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LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE WORLD OF WORK: CEET'S SURVEY FOR THE OECD

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Introduction

CEET was approached early this year by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) to undertake a study of lifelong learning and the world of work. As part of the OECD's work program aimed at developing studies and policy recommendations for use in member countries, BIAC (the Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD) and TUAC (the Trade Union Advisory Committee) are collecting further information on the situation concerning lifelong learning from the viewpoint of their affiliates in individual OECD countries ie. the trade unions and employers represented by the ACTU and ACCI. Since the survey focuses on the world of work, and particularly on the need for retraining and upgrading of skills and knowledge, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) agreed to support the survey. CEET's survey is the first of the national studies.

This paper outlines the background to the survey, how it was undertaken and the main findings. The survey involved five different approaches, addressed in the different chapters of the report (Selby Smith, Ferrier, Burke, Schofield, Long and Shah, 2002). Chapter 1 outlines the background to the survey (for the OECD has placed a high priority on lifelong learning and undertaken a considerable body of work); the framework principles established by BIAC-TUAC for the various national studies; some key features of the Australian context; and CEET's approach. There was then a survey of the available quantitative and qualitative material; a survey of the views of key stakeholders, based on a symposium which was held in Melbourne in mid-May to elicit their views; a survey of the experience for disadvantaged groups and individuals; and eight case studies. The final chapter identified four areas which the surveys suggested warrant further attention.

The survey, which was primarily based on existing research and involved relatively little in the way of original investigations, was a co-operative study by members of CEET, although the overall direction of the survey rested with the authors of the current paper. Also, Kaye Schofield, the executive director of the Research Centre on Vocational Education and Training at the University of Technology, Sydney (an ANTA key research centre) prepared a report on the main themes which emerged at the May symposium; and her report is the basis for that chapter in the survey.

Additionally, the full proceedings of the symposium will be published by CEET later this year, including the presentations which were given, the main points raised in discussion and the record of three interviews with individuals who were invited to the symposium, who wished to participate but, in the event, due to other commitments, were not able to do so.

Background

The OECD has placed a high priority on lifelong learning. The case for lifelong learning is based on the importance of knowledge and skills, human capital, for economic growth and social development; and the recognition that education and training systems play a crucial role in fostering the development of the human capital which is needed. New and old skills demanded in the labour market need to be complemented by skills that help foster the social networks, norms and values, social capital, that are essential for well-functioning democracies, with active participation by citizens. Institutions for learning can help to create values for social co-operation and thus nurture social capital along with families, local communities and firms. There is an important role also for education and training systems to play in promoting equity. Even though overall education levels have increased during the past few decades, education and training opportunities continue to be unevenly distributed. New risks of inequality may also be emerging. The OECD has expressed particular concern that unequal access to, and use of information and communication technologies could reinforce existing inequities through the development of a new “digital divide”.

Initially the concept of lifelong learning tended to focus on giving to adults access to formal courses at educational institutions. However, in 1996 the OECD Education Ministers adopted a more comprehensive approach. The new approach included all purposeful learning activities which aim to improve knowledge and competencies (OECD, 1996). The present BIAC-TUAC survey is only concerned with a part of the cradle to grave continuum. It lays particular emphasis on the world of work, the need for retraining and the upgrading of skills and knowledge, and the contribution of vocational education and training (VET).

There are four key features of the lifelong learning approach, as presently conceived by the OECD (CERI, 2001). First, it offers *a systemic view of learning*, since it examines the demand for, and the supply of, learning opportunities, as part of a connected system covering the whole lifecycle and comprising all forms of formal and informal learning. Secondly, it emphasises *the centrality of the learner* and the need for initiatives which cater for the *diversity* of learner needs. This represents a shift of attention from the supply of learning to the demand side. Thirdly, the approach emphasises *the motivation to learn*, and draws attention to self-paced and self-directed learning. Fourthly, it stresses the multiple objectives of education policy, which can include economic, social and cultural outcomes; personal development; and citizenship. The lifelong approach also recognises that the priorities among these objectives can change over the lifecycle of the individual; and that each objective has to be taken into consideration at each stage in policy development and implementation.¹

¹ For more detailed discussion see CERI (2001), on which much of this background material is based, and the wide range of references which are cited there. The CERI report summarises

The OECD argues that there are five key areas for countries to consider when seeking to implement strategies for lifelong learning for all and in determining the priorities for policy reforms (CERI, 2001, pp. 17-40). First, recognise all forms of learning, not just formal courses of study. Recognition of prior learning in Australian VET seeks to address this matter; it can also be significant in articulation pathways. The OECD notes that “highly flexible non-university-level tertiary institutions – such as ... Australia’s technical and further education (TAFE) Colleges – can have many advantages in creating learning pathways. They can provide flexible entry points, offer remedial and foundation programs for those lacking entry prerequisites, and provide programs at several levels to allow individual students to meet a range of learning needs within a single institution” (CERI, 2001, p. 21). The OECD also comments that, whatever the weaknesses of national information and guidance services for youth, the weaknesses and gaps in services for adults tend to be even more evident.

Secondly, the OECD stresses the importance of developing foundation skills that are wider than those traditionally identified as central, including (in particular) motivation and the capacity for self-directed learning. The international evidence clearly shows that those people without an upper secondary qualification and without strong literacy skills are among the least likely to participate in further education and training as adults, or as adults to take part in training within enterprises. Across OECD countries as a whole, some one in four 20 to 24 year olds have not completed upper secondary school. VET in schools programs, such as those which are being developed in Australia, can have a valuable role to play in this respect. Recent research has highlighted some of the techniques that are successful in motivating adult learners (US Department of Education and OECD, 1999; OECD, 1999a). In general, adults appear to be most motivated when they draw on past experience; when learning is located in the context of their own lives; when it is applied to real problems; and when they have choice and control over what they learn. A culture of learning is important for promoting adult education and training; and the OECD suggests that a significant determinant is the degree to which governments and the social partners are convinced of the need to refresh and upgrade adult skills.

Thirdly, the OECD emphasises the reformulation of access and equity priorities in a lifelong context, by looking at the opportunities which are available to individuals across their life-cycle and in the different settings where learning can occur. The OECD argues that knowledge-based economies and societies cannot afford to exclude a large part of their population from access to education and learning resources. Furthermore, inequalities in society often raise problems of mutual understanding and adjustment within organisations, in society at large and in the democratic process. However, the issues of equity are broadly social, cultural and economic and not just educational. There are cultural and social norms at stake, political interests and active pressure groups at work, so that education policies alone are most unlikely to be sufficient in addressing the equity challenge. Social inequalities existing outside the education system contribute to educational inequalities in terms of access, opportunity, process and outcomes as well as in terms

many of the main results of the OECD’s work on lifelong learning since 1996 and identifies a range of future challenges.

of the consequences of achievements and attainment. This is well illustrated in Australia by the situation of ATSI people or those with a disability.

Fourthly, the OECD stressed the importance of considering resource allocation across all sectors and settings, including --one might add -- the incentives facing the various participants and the likely effect of such incentives on outcomes in terms of lifelong learning. The OECD argues that public authorities need to consider three aspects particularly. First, are the resources adequate to support lifelong learning for different types of provision (and different settings) and over different phases of the individual's life cycle? Secondly, are resources well used or can efficiency gains be achieved? That is, can more output be obtained from given inputs or can the same outputs be achieved using a lesser quantum of resources? Thirdly, there are issues relating to the sources of funding. If more resources are required, who will pay for them and how can those resources be mobilised? Many OECD countries are relying on expanded private contributions and increased competition in the provision of learning opportunities to improve efficiency and increase capacity. The development of a training market and the introduction of User Choice are interesting examples in Australia, to which CEET's research has contributed. Over the 1990s, there was a clear trend in favour of greater private contributions in many OECD countries (OECD, 1999b), particularly at the tertiary level, in the field of adult learning, and for early childhood education (see CERl, 2001, pp. 35-36 for some innovative examples).

Fifthly, the OECD has emphasised the desirability of improved collaboration in policy development and implementation among a wide range of partners, including ministries other than education. For example, the OECD's thematic review of adult learning emphasised the close interaction that is required between education, training, labour market and social policies in meeting the needs of adult learners (OECD, 1999a). The recent report of the OECD review team on lifelong learning in Norway recommended that implementation adopt "a whole of government approach ... [and] that the Prime Minister ask the Minister for Education, Research and Cultural Affairs to co-ordinate the implementation of the lifelong learning agenda across the various ministries" (OECD, 2001). Of course, since lifelong learning involves a wide range of stakeholders, the need for co-ordination in policy development and implementation is much wider than within government alone.

Major themes

While BIAC and TUAC recognised explicitly, in establishing their survey on lifelong learning, that there is great diversity among the OECD member countries, they suggested a framework "derived from a consensus on the matters which must be addressed". This framework underlies the approach adopted by CEET and much of the discussion in the individual chapters. It is, of course, especially concerned with the world of work, and particularly on the need for retraining, the upgrading of skills and knowledge, and VET.

BIAC-TUAC's draft framework proposed three principles.

- First, employers and employees *share responsibility* for lifelong learning; and within this broad framework both trade unions and employers' organisations have an important role to play. Relatedly, they argued that systems of qualification and recognition should be established through partnership.

- Secondly, there must be *wide and equitable access* to lifelong learning opportunities for everyone in the society. This principle is breached at present in every OECD country; to meet it adequately will require major changes in policy and practice.
- Thirdly, “motivation is a key factor in learning”; competency development, understood in a broad sense encompassing knowledge, skills and attitudes, is “a key concept for teaching and learning”; and, although no one model fits all situations, “sector/industry specific frameworks can be feasible”.

BIAC-TUAC also wanted the survey to address four particular matters. First, they identified *motivations*, since they argued that shared responsibility for lifelong learning in individual countries is based on the motivations of each of the main actors they identified ie. governments, employers and employees. BIAC and TUAC drew a distinction between individual enterprises and employers’ organisations, just as they distinguished between individual employees and trade unions in relation to employees.

Secondly, BIAC and TUAC asked that consideration be given in the survey to the *methods and approaches for providing lifelong learning* in each country. The elements they identified include some with particular relevance to vocational education and training in Australia. For example, the elements identified by BIAC and TUAC included: qualification frameworks; recognition, including assessment of prior learning and work experience; accreditation of providers; flexibility of delivery; interaction between workplaces and lifelong learning providers; quality control; and private as well as public providers, based on a well-functioning market.

Thirdly, BIAC and TUAC asked that consideration be given in the country surveys to *resources and facilities*. They noted the shared responsibility of governments, employers and employees – as well as employers’ organisations and trade unions – for promoting lifelong learning and the effective use of resources. Nevertheless, BIAC and TUAC emphasised that governments bear “the main responsibility” for providing a good initial education; and that this is essential for successful lifelong learning. BIAC and TUAC encouraged those undertaking the individual country surveys to consider various schemes for promoting lifelong learning in the world of work.

Finally, BIAC and TUAC asked that the country surveys identify any major obstacles which exist to lifelong learning or its effective utilisation. For example, it may be that there is no obvious use in the workplace for workers to utilise the new or improved knowledge, skills or attitudes which they have developed through some aspect of lifelong learning; or that there are gender specific obstacles in particular countries, circumstances or workplaces. BIAC and TUAC asked that, wherever possible, when such obstacles are identified, consideration also be given to how they could be removed, or at least their impact reduced.

ACCI, the ACTU and ANTA asked that CEET survey the existing arrangements for lifelong learning in Australia (ie. “reflect national realities”), particularly those relating to experience in the world of work, the need for retraining and the upgrading of skills and knowledge, and the particular contribution of the VET sector. There was also a need for CEET’s survey to provide some background information

on relevant developments in Australia to assist overseas readers. Secondly, it was emphasised that the survey should draw the various elements together in a policy-relevant way. Thirdly, it was requested that the report include “best practice examples”, especially those which illustrate successful co-operation between the social partners and between them and the public authorities. Finally, the Centre was asked, where possible, to indicate some possible improvements to the current arrangements which arise from the survey findings. The survey, to be completed by 30 June 2002, was to be no more than seventy to eighty pages in length.

The Surveys

Chapter 2 reviews participation in learning in Australia by persons of working age, providing a context for the issues which are considered later in the survey. The chapter considers four matters in particular. First, consideration is given to the current level and distribution of adult participation in training and education, inside and outside formal educational institutions (and including both educational attainments and literacy). The chapter notes that Australia has a high rate of participation of adults in formal education. There has also been a substantial increase in participation rates in formal education over the last fifteen years or so. There is, in addition, a considerable level of participation in education and training outside that recorded in the formal education statistics. However, the numbers participating in workplace training appear to be lower than in several other high-income OECD countries. Indeed, the figures suggest a decline in the proportion of employers providing training in the mid-1990's, in the hours of training provided per employee and in expenditure on training as a proportion of the total wage bill. These changes may reflect a shift towards greater employee responsibility for the funding of training and not necessarily a decline in the total training effort. Younger members of the population have higher levels of educational attainment than older persons; and a significant proportion of the population has not achieved adequate levels of literacy. It is those persons with the lowest levels of literacy who participate least in further education and workplace training; while persons with qualifications in full-time employment participate more in study and in structured training than those without qualifications. Those who work part-time on a casual basis or who are unemployed tend to receive less training in the workplace and also to have lower levels of formal educational attainment. For example, over 55% of females aged 45 to 64 years with degrees are in full-time work, compared with 22% of those who have not completed school.

Secondly, the chapter considers indicators of the need for increased participation in training, skills upgrading and continuing education. The changes taking place in the Australian economy are resulting in a greater expansion in higher skill jobs, though there is also an expansion in some relatively low skill jobs. Job openings for new entrants are also created through the replacement of those who leave an occupation. Estimates are provided of the job openings for new entrants by major occupation groups ranked by skill level. It shows that the most job openings are at the highest skill levels, though it also shows that there are considerable openings at the lowest levels. Many of the jobs at the lowest level are part-time, so the equivalent full-time openings would be a little more skewed to the high skill jobs. There appears to be a relatively small number of jobs at the middle skills and qualifications level.

However, there are other major drivers of training such as: the need for retraining an ageing workforce; new work processes, quality assurance processes, new technologies and emerging industries; the need to raise the basic education, literacy and skill levels of many workers; and the need for workers to be better educated or trained in the key competencies and in generic skills such as communication skills and working in teams. Interestingly, the participation rate for males in the Australian labour force fell among almost all age groups until the mid-1990's (and appears to have stabilised since then), whereas the participation rates for females have been growing, especially among women aged 45 years and over. An increase in labour force participation among older males and females may be a way of sustaining the labour force in the face of the reduced growth (or decline) in number of younger workers.

Thirdly, chapter 2 considers the motivations of governments, employers and employees, together with the incentives and obstacles to their lifelong learning. Since the late 1980's there has been a process of continuing reform to VET, including industry training arrangements. The reform agenda has had two broad purposes: to assist individuals in responding to technological and structural change; and to improve the competitiveness of Australian industry. ANTA's policies have aimed to make the VET system more responsive to the needs of industry and more nationally consistent. They have included: a competency-based approach to training with increased industry involvement in the development of standards and an expansion of structured training from traditional trades into other industries and occupations; the articulation of career pathways between levels of education and training; a national framework for quality assurance and the recognition of training providers across State and Territory borders; the development of a more unified entry level training system; and the development of the training market.

Various actions have been taken to implement these reforms. They have included training packages; New Apprenticeships; VET in schools; tendering out part of the publicly funded provision of training; user choice for New Apprenticeships; development of the Australian Quality Training Framework; programs to promote equity among less advantaged groups and individuals; increasing recognition in policy statements of the importance of lifelong learning; support for flexible delivery and in particular on-line learning; and developing a marketing strategy aimed particularly at sustaining and increasing the interest in training. The chapter also notes the continuing differences between States and Territories.

In the pursuit of efficient use of resources there has been a move by States and Territories to be seen no longer as the operator of the public VET system, but instead as the purchaser of training from public and private providers. Interestingly, throughout this period of reform, and the push towards more market-oriented operations, student fees for publicly funded places in VET have remained in general very low (yielding only about 5 per cent of total revenues) and disadvantaged students were partially or wholly exempt from fees. Access to the system has remained very high, as indicated by the rapid growth in the number of students. The role of trade unions in training has diminished with the decline in union membership, but the impact of unions still extends beyond their numerical membership. Workplace surveys suggest that there is more training in the workplace when the union has a sizeable presence as compared with non-unionised workplaces (Long, 1998).

The fourth matter reviewed in chapter 2 concerns the resources provided for lifelong learning by governments, employers and employees, together with various ways of increasing training expenditures. A key question is the proportion of the total resources for lifelong learning provided by the respective stakeholders. Details are provided in the CEET survey on the use of public funds and the hours of training which are delivered. Interesting points include: the rise and then slight fall in the Commonwealth government's funding (though the funds have increased a little from 2001); the increase in private funds, which would include some payments by employers for training; the decline in VET's total revenues in recent years when the revenues are revalued to constant prices; and public funds per publicly funded hour of training declined in constant prices by more than 10 per cent (possibly nearer to 20 per cent) in the years 1997 to 2000. Thus, the rapid enrolment increases which have been occurring in the VET system have been funded with constant or declining funds when measured in real terms.

Finally, the CEET survey notes that there are a wide range of possible ways of increasing training expenditures among adults, involving additional contributions from governments, employers and students/trainees. The wide range of schemes is discussed by Gasskov (2001) and Burke (2002). These include:

- Schemes to free government funds for the less advantaged by reducing subsidies to the advantaged without reducing their participation. Such schemes include fees and income contingent public or private loans.
- Entitlements that ensure that less advantaged people have access to the same or more government funds as the more advantaged and which encourage complementary private spending.
- Improved disclosure of a firm's human and intellectual resources in capital markets, that makes it easier to demonstrate links between training and profitability and to provide incentives for employer training.
- Promotion of employer social obligation and social partnerships.
- Continuation of contracts of training, especially apprenticeships, that permit below market wages in return for provision of general training.
- Reconsideration of a levy – perhaps voluntarily agreed among employers and employees - for minimum training requirements by employers and for provision of training leave.
- Increased subsidies or tax incentives encouraging employer expenditure on training, especially in small firms.
- Continued development of information systems for students and trainees, in order to optimise their choices and returns to training.
- Continued simplification and development of the training framework and qualifications infrastructure; and other training support for employers and trainees.
- Extension of schemes for student living costs for alternative forms of learning for adults.

Chapter 3 summarises stakeholder views, based on a full day symposium in mid-May (the program is at Attachment 2). The symposium involved twenty-eight senior delegates representing a range of constituencies - employer associations, trade unions, national and state governments, public and private vocational education and training providers, small business and the research and consulting community. Of course, not every possible viewpoint could be accommodated in the limited time available; and in retrospect a particular absence was the adult and community education sector (ACE), which makes a small but significant contribution to adult learning, and to overall social and individual development in Australia. The symposium opened with an overview of the BIAC-TUAC survey and the key features of OECD's approach to lifelong learning. Delegates from trade unions, employer organisations and government each made brief presentations on their current experience and opportunities for improvement, followed by discussion of the commonalities and differences between the three perspectives. Other stakeholders then offered their insights, providing different perspectives and also good practice examples of lifelong learning for people with disabilities, for nurses, for overseas-qualified professionals, for disadvantaged workers, for agricultural workers and for people working in non-government organisations.

Overall, the symposium acknowledged and affirmed the substantial contribution that vocational education and training (VET) has made to lifelong learning in Australia. It also identified a range of future changes which are needed. But lifelong learning is not the preserve of the VET sector alone. It was argued that VET must now join-up more effectively with all other parts of education and training in a whole-of-government approach. It was emphasised that while lifelong learning can be advanced in workplaces and in education and training institutions, it also needs to be advanced in the community more broadly. Participants argued that governments need to work in genuine partnership with employer and employee associations, and also with a wider stakeholder group, to stimulate an informed demand for learning across all parts of Australian economic and social life.

Although the symposium was focused on lifelong learning and the world of work, much of the initial discussion favoured a narrower rather than a wider interpretation. It assumed lifelong learning to be primarily formal post-school education and training provided through the publicly funded vocational education and training (VET) sector and delivered through registered public, private and community training organisations. Links to non-formal and informal learning were largely seen through the lens of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Recognition of Current Competence (RCC). However, some participants emphasised that lifelong learning needs to be interpreted more widely, beyond formal education and training to encompass non-formal and informal learning in workplaces, institutions and in community life more broadly. Distinguishing between lifelong learning and lifelong training is important; it was emphasised that there can be a danger that lifelong learning degenerates into training credentialism.

Three main conclusions emerged from the symposium discussions about what is working well and what is not yet right. First, Australia has made substantial progress in developing a systemic approach to lifelong learning over the last quarter-century. Secondly, a number of important matters need further improvement, in particular: funding; incentives; cross-sectoral co-operation; recognition of prior learning; access and equity; and decision-making (eg. whether industry-led or learner-centred).

Thirdly, despite considerable agreement among the key stakeholders there were also important areas of disagreement. The proceedings of the symposium, to be published by CEET later this year, will include the presentations which were given, the main points made during the discussion sessions, and interviews with the representatives of three organizations who were invited to participate at the symposium and wished to do so, but expected to be abroad at the time.

While most symposium participants believed the current policy settings are essentially sound, but acknowledged that improvements in implementation are both desirable and possible. However, there were some who pointed to problems of a more fundamental kind, highlighting the need for a different approach rather than continuous refinements of the existing approach. Their arguments focussed on two areas particularly: the need for new policy settings; and the changing nature of work.

First, while Australia has a well-deserved reputation for grasping the nettle of change and undertaking bold or radical reform, it was argued that the directions of those changes are now a decade old. They do not reflect contemporary economic and social reality and the changing demands of the modern economy and labour market. Four requirements for effective government action on lifelong learning were identified by these participants.

- Governments which take the long view, recognising education and training as long-term drivers of productivity performance in an economy increasingly based on knowledge and skills. This means a 5, 10 and 20 year perspective rather than the current 3 year electoral cycle perspective.
- Governments which take the wide view. Investments in education and training will only be fully effective, they argued, when the investments form part of a comprehensive suite of policies designed to foster economic growth, support the development of high-performance industries and protect the interests of the most vulnerable. In their view VET needs to more actively acknowledge and influence wider social and economic policies beyond VET.
- Governments which create an environment conducive to lifelong learning. This, they argued, means governments which are active in raising awareness of the growing importance of knowledge and skills, which create incentives for private investment in education and training, which provide reliable information to guide choice and which ensure that high standards are established and maintained.
- Governments with a strong commitment to equity. Participants emphasised that this means acknowledging the strong and well-established relationships between levels of educational attainment, labour market experience and income, and the dangers of social division from a widening gap between the skills-rich and the skills-poor. It also means acknowledging the need for action.

For some of the participants at the symposium, Australia's performance against each of these criteria is mixed at best and, in some instances, quite unsatisfactory. For all its significance and undoubted achievements, they argued that the training reform agenda has failed to keep pace with the changing demands of the modern economy and labour market.

Secondly, many stakeholders spoke of the impact on VET of the changing nature of work, evident, for example, through: the rise of non-standard precarious employment through casual work, outwork, agency/labour hire work, part-time work and self-employment; relentless demands for greater workplace flexibility; longer hours of work and the consequent stress on family life; the decline in some traditional manufacturing industries and the rise of new service industries; and contraction of the public sector. Such developments are, in their view, antithetical to lifelong learning (and even to resolution of skill shortages at a societal level).

It was noted that the concept of the learning organisation is often put forward as a solution to the changing nature of work and new forms of knowledge production and as a mechanism for supporting lifelong learning. However, it was emphasised at the symposium that few organisations aspire to be learning organisations and even fewer achieve the status of a learning organisation. It was argued that differences between organisations are the norm and unitary views about how workplaces should be managed obscure this reality. Lifelong learning needs to be more than throwing responsibility back to employees. Accordingly, these participants concluded, until workers are able to negotiate effectively with their employers, until challenging work and opportunities for skill development are available to all workers, and until genuine teamwork and effective dialogue between management and workers occur in a climate of mutual trust, efforts to promote lifelong learning through workplaces will inevitably be constrained.

Chapter 4 explores aspects of diversity in Australia and their relationship to lifelong learning and the world of work. Australia's population is diverse, much more so than for many other OECD countries, and it has become increasingly diverse over the last fifty years. Overwhelmingly Anglo-Celtic at the beginning of the 20th century, Australia's population is now one of the world's most multicultural societies (Hugo, 2001). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) identifies a quarter of the population (24%) to be 'overseas born' - the largest group among them from Europe and the USSR (13%, including 7% from the UK and Ireland). Six percent are from East and Southern Asia. A further 2% of Australians are Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders ('Indigenous Australians'). For the majority of immigrants from overseas, many of their Australian-born children and some Indigenous Australians, particularly from remote areas, English is not their first language. Language barriers can affect their full participation in education and work (and in society more generally). The recent census found that the number of households where a language other than English is spoken rose from 18% in 1996 to 21% in 2001.

Overall, Australia's population is ageing. The median age has risen from 31.8 years in 1989 to 34.9 years in 1999. Indigenous Australians, although ageing, are younger than other Australians: their median age was 20.2 years in 1999, because of premature mortality. While the median age at death for the overall population is 77 years, for Indigenous Australians it is 50 years.

Physical and intellectual disabilities that create specific restrictions and difficulties for participation and achievement in education, training and employment affect a significant group (and the number of people who are affected rises with age). 19% of the New South Wales population had a disability in 1998. The rate of disability was 4% among people aged 0-4 years, but rose to 83% of people aged 85 years and over.

In nearly all age groups men were more likely to have a disability than women, although the total number of women with a disability exceeded the number of men because women live longer.

The geographical distribution of the population is important for lifelong learning. Australia covers an entire continent; it is the sixth largest nation in the world with a land area of about eight million square kilometres. Much of the country, and a significant proportion of the population, is 'remote' from access to facilities and services for education, training and work. However, the majority of the population lives around the south and east coast and particularly in the State/Territory capital cities (64%), which are growing fast and are of low density, so that services may be restricted, especially in outer suburban areas. Outside the capital cities the population is growing a little in some regional centres, while in others the population is declining (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000).

The diversity of the Australian population has many dimensions; and offers substantial potential benefits for individuals, the nation as a whole and particular enterprises. For example, diversity in worker characteristics brings a range of skills, ideas and social and cultural understandings from which enterprises can benefit. As work requirements change and lifelong learning becomes increasingly important, ensuring that access to opportunities for education, training and re-training is available to all workers helps to ensure that the potential benefits are maximised. There can also be social benefits from diversity. Australia has become a more vibrant, culturally enriched and outwardly-oriented, global society as its population has become more diverse. However, diversity can also contribute to social disharmony if access to wealth and opportunities are inequitably distributed and social groups compete for limited resources.

Diversity can be measured in many ways, including gender, cultural background, age, and ability. A number of indicators show that some aspects of the diversity in the Australian population are not fully represented in participation in education and training, or in paid employment. Different groups of workers do not enjoy the same levels of employer support for education and training or the same range of opportunities to participate in lifelong learning. While education and training policies have attempted to identify groups under-represented in VET, higher education and ACE, and initiatives have been implemented to better meet the needs of these groups, the survey concludes that much more needs to be done if lifelong learning is to become really available for all.

Education and training policies have tended to address issues of diversity in Australia primarily through a focus on 'target' or 'disadvantaged' groups of people (Selby Smith, Ferrier, et al, 2001). This approach has focused on groups who are under-represented among participants in vocational education and training (VET), higher education and adult and community education (ACE), compared with their share of the population. They include some groups of women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people of non-English speaking background, people with disabilities, people from low socio-economic backgrounds, people with low literacy and numeracy skills, people from rural and isolated areas and people in correctional institutions. Taken together, of course, they are a very significant proportion of the population – on some definitions more than half.

For each education sector, the barriers and problems faced by these groups have been investigated, in some cases extensively. A variety of special programs and initiatives have been funded and some success has been achieved in addressing the identified difficulties. For example, in higher education, equity plans are prepared annually by institutions and performance against the plan targets is monitored by the Commonwealth government using indicators of access, participation, success and retention for each group. Participation by some recognized disadvantaged groups improved from 1991-1997 (DETYA, 1999). However, there has been little change across the system as a whole for students from low socio-economic backgrounds or from rural and isolated regions, despite some successes at the level of individual institution. In VET and ACE all registered training organisations receiving public funding are required to collect statistics and report on the participation and outcomes for different disadvantaged groups.

In recent years the focus on target groups has been supplemented by a stronger concern for individuals and the capacity of education and training sectors to recognise and respond to their many different aspirations and demands. For instance, in *Achieving Equitable Outcomes* (a 'supporting paper' to the national strategy for VET entitled *A Bridge to the Future*) ANTA set out a new equity objective for VET:

“The overall goal must be an equitable vocational education and training system able to offer *inclusive and appropriate products and services for a full range of clients and potential clients*” (ANTA, 1998, p. 2: italics added).

This new approach has emerged as drawbacks have been identified in the use of target groups. First, there can be substantial differences in the characteristics and circumstances of individuals who are members of the same group. For instance, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples include those living in urban, rural or remote environments, with varying levels of literacy and numeracy, participation in formal education, and income or family support. Secondly, membership of the groups may overlap. For instance, a person of low socio-economic status could also be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, of non-English speaking background, a person with disabilities, from a rural or remote area, and a woman. Thirdly, the groups can be placed in competition with each other for resources and opportunities and become 'competing victims'. Students can also be stigmatised by the 'disadvantaged' label (Butler and Ferrier, 2000).

The existence of multiple group membership is particularly important, for research has indicated that where individuals (and groups) are represented in more than one category the problems and barriers they experience 'compound' to increase the magnitude and impact of the disadvantage they experience. A study of students in higher education, Clarke et al (1997) concluded that low SES is a 'common central element' in the disadvantage experienced by students in other groups and affects the impact of other forms of disadvantage. For example, they noted that low SES females are less likely to overcome the barriers of gender disadvantage than high SES females. Similarly, a comprehensive study of 7000 students in three states, which examined the attitudes and aspirations of school students towards tertiary education (James et al, 1999) noted the influence of a complex mix of interacting elements. More

specifically, it found that rurality and low socio-economic status combined to produce the greatest educational disadvantage.

In VET, a longitudinal study of student experience (Golding and Volkoff, 1998) noted the spread and strength of 'intra-group factors' and 'cross-group factors' in addition to 'group factors'. Intra-group factors were described as those which 'apply to sub-groups within particular target groups'. Cross-group factors are those which apply irrespective of, and in addition to, intra-group and group factors, commonly entrenching disadvantage. Two of these factors, which were identified by Golding and Volkoff as influential in shaping educational course and provider selection, intention and outcomes from VET, were low skills and unemployment:

One interesting (and encouraging) finding concerns external training courses ie. those that were not in-house. The results in Table 4.2 are only for courses undertaken while the employee was working, and therefore exclude participation in labour market programs. No distinction is made, however, between whether the training was supported by an employer or not. The most prominent feature of the results (Table 4.2 in the CEET report) is the substantial increase in the incidence and hours of receipt of external training in the 1997 survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (compared to 1989 and 1993). It is an open question as to whether this is an artefact of the change in methodology between the 1997 and earlier surveys; but probably this factor alone is unlikely to be able to explain a change of the size reported— participation and hours of external training doubled in 1997 compared with the earlier surveys.

The shift is broadly spread across the different categories of workers, but there is a pattern. With the possible exception of younger workers, the increase in external training was greatest for those categories of workers that had the lowest rates of training — females, older workers, employees born in non-English speaking countries, plant and machinery operators, labourers, part-time employees and casual employees. There is, therefore, a decline in relative difference in the receipt of external training among categories of workers during the period covered by the three ABS surveys (even although substantial differences persisted in the most recent survey). The shift indicates a rather more equitable pattern in the provision of external training.

Similarly, there were some encouraging findings in the ABS survey results for in-house training ie. those training activities attended mainly by employees working for the same employer or business as the respondent. The term "in-house" thus emphasises the organisation of the course rather than who provided it or where it occurred. For example, workers who were not born in Australia had a substantially lower incidence of in-house training than other employees. Between the 1989 and 1993 surveys, however, the difference in receipt of hours of training, although still evident, declined substantially. Provision of in-house training also varied substantially between occupations — managers, administrators, professionals and para-professionals (generally) received more in-house training than plant and machinery operators. There has, nevertheless, been a shift, particularly in the 1997 survey, towards greater relative provision of training to workers in the less skilled occupations. For instance, the 1989 survey showed that, for every hour of in-house training labourers received, managers and administrators received more than six hours. By the 1997 survey, this ratio had halved to one hour of training for labourers

to every three hours of in-house training received by managers and administrators. A similar convergence to that for labourers can be observed for plant and machinery operators.

Chapter 5 presents stories that illustrate the many facets of successful lifelong learning in Australia. Although the earlier chapters have shown that lifelong learning continues to face a number of challenges, it is nevertheless being successfully implemented in enterprises, educational institutions and many communities throughout the country. While each of the eight examples tends to offer a rather different emphasis, many of them demonstrate the importance of co-operative arrangements, networks and partnerships between a wide range of stakeholders, such as employers, employees, governments at all levels, education and training organisations, communities and unions. These stories, there are many others available, illustrate good practice, innovative thinking and the capacity to meet some difficult challenges. They also illustrate the broad commitment of the Australian community to expanding the opportunities for many different individuals and groups to benefit from lifelong learning.

Summary

Chapter 6 summarised the survey, drawing on the five different approaches involved in CEET's survey ie. the surveys of the available quantitative and qualitative material, the survey of the views of key stakeholders, the survey of the experience for disadvantaged groups and individuals, and the eight case studies. It was found that lifelong learning has often been given a narrower rather than a wider interpretation. At the symposium to ascertain the views of key stakeholders, for example, it was widely assumed to be formal post-school education and training, particularly that provided through the publicly-funded vocational education and training sector (VET) and delivered through registered public, private and community training organisations. Other participants argued, however, that lifelong learning should be interpreted more broadly; and also that lifelong learning should not be debased into training credentialism.

Overall, the survey shows that, first, the framework *principles* of BIAC-TUAC have been adopted, except for that relating to wide and equitable access. To meet this principle adequately would require major changes in policy and practice, which – as in other countries – are unlikely to be acceptable to the social partners or the wider society.

Secondly, there is considerable overlap between the *motivations* of the key stakeholders in relation to lifelong learning, but also some differences in important areas. For example, the different survey approaches revealed considerable agreement between trade unions, employer organisations and governments, in relation to human capital as a strategic asset for enterprise competitiveness, individual advancement and national prosperity. The policies of the Australian National Training Authority, its industry-led board and its Ministerial Council have aimed to develop individual capacities and national competitiveness (although the stress in technical and further education (TAFE) has increasingly been on the technical rather than the further education elements).

Yet the surveys show that the motivations of the different stakeholders are not identical. Three examples illustrate this. First, employers and unions differ in their views on the labour market and its relationship with lifelong learning. The rise of non-standard, more precarious employment through outsourcing, casual and part-time work, labour hire and self-employment are much more strongly supported by employers than unions. These changes have major implications, for example for who obtains what work, for its relationship to education and training, and for lifelong learning, family life and community participation. Secondly, the dynamism and unpredictability of intensified competition in a globalising world is tending to push enterprises towards flexibility, productivity improvement and often a short-term focus on survival, especially perhaps in small businesses (which with the unemployed, represent half of the labour force). Lifelong learning, at least within institutional settings which remain more heavily influenced by the social partners, may be argued to benefit from more settled, long term arrangements, for example in relation to incentives, information to guide choice and quality assurance. On the other hand, there appears to be a shift in the locus of responsibility for lifelong learning towards the individual. Thirdly, unions lay greater emphasis, at least publicly, on equitable outcomes in education, training and employment than individual enterprises or employer organisations.

Thirdly, the surveys make it clear that, at least in Australia, a tripartite view of lifelong learning is incomplete. There are many institutions in Australian society other than governments, trade unions and employer organisations which contribute to lifelong learning; and a framework for policy and practice which fails to take them adequately into account is unsatisfactory. For example, professionals and para-professionals, including through their professional associations, make major contributions to both the demand for, and the supply of lifelong learning. Similarly, the voluntary and community sector, equivalent to some 8% to 10% of GDP, provides many opportunities for learning – prior to employment, during working life and subsequently.

The OECD conceived lifelong learning as having four key features; and the survey findings for Australia can be considered in relation to each of them. First, the Australian arrangements do not provide a fully *systemic view of learning*. There are links, but there are also discontinuities between the sectors of education and training. It is notable, for example, how the points of transition, such as from school to higher education or VET, from education into employment or disjunctures during working life, present particular difficulties for the less educated and generally less advantaged citizens. Secondly, the Australian system does seek to cater for a *diversity of learner needs*; and there has been a substantial shift of emphasis from the supply of learning to the demand side over recent years. It has been a particularly marked change in VET, including through the introduction of user choice and the development of a training market. Thirdly, there has been some increased emphasis on *self-paced and self-directed learning*, although there is more which could be done in this area, for example for students with a disability. Fourthly, policy and practice have recognised the *multiple objectives* of education and training in both VET and in higher education – and in adult and community education perhaps even more so. This is despite the increasing emphasis on an industry-led system.

Overall, the Australian education and training system performs creditably, but there is plenty of room for further improvement. The surveys make it clear that substantial

progress has been made in developing a more systemic approach to lifelong learning in Australia over the last two or three decades. There have been many significant achievements, both qualitative, such as the improved portability of enterprise training, financial incentives for employers to provide structured work-based training for apprentices and trainees, development of the Australian Qualifications Framework, recognition of current competency (RCC) and recognition of prior learning (RPL), a competency-based approach and quality assurance, and also quantitative achievements. There is a substantial measure of shared commitment to the national VET system from unions and employers. There are many examples of good practice across the country – and some extremely creative ones.

Possible improvements

The surveys identified four areas which warrant further attention. First, there are funding issues relating to who pays for lifelong learning and for which purposes. Individuals, enterprises and governments – at national, State/Territory and local levels – will all contribute, but in what proportions and by what mechanisms? Getting the funding arrangements right, both within VET and between VET and other sectors, appeared to the stakeholders as the most important step to further advancing the lifelong learning concept in Australia. Future funding arrangements would need to include consideration of the incentives for active participation in lifelong learning: incentives for individuals, incentives for employers and incentives for existing workers.

Secondly, all of the key stakeholders saw a need to find better ways to co-ordinate and integrate activities across the various sectors of education and training. Cross-sectoral pathways are critical to lifelong learning, but sectoral differences in organising, delivering, assessing and recognising learning continue to pose barriers for individual learners. While progress has been made, there is still more to be done. Relatedly, RCC and RPL for individuals, be they currently in work or looking for work, are important building blocks of lifelong learning. RCC and RPL can provide pathways from informal and non-formal learning settings and a real opportunity to engage with those who possess relatively little post-school education and training. Their limited practical application was widely regarded, especially by trade unions and governments, as a key weakness in current arrangements.

Thirdly, there are access and equity issues. As one stakeholder stated at the symposium: “the relationship between education and training participation and socio-economic status remains clear and strong in Australia ... the private benefits of education, and public subsidies at the post-compulsory level, still go predominantly to those from relatively privileged backgrounds”. The learning needs of those in education and training institutions, in structured workplace training and in enterprises with a commitment to training are generally well catered for. But those who are unemployed, who are poorly educated or who have relatively few employment opportunities (for example, those with low literacy levels, in remote locations without adequate employment, with a disability or in prison) tend consistently to be overlooked in policy considerations and inadequately provided for in practice. The surveys identified two other groups with restricted opportunities for lifelong learning: older workers, who (as a group) tend to have substantially lower levels of education and training than younger workers and whose learning opportunities can be limited by stereotypes of their employability, learning capacities

and needs; and professional workers with overseas qualifications, which are not always recognised for employment in Australia, and who may need assistance to understand Australian workplace arrangements, traditions and culture.

Finally, there is the importance of involving a wider range of partners than is sometimes appreciated in developing policies for lifelong learning and in implementing them. Lifelong learning is not a matter only for education and training portfolios. It can impinge on labour markets, social policies, industry, regional and defence policies. Policy development and implementation in relation to lifelong learning in Australia can benefit from collaboration between the three tiers of government (national, State/Territory and local) and from the contributions of both public and private enterprises. Also, since lifelong learning involves a broad range of other stakeholders, including learners and their families, institutional and other providers, as well as the social partners, the need for co-ordination in policy development and implementation is much wider than within government alone.

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Attachment 2: Symposium Program

BIAC-TUAC Survey on Lifelong Learning: Australia

Melbourne Symposium: Thursday 16 May 2002
Monash Conference Centre
Level 7, 30 Collins Street, Melbourne

Program

- 8.30 a.m. Registration
- 8.45 a.m. The BIAC-TUAC Survey – Overview
Chris Selby Smith, CEET
- 9.00 a.m. –
10.05 a.m. Employee and Trade Union Perspectives: current experience, opportunities for improvement
Chair: **Michael Long**,* CEET
- Presentations (10 minutes each)
 - **Therese Bryant**, Industrial Officer, Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association
 - **Keith Harvey**, National Industrial Officer, Australian Services Union
 - **Rex Hewett**, Federal TAFE Secretary, Australian Education Union
 - **Julian Teicher**, National Key Centre in Industrial Relations
 - Discussion (25 minutes)
- 10.05 a.m. –
10.20 a.m. Morning Break (1)
- 10.20 a.m. –
11.25 a.m. Employer and Employer Organisations' Perspectives: current experience, opportunities for improvement.
Chair: **Steve Balzary, ACCI.**
- Presentations (10 minutes each)
 - **Gary Collins**, Manager, Training Services, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of WA
 - **Peter Costantini**,** General Manager, Employment Services, Commerce Queensland
 - **Peter Glynn**, CEO, National Electrical and Communications Association
 - **Pam Jonas**, Training and Employment, Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
 - **Maria Tarrant**, Assistant Director, Business Council of Australia
 - Discussion (25 minutes)

* Mr Bill Mansfield was intending to Chair this session. However, in the event, he had to participate in an ILO meeting in Geneva. Mr Michael Long, Senior Research Fellow with CEET, agreed to Chair the session at short notice.

** Unfortunately, due to last minute unforeseen circumstances, Mr Constantini is unable to attend.

He tendered his apologies to all.

- 11.25 a.m. –
11.40 a.m. Morning break (2)
- 11.40 a.m. –
12.55 p.m. Governments: ‘Steering and Rowing’
Chair: **Moira Scollay**, ANTA
- Presentations (10 minutes each):
 - **Peter Grant**, formerly Deputy Secretary, Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
 - **Paul Byrne**, ANTA
 - **Robin Shreeve**, Deputy Director-General, TAFE, NSW Dept of Education
 - **Madeleine Woolley**, The Director, Adelaide Institute of TAFE
 - **Geoff Creek**, The Principal, Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture
 - Discussion (25 minutes)
- 12.55 p.m. –
1.45 p.m. Lunch
1.45 p.m. –
3.00 p.m. The Three Perspectives: commonalities, differences
Chair: **Chris Selby Smith**
- Presentations (10 minutes each):
 - **Rex Hewett**,^{***} AEU
 - **Steve Balzary**, ACCI
 - **Moira Scollay**, ANTA
 - Discussion (45 minutes)
- 3.00 p.m. –
3.15 p.m. Afternoon break
- 3.15 p.m. –
4.30 p.m. Other Initiatives: a wide diversity
Chair: **Fran Ferrier**, CEET
- Presentations (10 minutes each):
 - **Greg Lewis** (LLL for people with disabilities), Edge Training Solutions, Perth
 - **Jenny Duncan** (continuing education of nurses), Mayne Health, Sydney
 - **Thit Tieu**, NSW Adult Migrant Education Service
 - **Peter Waterhouse**, Workplace Learning Initiatives, Melbourne
 - **Bruce Wilson**, Union Research Centre on Organisation and Technology & RMIT
 - Discussion (25 minutes)
- 4.30 p.m. –
4.45 p.m. Summary of Main Themes
Chair: **Gerald Burke**, CEET
Kaye Schofield, Research Centre for VET, UTS, Sydney
- 4.45 p.m. Close

*** Mr Rex Hewett has kindly agreed to take Mr Mansfield’s place for this discussion.