post-school outcomes of Indigenous youth: the role of literacy and numeracy,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2002, OECD *Review Of Career Guidance Policies, Australia National Questionnaire,* Prepared by the Department of Education, Science and Training, January 2002 OECD, Paris.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2006, *Economic Survey of Australia 2006: Improving incentives to work,* OECD, Paris,

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2007, 'Sickness, Disability and Work: Breaking the Barriers (Vol. 2): Australia, Luxembourg, Spain and the United Kingdom' *OECD Social Issues/Migration/Health,* vol. 2007, no. 25, pp. 1-180. OECD, Paris.

Pittham, P 2009, *Understanding current issues in adult education,* http://www.helium.com/items/401584-understanding-current-issues-in-adult-education

Pocock, B 2009, *Low-paid workers, changing patterns of work and life, and participation in vocational education and training: A discussion starter,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Polidano, C and Mavromaras, K, 2010, *The role of vocational education and training in the labour market outcomes of people with disabilities,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Rushbrook, P and Pickersgill, R 2008, *In training we trust: Communicating regional training need and demand to vocational education and training providers,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Saunders, J, Jones, M, Bowman, K, Loveder, P, and Brooks, L 2003, *Indigenous people in vocational education and training: A statistical review of progress,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP) 2009, *Report on Government Services 2009*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.

Tulett, C 2001,*Taking classes to the country,* National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Leicester, UK.

Young, M, Guenther, J and Boyle, A 2007, *Growing the desert: Educational pathways for remote Indigenous people,* NCVER, Adelaide.

Vinson, T 2007, *Dropping off the edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services, Australia.

Volkoff, V and Walstab, A 2007, *Setting the Scene: investigating learning outcomes with a view to the future,* Report to the ACFE Board, Centre for Post-compulsory Educations and Lifelong Learning University of Melbourne.

Wallace, R 2008, *Reluctant learners: Their identities and educational experiences*, NCVER, Adelaide.

West, R and Warth, S 2002, *Evaluation of the spinal cord injury project: final report,* New South Wales Board of Vocational Education and Training (BVET), Sydney.

Ziguras, S and Kleidon, J 2005, *Innovative community responses in overcoming barriers to employment,* Department for Victorian Communities, Melbourne.

ACFE / NCVER
Research Report
Lift-Outs

These lift-out documents have been
developed for ACE providers and include:

Best Practice Principles model
A checklist against best practice that supports hard-to-reach learners
Attitudes to learning
Marketing techniques
Strategies to Improve Persistence Case Study
Taster Courses Case Study
Surrey Essential Skills Flagship Network Case Study