An Evaluation of Lessons Learned from Projects in the Workforce Innovation Program

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Employment Research Australia
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Executive Summary

The Workforce Innovation Program ran from August 2008 and commenced discontinuation from December 2011. It sponsored one-off projects to meet workforce development and skills needs. It was tasked with supporting industry-led projects of a "developmental, pilot or innovative nature".\(^1\) During that period 60 projects were conducted at a cost to the fund of $21,073,613. The program encouraged collaborative work at industry, region and enterprise level and prioritised project activities aimed at: encouraging workforce development approaches to skilling; developing innovative enterprise cultures; supporting skills for sustainability; and improving the adaptability and responsiveness of skill formation systems.

In June 2012 Employment Research Australia (ERA) was funded to distil and analyse the ‘lessons learned’ from 28 WIP projects. The purpose of the research was to draw lessons from the projects which could inform policy and practice associated with innovative workforce development.

The diverse nature of the WIP projects means they are not easily categorised or grouped. The projects differed in terms of their focus, scope and method. The key topic areas of the projects included: workforce development to address industry skill needs; improving access to the national training system; skills for sustainability; apprentice support; innovation; place-based workforce development; skill recognition for volunteers; high performance workplaces; and workforce development for SMEs.

The evaluation has taken a case study approach to derive lessons from each project, involving analysis of final reports and data from interviews with 61 individuals who had been actively involved in the conduct in at least one of the WIP projects. Documentary and interview data was examined several times, subjected to cross-case analysis, and then reported as lessons associated with project experiences, processes and conduct, outcomes and impacts, and lessons relating to specific policy areas. Interviewees also reflected on the role of the program and its administration. Individual case studies at Appendix 2 provide the details and primary issues associated with each of the projects.

Lessons learned relating to project conduct and implementation

An analysis of the data across the projects identified that specific factors associated with how projects were designed, led and managed shaped their relative success. These factors included: engaging in scoping exercises to assess project context and risk; applying robust project design principles; building sound project structures for leadership and guidance; achieving involvement of key individuals; and ensuring participant engagement.

Undertaking a tailored scoping exercise as a first phase in the project lifecycle was a critical success factor in WIP projects. Analysing and understanding the context of the project through preliminary research work to gather extant knowledge and insights improved project design. Scoping exercises that resulted in reliable understandings of the industries of interest, the populations being targeted for involvement and the environments in which projects were to be conducted, led to better project methodologies, improved timeframes and ensured more accurate budgeting. Several interviewees

\(^1\) DEEWR, (2009), Workforce Innovation Fund (WIP) Guidelines for Applicants February 2010, p 3.
identified the need for scoping procedures to include an assessment of project risks to enable the
development of strategies for their circumvention. Where appropriate scoping work and risk analysis
did not take place, projects were more likely to falter.

It was evident that several projects would have benefitted from external advice in relation to scoping
and risk assessment. Parties to projects suggested that expert assistance to examine initial proposals
and to troubleshoot project designs and methodologies would have been particularly useful in
overcoming problems that emerged later in the projects. In other cases it was evident that the skills
required to undertake and apply scoping and risk analyses existed within project teams and were
deployed to good effect.

The strength and quality of relationships between project partners also impacted on the success of
WIP projects. Where highly collaborative and engaged steering and reference groups were involved in
guiding projects they were able to provide valuable advice at critical junctures, as well as assisting
project teams to avoid pitfalls, maximise the involvement of participants to the projects, and
disseminate project findings and outcomes. The commitment of senior figures from project partner
organisations was important for securing on-going partner involvement.

Responsive, adaptable and consistent project management was a critical factor in the success of WIP
projects. Where project management was inconsistent due to changing personnel, poor role
definition or under-resourcing, projects struggled to achieve their aims.

The study identified the importance of a key type of leadership figure in several WIP projects.
‘Integrators’ were individuals that were engaged in all aspects of the project, brought with them
extensive professional and personal networks, and had on-going and deep experience in the sectors
in which they were involved. Each of them was instrumental in the genesis of the project in which
they were involved and they added considerable value to projects by accelerating the pace at which
outcomes were achieved and the level at which projects operated.

The experience of consultants varied between projects. In some cases consultants who were
contracted to conduct projects, or parts of projects, provided high quality work. In other cases
consultants did not appear to have the appropriate degree of expertise or experience. Study
interviewees suggested that in some cases project teams needed to work more closely with
consultants to ensure they were able to deliver on project requirements.

The most common difficulty in adhering to plans and outcomes experienced across projects was
securing the involvement of adequate numbers of project participants. Barriers such as the
‘invisibility’ of some target populations and struggling to communicate the value of projects for
different groups led to time slippage and, in some cases, poor levels of engagement. There were also
challenges involved in designing projects to overcome those barriers and thereby maximise quality
participant recruitment and retention. Strategies that operated to secure involvement included
gathering insights to better understand target populations, winning the support of key opinion
leaders, bringing in project partners that provided access to potential participants, and modifying and
refining project design early on in the process in light of participant characteristics.
Lessons learned relating to increasing, sustaining and measuring impact

The report considered both project outcomes (the achievement of project aims) and impacts, which occurred beyond project completion. Immediate project outcomes took the form of reports, products and models of practice, with most projects producing one or more of these outputs.

A number of challenges were inherent in evaluating the impact of projects. In some cases, insufficient time had elapsed, since project completion, for impacts to become evident. Other challenges included an absence of impact evaluation conducted by proponents or partners and difficulties tracking the uptake, use or influence of publicly available project outputs. In addition, many longer-term impacts of projects were diffuse and non-quantifiable, and difficult for proponents to measure in the absence of detailed evaluation guidelines or dedicated resources. There was support from proponents and partners for impact evaluations on the basis that they can assist in maximising project effects by sustaining interest in projects, guiding ongoing promotion or resourcing efforts, providing evidence of the public value of projects, and fostering opportunities to build on project outcomes.

Analysing the impacts of 28 very diverse projects presented a challenge. However, assessment of the broad sweep of project impacts indicated that six key categories of impact were evident. They were:

- knowledge attainment through research that enhanced the workforce development capacity of project proponents and partners, external organisations, and individuals (and where disseminated, contributed to public knowledge);
- effects on the operation of organisations, primarily through improved functioning or capability;
- effects on the employment opportunities, outcomes and job security of individual project participants or project parties’ constituencies or clients;
- effects on skill formation at industry, enterprise, occupational and regional levels, leading to enhanced capability for individuals, employers and those operating in the skills system;
- effects on collaborative structures and practices built between organisations in workforce development, regional and sector-specific communities of interest; and
- effects on organisational cultures in proponent or partner organisations.

The breadth or extent of a project’s impact appeared to be a function of (among other factors): the nature and scope of the project; the positioning and resource base of the proponent organisation; and the extent of dissemination or other activities aimed at extending the life of the project. In some projects little or no dissemination or ongoing activities took place while in others, multiple initiatives were undertaken to build impact. Several factors influenced proponents’ propensity for disseminating outputs or continuing project activities. They included the extent to which planning to maximise impact had taken place early in the project lifecycle, whether individuals in the proponent organisation remained in place and committed to disseminating project outputs over the medium term, and whether resources could be accessed for dissemination or the continuation of project activities.

Findings indicated that the generative outcomes of research reports are greater in number where planned, targeted and active dissemination of research reports takes place using multiple channels, activities and methods. Likewise, the impact of products generated from WIP projects was maximised as a result of: planned, targeted marketing and circulation activities; modification of products for new
audiences or for lower delivery costs; having sufficient resources in place for dissemination and continued project activity; ongoing stewardship of outputs by well-networked ‘champions’ or institutions; the presence of established dissemination networks; and importantly, a threshold level of demand for products. Finally, factors influencing the impact or continuance of models of practice produced within the WIP include many of those described for reports and products, namely: the level of resourcing available to disseminate, extend or build on models; the extent of stewardship of models by proponents or other organisations; and the scope for producing and publicising exemplar case studies to widen the uptake of models.

Lessons learned relating to specific policy areas and topics

Lessons relating to seven distinct workforce development policy areas or topics were distilled from the projects. Those lessons evident in projects involving training design, development and delivery centred on the ways in which:

- Internships and entry level training placements can expose students to the reality of industries, making them more employable;
- Involving training deliverers, recipients and employers in resource and course design can lead to improved outputs;
- Certain elements of the national training system can inhibit course creation; and
- Effective skills recognition systems can have a transformative impact on individuals and provide benefits for employers.

Lessons from a project encouraging the uptake of innovation in organisations (via collaboration with interactive media businesses) include the following:

- Cross-industry innovation is best achieved by a form of ‘co-creation’ collaboration between organisations, which has the potential to transform the organisations involved;
- Intellectual property sharing for co-creation impacts positively on innovative activity; and
- Project team intermediaries play a crucial role in promoting uptake and application of cross-industry partnerships, particularly amongst SMEs.

The following findings relate to projects aimed at increasing participation in apprenticeships and Indigenous employment:

- Multiple barriers prevent SMEs from employing apprentices, particularly in relation to knowledge and resource constraints;
- Targeted and ‘packaged’ brokerage services provided by intermediaries made the employment of apprentices and Indigenous jobseekers more attractive to employers; and
- Intensive support and mentoring provided to jobseekers and apprentices by intermediaries improves their employability, as well as retention and career paths.

Projects focussing on workforce development in regional and rural areas yielded many lessons, including:

- Impediments to implementing a workforce development approach include population dispersion, competition for labour from the resources sector, and low workforce management capacity among employers;
• effective workforce development solutions are tailored to the particular characteristics of sub-regions, developed and integrated at the local level, and championed by local stakeholders; and
• embedded project managers and longer project durations enhance workforce development outcomes.

Projects allowed lessons to be drawn that related to workforce development for owners and senior managers in SMEs, including the following:

• the design and delivery of workforce development initiatives should reflect the ‘time poor’ nature of owners and managers;
• business owners and managers have an incentive to engage in training where it leads to improved business performance and compliance with regulation;
• business owners and managers undertake training to gain knowledge of ‘business solutions’, rather than qualifications; and
• training has a sustained impact where owners and managers receive mentoring and advice from experts.

Lessons from projects addressing workforce development for sustainability included:

• in some quarters there is a lack of understanding about what sustainability is, and how it differs from ‘1970s environmentalism’;
• businesses are most likely to engage in workforce development for sustainability where they see clear business benefits from doing so in terms of increased efficiencies and cost savings; and
• the impact of training is greatest where a whole of enterprise approach is taken, moving beyond ‘technical fixes’, and senior managers are trained and spread skills from the top-down.

Finally, a number of lessons were evident in relation to developing web-based workforce development tools, resources, and e-learning:

• training using an online platform is suited to time-poor managers or small business people, but conversion from face to face to online training may be costly and some content is unsuitable for online delivery;
• online learning can be key to building regional skills and training capability in thin markets;
• open learning can be hampered by poor broadband access in regional areas;
• upfront user registration may reduce usage of online tools or training resources; and
• the usability of resources and tools is improved when the amount of content is reduced.

Views on the WIP Fund

The majority of project parties regarded the administration of the WIP fund favourably. The program management personnel were applauded by various parties for providing valuable input into project proposals, design and implementation; for sharing important and useful information; and for their assistance with navigating government systems. In a small number of cases individual partners
reported frustration at the degree of administrative inflexibility exercised by program managers, and a few partners felt program managers failed to intervene in matters they deemed important.

Project interviewees were universally appreciative of the aims and intent of the WIP fund and lamented its closure. Most praise for the program was directed at the importance of a ‘flexible’ fund that sponsored exploratory work relating to workforce development that is rarely able to be conducted. Several interviewees believed that without the WIP they would not have reached the new understandings and insights gained in their projects. In other cases the WIP enabled the examination of under-studied sub-sectors and occupational groups with limited ‘voice’. The WIP provided practitioners and industry with the opportunity to creatively test solutions to problems without the limitations imposed by achieving training targets. For others it enabled them to take their practice to another level, to think strategically and act consciously beyond the constraints of their more general and standard practice.

Several interviewees felt the unique benefit of the WIP was the ‘public good’ it delivered by sharing new lessons and insights across sectors to improve workforce development practice. Others expressed disappointment at the lack of dissemination and follow-up of projects. They felt that there was great unrealised potential in the program due to the failure of the WIP to work with project parties to pursue generative outcomes and build upon the WIP experiences.

Conclusions

The exploratory and innovative nature of the WIP suggests the need for a specific type of program management – one that encompasses all the checks and balances of a more standard program, as well as additional factors to facilitate the high levels of collaborative effort and creative endeavour that characterised the best of the WIP projects. This appeared to work best where strong structures were in place but where there was also the flexibility that innovation and exploration require. Based on the study findings a series of factors have been identified that might guide any future programs to achieve the desired ‘balanced flexibility’.

First, it is clear that particular skills are required in exploratory project teams, in addition to general content expertise and project management skills. They include the capacity to engage in high levels of collaboration, the ability to reflect on and codify findings and insights as they emerge, and the ability to design projects in light of complex factors. The program should undertake a review of the project skills profile to ensure that demonstrable experience in these areas is present in the project team.

Second, assisting in the facilitation of partnerships is a critical role for exploratory program management. Instituting structures and practices to maximise collaboration, and to be an active partner in projects, was found to enhance project outcomes and impacts. In addition, scoping was found to have a particular importance in exploratory work. The program might ensure that adequate and fit for purpose scoping exercises are timetabled and budgeted in the first phase of each project. This will improve the final project design. To ensure that project methods and approaches are appropriate to their aims the program should also ensure that validation of project design takes place. In some cases this might require the involvement of external experts where program managers are not in a position to conduct the process themselves.
It was apparent from WIP projects that the insights being generated were not always identified and recorded by the project teams. The program might play a role in advising on the appropriate means of designing projects to generate and record those lessons and enable their dissemination. This might include using ‘action learning’ approaches where that is suitable, but should guarantee that knowledge capture is being performed. The benefits of robust and appropriately structured evaluations were evident and this suggests that the program should guide those processes by providing an evaluation framework and ensuring that evaluation is designed into projects and adequately resourced.

There is an important role for the program in ensuring and facilitating the dissemination of project products to allow their wider use. Program management processes might ensure that adequate planning, timetabling and budgeting for dissemination practices are embedded in project design. The nature of exploratory projects is such that ongoing work maybe required for impacts to be realised. As such the program might also consider the means by which work will continue to build on the foundations of projects, and this should also form part of the project plan.

Finally, it is apparent that there are implications for program management workloads in undertaking such ‘hands on’ management of projects. The complexity of much exploratory project work as exemplified in the WIP suggests that the size and nature of project portfolios for program managers should be set with these factors in mind. Accordingly any assessment of the success of exploratory work should take into consideration the need for ‘balanced flexibility’. Measuring the success of exploratory programs should move beyond assessments of planned outcomes and quantifiable impacts, and include an examination of how the program fosters the creation of strategies that build and support innovative and exploratory practices; and how outcomes have contributed more broadly to the advancement of understanding, practice and activity for workforce development.
### Glossary

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AHRI</td>
<td>Australian Human Resources Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>BBB</td>
<td>Business Building Blocks (WIP 175)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BEC</td>
<td>Business Enterprise Centres</td>
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<td>CCF</td>
<td>Civil Construction Federation</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
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<td>CS&amp;H ISC</td>
<td>Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council</td>
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<td>CPRS</td>
<td>Carbon Price Reduction Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>ddd</td>
<td>Discuss, Display, Do (WIP 165)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEEWR</td>
<td>Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIISRTE</td>
<td>Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education</td>
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<td>EBPPP</td>
<td>Enterprise Based Productivity Places Program</td>
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<td>ECEC</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education and Care</td>
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<td>EOI</td>
<td>Expression of Interest</td>
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<td>ERA</td>
<td>Employment Research Australia</td>
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<td>FDC</td>
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<td>FDCA</td>
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<td>GFC</td>
<td>Global Financial Crisis</td>
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<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<td>IBSA</td>
<td>Innovation and Business Skills Australia</td>
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<td>IEP</td>
<td>Indigenous Employment Program</td>
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<td>ISC</td>
<td>Industry Skills Council</td>
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<td>IM</td>
<td>Interactive Media</td>
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<td>ISIS</td>
<td>Interactive Skills Integration System (WIP 217)</td>
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<td>NEIS</td>
<td>New Enterprise Investment Scheme</td>
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<td>NSW</td>
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<td>NWDF</td>
<td>National Workforce Development Fund</td>
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<td>P&amp;C</td>
<td>Federation of Parents and Citizens’ Associations of New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>PISC</td>
<td>Primary Industry Skills Council (South Australia)</td>
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<td>QLD</td>
<td>Queensland</td>
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<td>RAMIT</td>
<td>Regional Agriculture and Mining Integrated Training (WIP 212)</td>
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<td>RPL</td>
<td>Recognition of Prior Learning</td>
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<td>RTO</td>
<td>Registered Training Organisation</td>
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<td>SA</td>
<td>South Australia</td>
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<td>SACS</td>
<td>Social and Community Services</td>
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<td>SEE</td>
<td>Sustainability Essentials for Executives (WIP 256)</td>
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<td>SME</td>
<td>Small and Medium-sized Enterprises</td>
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<td>SSA</td>
<td>Service Skills Australia</td>
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<td>TAFE</td>
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Section 1: Introduction

1.1 The Workforce Innovation Program

The Workforce Innovation Program (WIP) was established in August 2008 and discontinuation began on 31 December 2011. During this time it funded 60 projects to a total funded value of $21,073,613. The WIP is managed by the Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) and formerly the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The program provided grant funding for innovative, one-off pilot projects that addressed current and future workforce and skills development needs. Fund guidelines specified that projects were required to be industry-led in origin and operation and to be of a developmental nature. The policy context shaping the design of the program was one in which, in Australia and internationally, workforce development was increasingly gaining recognition as a means of enhancing productivity.² The workforce development agenda in Australia hinges on a range of factors that foster the development of skills and their utilisation in workplaces, which in turn improve workplace participation and productivity outcomes. Skills Australia (now the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency) defines workforce development as

Those policies and practices which support people to participate effectively in the workforce and to develop and apply skills in a workplace context, where learning translates into positive outcomes for enterprises, the wider community, and for individuals throughout their working lives.³

The workforce development approach recognises that merely tracking and responding to occupational shortages or over-supply does not adequately deal with the more nuanced and embedded barriers to and opportunities for improving access to national skills-based prosperity. Rather, strategies centred on equipping industries, workplaces and local economies to adapt and create environments for collaborative effort are seen as more effective and sustainable ways of encouraging innovation and keeping abreast of shifts in workforce requirements. If innovation is the driver of improved productivity and competitiveness, as described in the “Powering Ideas” innovation agenda, then effective workforce development is a key mechanism by which it is put into practice.⁴

The WIP was established to provide funding to support initiatives for ongoing improvements in skill creation in Australian enterprises. The program encouraged pilot projects at industry, region and workplace level to make tangible and sustainable contributions to skill development strategies and practices within the pilot environment, as well as providing a means by which others may learn from

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the projects. Priority areas identified in the WIP included (among others): encouraging workforce development approaches to skilling issues; creating innovation cultures at workplaces to build productive capacity; supporting ‘green’ skills in a carbon-based economy; and improving the training system to adapt and respond to changing skills demands. A condition of the program was that projects seek the involvement of Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) and other relevant partners, to encourage collaboration between stakeholders.

1.2 Overview of this research

This study was funded to examine lessons learned from 28 projects which were completed prior to or during the course of this research. The projects that are the focus of this report were funded to a combined total value of $8,965,802. Other organisations also made financial or in-kind contributions to some of the projects.

It should be recognised that this study examined only a portion of the projects funded under the WIP, due to the fact that many projects were ongoing at the time of the study or too much time had passed after project completion for appropriate information to be uncovered. As such the findings and lessons learned outlined in this report may not be representative of the experience of all projects subject to WIP funding.

The purpose of this research was to draw lessons from the WIP projects in order to:

- inform workforce development policy and practice and to improve workforce productivity;
- improve the reach of innovation in, or via, workforce development; and
- increase and improve dissemination of beneficial workforce development practices and understandings.

The structure of the report is as follows. The following section (Section 2) profiles the methodology used in the study. Section 3 then briefly describes summary features of the projects analysed whilst also referencing Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, each of which provide broader detail relating to individual projects. Sections 4 and 5 make up the greater part of the report. Section 4 reports lessons learned in relation to project conduct and implementation and Section 5 evaluates lessons drawn concerning how project impact is measured, increased and sustained. A brief summary of key findings from Sections 4 and 5 is provided, in tabular form, in Section 6. The next section (Section 7) sets out lessons learned from the projects as they relate to seven specific policy areas. Section 8 summarises views of the WIP among those involved in the conduct of projects or as participants. Lastly, Section 9 provides concluding insights and focuses on the implications of the study’s findings for future innovative workforce development practice and funding.

1.3 How to read this report

Sections 4 and 5 are the key sections of the report and provide stand-alone examples from cases of key lessons learned in relation to project conduct and impact. In some cases these examples are accompanied by background detail required to contextualise the projects from which the lessons are drawn, but in some cases they are not. Some examples or explanations of lessons also do not explicitly reference the project from which they are drawn where the issues discussed are of a sensitive nature or interviewees have requested that the information they have provided is anonymised. The report may be read in a linear fashion from beginning to end. However, readers may
wish to read Appendix 2, which contains detailed case studies of each project, prior to reading Sections 4 and 5. This approach provides the reader with insight into the types of projects conducted and their nature, scope and outcomes, prior to reading the sections that consider lessons in the round (Sections 4 to 9 inclusive), thus providing ‘contextualisation’ of the material in these sections.

1.4 A note on terminology used in this report

The following list provides definitions of the terms used to describe key individuals involved in projects used in this report:

- Project proponents – the ‘proponent’ is the organisation in receipt of WIP funding to conduct the project, and in this report the term is also used to refer to individuals from proponent organisations. These individuals are members of project leadership or management teams where they may be conducting projects with other organisations. In some cases, the proponent was the sole organisation involved in the project.

- Project partners – these are the partner organisations that worked with proponents to manage and administer the conduct of projects. In this report the phrase is also used to identify individuals from partner organisations.

- Project parties – a collective term for the proponent and project partners together (that is, the members of the project team).

- Stakeholders – the constituencies or networks associated with the project parties.

- Project participants – the individuals or organisations which were the subject or focus of pilot or other project delivery activities. Examples include pilot enterprises, individual learners receiving WIP-piloted training, the Registered Training Organisations that delivered the training, job-seekers and others.

- Project manager – this role may be performed by the proponent or by a project partner.

- WIP manager – individuals working in DIISRTE (or DEEWR) who performed the administration and contract management activities attached to individual projects. These individuals are also referred to as WIP administrators, WIP contract managers, or are collectively labelled WIP staff.
Section 2: Methodology

This study reports lessons learned from 28 projects funded under the WIP. A case study treatment was used to derive lessons from each project, involving analysis of documentary and interview data. The approach used is described in this section.

2.1 Analysis of project final reports

The original methodology set out in the research proposal involved the analysis of project reports written by WIP proponents in order to examine and collate lessons, along with case studies of a selection of projects. A first-stage analysis of final reports written by members of project teams in all 28 projects was undertaken during July 2012. This analysis process had two functions: to allow researchers to assess the extent to which project reports contained information in relation to lessons learned from projects; and to allow researchers to produce short, standardised summary reports of projects. Summary reports aided researcher understanding of project processes and outcomes, and provided a useful reference tool when researchers were referring back to projects. In addition, the process of writing summary reports served to highlight gaps in project information that would need to be obtained from other sources.

This analysis of project final reports found that most contained little data relating to lessons learned as recorded by project proponents or parties. Moreover, as the reports were in most cases produced at the time of project completion, insufficient time had elapsed to enable project parties to report on project impacts (most of which become evident in the period following project finalisation). Essentially the reports stopped at a point in time, providing no insight into project impacts beyond that moment.

Other issues of concern came to light with regard to using reports as the sole source of data. First, reports were often coloured by the views of the individual report writer, who may present an unintentionally biased view of project events and outcomes, with no means of researchers triangulating or validating the views presented. Researchers’ concerns with regard to this issue were shown to be well-founded based on interviews with project teams later in the research project. Over the course of interviews, researchers found that in some cases each member of a project team interviewed offered distinctly different perspectives on project aims, challenges and outcomes, and in some cases interviewees refuted the views or conclusions of the report writer.

Second, reports were unable to convey in detail the qualitative or diffuse impacts of projects (described in Section 5). Examples of such impacts, which were able to be teased out in all their complexity during interviews, included the value of building networks between project parties and project participants or wider constituencies, or the benefits for the self-esteem of disadvantaged jobseekers who participated in some of the projects.

2.2 Qualitative research interviews

This absence of data pertaining to lessons learned and project impact, coupled with concerns about the objectivity of data in reports, led researchers to re-evaluate and re-design the planned research methodology. The revised design expanded the second phase of the project to include in-depth interviews with project proponents, partners, and participants from each of the projects to ascertain their views on project lessons and impacts. The combination of documentary analysis of final and
(some) interim reports and analysis of interview data allowed for a case study approach to be taken in respect of the 28 projects within the project’s scope. This approach enabled a cross-case analysis of the completed WIP projects which facilitated the identification of lessons within the context of each project, alongside an assessment of patterns associated with success across projects. Cross-case analysis has the advantage of providing capacity to ‘test’ the lessons evident in one project against the evidence from projects of a similar type; as well as leaving scope for lessons to be reinforced where findings are similar in projects of different types.

Fifty-six structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with sixty-one individuals over a two month period during August and September 2012. Key individuals from proponent organisations were approached for interviews in the first instance. A number of interviews also took place with other members of project teams. The vast majority of individuals contacted by researchers were willing to engage in interviews. The project roles of interviewees included:

- Project leaders from proponent organisations
- Individuals from contracted organisations or consultancies who functioned as key project partners. Some of these individuals had developed the initial idea for projects prior to approaching proponent organisations for their involvement. Some played a key role in steering the implementation and dissemination process from beginning to end
- Consultants who played a less decisive role in the project, in that they were contracted to perform a discrete activity within the project
- Project managers, who may have been from the proponent organisation or a contracted partner organisation
- Project partners from organisations responsible for delivering project activities at the ‘ground’ level
- Individual project participants who were not members of the project team but were involved in or were recipients of project activities (for example, as members of regional committees).

In addition, a small number of informal and unstructured interviews were undertaken with WIP contract managers to obtain insights into the background to and conduct of specific projects in the program. Projects were excluded from the study’s scope in cases where it was not possible to make contact with any individuals from project teams who were willing to be interviewed and there was inadequate documented data, or where it became clear from initial interviews that there were some sensitivities involved in evaluating a particular project. Significant turnover in proponent and partner organisations meant that, in regard to some projects, only one individual was interviewed. This was also the case where projects were smaller-scale in nature and one key individual steered the project. However, case studies of the majority of projects were drawn from interviews of between two and six individuals.

A standard interview schedule was used to guide questioning and elicit uniform information from individuals across all projects. However given the wide diversity of projects and their exploratory nature, schedules were also tailored to each interviewee, with researchers reading through project final reports and summary reports prior to interviews to develop specific questions of interest in relation to each project. Interviews ranged in duration from 30 to 90 minutes. With a few exceptions, all interviews were conducted by telephone (with a small number conducted face to face) and almost all were digitally recorded and transcribed, allowing for verbatim quotes to be used.
The value of conducting interviews at an interval after project completion rested in researchers’ ability to collect data relating to a broad sweep of project impacts and in allowing project parties time to reflect on lessons learned from projects. The length of intervals between project finalisation and research interviews varied by project: some projects had been completed two to three years’ prior to interviews; others were recently completed; and two were in the final stages of completion at the time of interviews. Most however had been completed in 2011, allowing sufficient time for interviewee reflection and for impacts to become evident.

2.3 Data analysis strategy
Analysing, coding and collating data from 28 diverse projects presented researchers with a challenge. Whilst considerable research literature exists on techniques for evaluation of policy programs, researchers were unable to find any research in the academic or practitioner literature that provided guidance in relation to frameworks for evaluating the conduct and impact of individual, exploratory projects within programs. We were required to evaluate each of 28 projects within the same program on both an individual and collective (thematic) basis, and the research literature offered no guidance on how this task might be conducted.

Accordingly the process for analysing data that was used emerged on an iterative basis and was subject to trial and error. It proceeded according to the following phases:

- **Phase 1**: The 28 projects were divided equally between each of two ERA researchers. Researchers subjected all available primary data to analysis including interview transcripts, reports written by project team members, and publicly accessible project outputs such as web-based tools or products. For the purposes of this initial analysis, each project was treated as an individual case study. Researchers then coded all ‘lessons’ and other project findings into a matrix of results. The matrix comprised a thematic framework delineated by six categories or types of project that had emerged from a first reading of the source material. This approach was used on the assumption that similar themes would be evident within each of the ‘types’ of projects. The six project categories were based on the primary purpose or output of projects and included: projects involving training development, design and delivery; projects to build workforce development knowledge; projects to develop workforce development tools; place-based workforce development projects; projects to build management capacity; and projects to support apprenticeships.

- **Phase 2**: This involved cross-case analysis of the lessons coded within each of these categories in order to identify ‘sets’ of themes or commonalities across projects. This process enabled researchers to establish a framework for ongoing thematic analysis and a draft report structure. Key themes appeared to relate broadly to project conduct, project impact, reflections on the program by project parties, and lessons relating to specific project topic areas. Examples of the latter include (place-based) regional workforce development, innovation, and skills for sustainability, as reported in Section 7.

- **Phase 3**: Researchers analysed data coded to each of the new thematic areas (project conduct, project impact et cetera) from across all 28 projects. This material was sorted into sub-themes which became this report’s sub-sections, and data was analysed within each sub-theme to allow the writing of report sections.
Phase 4: Researchers undertook the writing up of detailed case studies of each of the projects (located in Appendix 2). This process led to further material being added to each thematic report section, as new and deeper understandings of individual projects emerged.

This process led to a robust and thorough analysis of all primary data collected, with transcripts and final reports read and analysed multiple times in the course of analysing them for different purposes. They were initially analysed to draw out any lessons that emerged from the data, then to examine lessons in relation to project impact, conduct and other issues, and consequently to provide data for detailed case studies and sections examining lessons relating to specific policy areas.

2.4 Limitations of the methodology used

A key limitation of the research design guiding this study is one that is common to qualitative case study design across the board. It relates to the representativeness of the data drawn from interviews. Whilst it is not expected that qualitative research will yield findings that are able to be generalised to the population at large, as is the case in robust quantitative studies, it should be noted that interviews conducted with a portion of those individuals involved in steering projects, or involved as participants, will yield only a partial view of project conduct and outcomes.

Other limitations relate to the time lag between project completion and the interviews conducted in this study. Interviewees from projects that were completed well in advance of the research interviews occasionally struggled to remember events that had occurred during project implementation or beyond. The passing of time also resulted in key members of project teams leaving the proponent or partner organisation and being unable or unwilling to commit to an interview. In such cases it was beholden on researchers to attempt to find other individuals to describe events, but in some instances these individuals were found to have little knowledge of the mechanics or conduct of projects.
Section 3: The WIP projects

While Appendix 2 provides detailed descriptions of each project’s main activities and impacts using a case study format, the purpose of this section is to briefly summarise some of the key characteristics of the projects. Their diverse nature meant that they were not easily reduced to categories or convenient groupings, as might be expected from projects that are innovative or exploratory. The projects differed in terms of their locus of activity, the workforce and skills development needs they sought to address, the solutions or outcomes they developed, the nature or method of their delivery, their scope, and in terms of many other aspects. Despite these broad divergences in approach, an attempt is made to summarise the main features of projects within categories defined by topic area in Appendix 1 – Summary characteristics of WIP projects. The key topic areas of the projects of focus included:

- Workforce development to address industry skill needs and access to the national training system
- Skills for sustainability
- Apprentice support
- Innovation
- Place-based workforce development
- Skill recognition for volunteers; High performance workplaces; Workforce development for SMEs

Projects also varied in terms of their dominant activity or method. Some involved knowledge building activities, others training design, development and/or delivery, and others, the development and piloting of diagnostic tools. In terms of project outputs, these included research reports, products (for example tools or training resources) and models of practice – or any combination of the three. This three-pronged categorisation is used in Section 5 to identify distinct approaches to increasing and sustaining the impacts of projects.

The WIP is relatively unusual in that project parties are given significant autonomy in the development and implementation of ideas or models. As WIP funding is provided to support projects of an innovative or pilot nature, many projects were exploratory. Some were more exploratory than others, in particular those where models of practice were developed.

In terms of the individuals and organisations involved in projects, Section 1.4 lists the variety of proponents, partners and participants party to project activities and this list is representative of the breadth and roles played by these individuals involved in the projects. The genesis of many projects most commonly lay in ideas developed by proponents or partner consultants. As mentioned in Section 2, projects differed in terms of the number of individuals on project teams and this varied depending on the scale and nature of the project and whether project functions or project management was contracted to other organisations. Organisations that commonly emerged as proponents and project partners included Industry Skills Councils (ISCs), regional industry training and skills bodies, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), universities, industry peak bodies, and in a few projects, individual enterprises.

Projects were subject to a range of different funding arrangements. The projects evaluated in this report were funded by the WIP for amounts that ranged between $91,300 and $650,357. The WIP
funding was a contribution to the total cost of the project, with other stakeholders also required to provide a contribution. Some of the projects evaluated were subject to funding from multiple government programs. Some had their genesis in the earlier National Skills Shortages Strategy program. In others, project impact is being sustained as WIP outputs evolve into new initiatives which are funded out of other sources, including federal and state funding programs.
Section 4: Lessons learned relating to project conduct and implementation

This section outlines the lessons that have been drawn from across the WIP projects about matters of project process - how projects are established, designed, led and managed. The key lessons learned from WIP project processes related to the value of: engaging in scoping exercises to assess project context and risk; applying good project design principles; providing sound project structures for leadership and guidance; ensuring the involvement of key individuals; and shoring up participant engagement. Some of the most important lessons are drawn from the challenges in WIP projects in achieving one or more of these fundamental project elements.

The different aspects of project processes that are examined are interlinked as well as being shaped by the context and operation of specific projects. We do not suggest that each of the factors outlined in this section can be acted on in isolation from the rest of the project elements. However, much can be learned from the experiences described by project proponents and partners relating to each of these factors. For a summary examination across project process and impact, Section 6 outlines the breadth of success factors and risk factors associated with the WIP projects.

4.1 The critical role of project scoping for context and design

The experience of those involved in the projects examined in this study underscored the value of including a scoping stage as the initial phase in the life cycle of projects.

Lessons learned from the projects indicated that the value of scoping exercises lies in their ability to:

- provide analysis of the context within which project implementation is planned;
- assess the feasibility of the proposed project design in light of contextual factors identified; and,
- allow project partners to anticipate challenges that might pose barriers to implementation and modify project design to circumvent these barriers and ensure project success.

The focus of this section is on projects which did not include a scoping phase and where project partners, with the benefit of hindsight, outlined how a scoping phase would have led to more successful implementation and impact. There are fewer but equally important examples of where scoping exercises demonstrably added value to a project.

Analysing and understanding the project context

A view expressed by partners in a range of projects was that an initial feasibility or scoping phase improves the capacity of project partners to hone project activities to make them more accessible and appropriate to targeted populations. This in turn results in improved engagement among pilot participants and, further along, improved uptake among end users of project outputs.

A key lesson discerned in projects that included knowledge-building activities related to the value of performing initial assessments of extant knowledge or research sources already available in the project area of focus. In a project designed to improve skill formation in a sub-sector, the majority of the project budget was allocated to interviewing people in the industry to build knowledge of key issues. It became apparent subsequently that this information was already widely and publicly available. A scoping or feasibility phase which included an evaluation of the project proposal by an...
industry expert would have identified that this was the case and allowed for reallocation of the budget towards ‘on the ground’ training (implementation) activities at the workplace level.

Another example of contextual features identified in scoping exercises that have a bearing on the success or otherwise of project implementation are the features of populations or constituencies being researched in knowledge-building exercises. The characteristics of populations targeted for research have an effect on individuals’ willingness and propensity to participate in projects, thereby impacting upon achieved survey sample sizes and the subsequent robustness of research and its findings. Barriers to engagement for some participants included language fluency, literacy, availability and accessibility. A scoping process may alert project parties to the potential for difficulties in data collection that may occur throughout the process, given contextual factors, and allow for the re-design of methodologies to better fit the target population (examples of which are provided in a following section).

Other examples of contextual factors bearing on project success which might be revealed during a scoping process were evident from initiatives delivering training. In a project aimed at up-skilling an enterprise’s workforce during a downturn, important contextual factors included workplace cultures and the views and concerns of the employees targeted for up-skilling, each of which had an impact on employees’ receptiveness to, and participation in, the project. In this case, influential employee opinion leaders were suspicious of the proposed recognition of prior learning process in an environment of workforce concerns about the potential for job losses. A partner in this project felt that it would have been more successful if they had conducted an initial scoping process to better understand factors at the workplace that might impede uptake.

In another project, despite initial interest, low numbers of employers and employees subsequently participated in a pilot aimed at creating a new retail degree that blended higher education and vocational education and training (VET) curriculum and practices. The proponent and partners believed that a greater concentration of up-front work to understand how to ‘sell’ the degree would have improved rates of involvement. This view was reinforced when focus groups of young people run later in the project established that the degree would have been more attractive to them and their parents had it been cast as an opportunity to gain a business degree while earning money, rather than as a retail management degree. One of the partners believed that efforts to recruit employers also needed to be better informed at the outset. It was felt that structural factors in the retail sector shaped both employee and employer reluctance to be involved. Had this been examined in a scoping exercise at the beginning of the project it was possible that better targeted recruitment could have been undertaken, with parties warned and prepared to counter participant resistance.

Other scoping activities identified as having the potential to contribute to project success included ‘mapping the market’ for similar initiatives to those proposed in early-stage WIP proposals. Such issues came to the fore in WIP projects centred on Indigenous workforce development. Proponents in two projects believed a process of mapping other local interventions would have prevented duplication of effort, avoided ‘stepping on toes’ and ameliorated fatigue. As one of the proponents pointed out, potential participants are likely to become impatient with and/or confused by multiple approaches from various government funded initiatives. This experience was echoed in three other projects designed to up-skill existing workers in sustainability across different industries. Each of these initiatives suffered from much lower take up than had been anticipated. A party to the projects
believed this may have been avoided had a scoping process taken place to identify sources of subsidised training already being offered by the Commonwealth and the state governments.

Lessons drawn from the WIP projects establish that where WIP proposals suggest the design of initiatives in potentially ‘crowded’ markets, an early process of mapping the extent to which similar offerings exist allows WIP parties to identify the particular ‘niche’ they might occupy. This increases the likelihood of high levels of engagement with would-be participants and eventual uptake of the output among end users.

In projects which involved the development and delivery of open access e-learning courses and online diagnostic tools, team members reflected that the poor uptake of their project outputs in the wider market might have been predicted by market testing in the early stages of proposal development.

### Market testing for demand

A partner involved in a project to develop and pilot an online diagnostic tool to measure innovative capacity suggested that market testing prior to WIP funding of the project would have provided an indication of low demand for the tool, allowing for refinement of the project plan. This partner also advocated a need for the inclusion of a “much clearer marketing plan” within the project plan to encourage higher levels of uptake, rather than partners “kind of making it up, post the product (launch)”, as had happened in this project. Views were expressed by project partners that the low uptake of the tool, despite some attempts to publicise it by proponent and partner organisations, was due to the fact that building innovative capacity was not a first-order priority for organisations in the target market. One research participant described innovative capacity as “something that people recognise as being important, but not always a necessity - it's more of a ‘nice to have’... add-on”. Another described current espoused interest in innovation among managers to be at the level of “rhetoric” only. The project team expended significant effort in their attempts to recruit pilot organisations to trial the tool from among the extensive databases of two proponent/partner organisations. However few organisations were willing to participate in the project and the number of pilot organisations fell short of those proposed. In this case, as in several others in the WIP, the inability of the project team to recruit organisations for involvement in the pilot might have provided an early indication of a lack of demand for a project output among the targeted audience more broadly. Where such indications become evident at this point in the project cycle, it might be appropriate for ongoing funding to be re-considered, or for the project to be re-scoped to ensure its more effective implementation and uptake.

### Identifying design flaws

A scoping process also allows for close scrutiny of project design. In a project designed to develop an online resource to assist mining companies recruit, retain, and develop apprentices, the initial funding submission set out a methodology for the resources to be piloted by companies. However it became evident to the proponents part way through the project that this would not be possible, as the average duration of an apprenticeship is four years, while the WIP project duration was only two years. A scoping phase with expert advice may have identified this flaw in design prior to project implementation and allowed for project re-design and re-thinking of key milestones.

Two projects run by and for peak organisations, one an ISC and the other an employer association, involved the conduct of research processes to improve their understanding of workforce
development activities amongst their constituents. In both cases it was apparent that while they had in-depth knowledge of industry contexts and in the case of the ISC, of the training system, a lack of research expertise appeared to limit the quality of the information they were able to gather. Problems in survey design and not knowing how to use complementary methods of data collection meant that in one case, “...more questions were raised than we had answers”. In both projects scoping processes that utilised expert advice would have established the weaknesses in the proposed design and enabled a more suitable approach to be taken.

Planning project timeframes
Examination of project experiences indicated that a thorough scoping process may also highlight factors that could cause project activities to take more or less time than initially estimated. A lesson learned centred on the need to spend significant time upfront on planning project timeframes and expenditure items, in order to allocate appropriate amounts of time and resources to specific project activities or phases. For example, in one project where the objective was to develop a new nationally accredited training course, a project manager who had no prior experience of developing VET courses from inception to completion reflected that they spent “far too much time trying to sort through the bureaucracy in the beginning of the project” as they attempted to build their understanding of the system used for getting VET courses accredited. Once again, a scoping process involving scrutiny of the project plan by an expert with experience in this field may have identified a shortfall of time allocated to accreditation processes or strategies for assisting the project manager in managing this project element.

More broadly the experience of those involved in projects indicated that some budget or timeframe ‘blowouts’ or contingencies are difficult to anticipate, plan or budget for in advance. However project partners also recounted lessons learned relating to having allotted insufficient time and budget to activities. This included, in a project focused on developing new training units, insufficient time and resources allocated to the research and development of entirely new course content, or, in the case of the development and piloting of an online diagnostic tool, to the process of recruiting organisations to participate in pilots. In another series of projects, the process of recruiting enterprises to be involved in skilling for sustainability programs needed to be of sufficient duration for proponents to be able to convince employers of the business case for enterprise involvement, and for organisations to prepare the way culturally. In most cases, project partners commented that they had learnt from these experiences and that their project planning for subsequent projects had been more effective as a consequence. The timeframe of the project was also an issue in one project, outlined below.

Building in realistic timeframes
In a project that set up local committees in order to build workforce development capacity in regional farming areas a key lesson learned was that building understanding around workforce development issues, and achieving cultural change to this end, takes time – certainly longer than the project’s 16-month timespan. Regional committees required sufficient time to develop as a group and influence regional workforce planning efforts, particularly in areas where there had been little focus on workforce development in the past and where they were effectively starting from scratch. The project timeframe was too short for the project aims to be realised, with committees in some areas slower to achieve the action points they had set for themselves than others. Project partners advised that those designing and funding workforce development programs in regional areas where knowledge of
workforce development is fairly minimal might consider the benefits attached to longer-term project timeframes. A proponent felt that a lengthier timeframe would have allowed the committees to better establish themselves as a functioning group and to establish strong local networks, which would enable them to build support for planned initiatives.

While the lack of support for committees from regional agencies in two of the four project areas was seen as a barrier to success in this project, it was the proponent’s view that a project of longer duration would be more likely to garner support from government agencies in local areas, as the program would be seen to be more credible and enduring in the local area. This was a critical issue given the plethora of relatively short-term policy programs instituted in some regional areas and the resultant ‘initiative fatigue’ among farmers in these areas. The proponent had observed the lack of commitment among local stakeholders to short term programs, stating, “Programs come and go. So if it’s a program that's going to come and go and it's going to be two meetings, (the response from local stakeholders will be) “Like yeah, whatever, I'm really busy.” This proponent also emphasised that a longer project time frame — say, four years — would provide greater certainty for project teams and stakeholders, allowing them to employ a permanent, well-connected and locally embedded project officer, ideally (in this project) a member of a farming industry representative body.

**Refining project design in line with contextual understanding**

In several projects it was evident that the early research work undertaken affected subsequent project design. This reinforces the benefits of scoping exercises as well as underlining the need for project management to remain flexible and responsive to what is being discovered. While it is not possible to identify all factors that impact on a project’s design in initial scoping, proponents expressed the view that scoping the issues was preferable to “constantly playing catch-up” due to important information emerging later in the project. The following examples show how the design of several projects was modified in response to new understandings.

Information consolidated in a literature and knowledge review undertaken early in a project piloting partnerships for innovation was instrumental in informing an early decision to redesign the project quite significantly, moving to a new methodological approach. The original intention of the project was to devise a means of up-skilling senior managers in SMEs to improve the viability of their businesses by utilising their high order interactive media skills in other industries. They envisaged a sizeable group of individuals receiving mentoring and professional development. It became apparent from an examination of the extant material on the topic that not enough was known about cross-industry innovation using interactive media to design such a program. Armed with the information that was available, they developed an action research plan based on a small number of intensive case studies as a means of *practicing* cross industry partnerships while *learning* from them. A thorough examination of literature and knowledge gathered in the scoping process was used to scaffold a draft framework for the integrations to follow, which was then built upon by examining the partnerships in action. A project partner, in reflecting on the importance of understanding what has taken place in other industries (in this case integrating design rather than interactive media), reinforced the value of learning from the experience of others to help guide the project:

> You want to be working side by side with other sectors, saying ‘well this is how you get that to work’. The momentum for design integration is extraordinary. It’s come about through
demonstrators, the build-up of capacity, a mixture of government programs and companies that have become in effect consultancy companies that know how you do it.

In several projects that involved conducting research to build knowledge of workforce development issues in specific sectors, research methodologies had to be adjusted part way through projects in order to better ‘fit’ the characteristics of the target research participants. In a project in the family day care sector, the initial design involved conducting telephone interviews with participants, who were family day care educators undergoing training and assessment. However, initial attempts to conduct telephone interviews indicated that several characteristics of the family day care population presented challenges to the proposed research method. Educators were “time poor” and their work days were long, and cultural and religious protocols and the fact that some spoke English as a second or third language all presented difficulties. The research strategy was altered, with researchers instead conducting focus groups of educators, accessed through RTOs and family day care schemes. The focus groups ‘piggybacked’ on training/workshop sessions held on scheme premises at “accessible times”. This method was deemed to be very effective by the proponents and led to greater participant engagement.

A second interviewee from a partner organisation involved in this project described how the achieved sample size in the survey of educators conducted as part of the project was smaller than they would have liked. This again was due to characteristics of the family day care workforce, who are dispersed, “disparate” and “not very aware of how broader (research) projects affect their actual day to day work... so they wouldn’t necessarily see a lot of value in participating in a research project”. In light of these characteristics, researchers were required to spend time explaining the purpose of the research and its sector-wide focus to potential participants, as well as describing the value of sector-wide research, how the research fit with their role as educators, and how the research would benefit them, as individual educators, and the sector more broadly. This was because educators held a particular world view, as explained by proponents,

They don’t even think ‘sector’. They’re just a small business operator, and so it’s not even like interviewing a disability worker about what they do in the sector because they're not attached to a large organisation or anything. So that was a learning: ... being really careful with communication and framing things before you hit them with so many questions.

**Incorporating risk assessment in scoping processes**

Some projects highlighted a need to embed risk analysis in scoping. Incorporating a risk analysis and risk management process into a scoping phase allows for consideration of factors that might derail the conduct of projects and pose barriers to project implementation. Consideration of these factors assists the development of strategies to ensure that project implementation proceeds down the planned route despite the occurrence of unexpected events. Primary among them appears to have been securing upfront and demonstrable commitment from partners and participants.

A key lesson learned from projects was that scoping exercises should involve close scrutiny of the resources available for implementation by partner/proponent associations as part of risk analysis processes. Funding might include an obligation for project partners to demonstrate during the proposal stage, in concrete and precise terms, the extent to which they will commit financial and in-kind resources to the project from start to finish. Those conducting a scoping or feasibility planning
process might then subject partners’ stated commitments to close examination, to assess whether the resources committed are sufficient for successful project implementation occur.

**Risk and feasibility assessment**

In one project, a consultant partner organisation had developed the WIP proposal and was contracted to develop the key project deliverable, a training package. The proponent and other partner organisations agreed informally that the proponent organisation would take full responsibility for project management and marketing of the resources produced from the project. However, the proponent organisation faced challenges in meeting their obligations due to a lack of resources. As a consequence, the contracted consultant partner elected to take a more active role in executing the project from beginning to end. This involved undertaking additional organisation and planning work and marketing and dissemination of the resources developed. They did this without receiving extra project funds and as a result, minimal marketing of the resources occurred and take-up of the training resources was affected.

Reflecting on the project, a partner from the consultant organisation felt that project implementation and impact would potentially have been more successful if project funding had been allocated to an initial phase where the project plan processes were subjected to rigorous analysis — “put under the microscope” - by an expert evaluator, when first developed. This process of testing project planning, of “risk assessment and more risk mitigation planning at the front end”, would have highlighted resource challenges in proponent and partner organisations that could affect the management and implementation of the project, which would then result in low take-up of the product developed. A feasibility process of this type would have allowed the parties to plan for alternative (“backup”) sources of funding and resources. In addition, it might have identified a need to develop closer relationships with the project partners responsible for implementing the project at the local level and to test whether they too were adequately resourced and financed to implement the project. This process could have identified ways of boosting the resources of these partner organisations, to allow for more extensive implementation of the project pilot, or might have identified alternative partner organisations that the project team could foster relationships with in order to increase uptake of project outputs. It was suggested that the WIP fund’s administrators might have played a role in engaging with project partners in order to scrutinise the viability of their role in the project and the level of resources they were able to devote to the project.

Project partners described lessons from another two WIP initiatives which involved implementing training programs and mentoring with participants from pilot enterprises. In both projects, the momentum for implementation of the project fell away part way through the project due to a lack of support and resourcing for the project on the part of the enterprise. Initial analysis of potential risks related to pilot site implementation may have averted the problems that a lack of momentum and organisational resource commitment caused. Lessons were learned in a project where all of the pilot sites were simultaneously dealing with a difficult and uncertain environment and at times struggled to commit the levels of staff necessary to keep the pilots on track. It became evident that participant organisations need to commit to allocating appropriate resources to the implementation of pilot programs, in particular staff resources. In this case, the proponent recommended that there needs to be “more upfront emphasis to develop a shared commitment to avoid situations where action plans fall behind, which then require significant catch-up activities”.
Where pilot projects are conducted at enterprise level, some consideration might be given to changes or events that might occur in the broader economic environment in which enterprises operate and which may have the potential to disrupt project conduct. Such factors included, in the projects surveyed, the occurrence of the GFC. In three projects, the GFC and its impacts on organisations disrupted project piloting or implementation processes. In one, a government department had initiated the piloting of an innovation diagnostic tool, but was then hit by budget cuts. Those who were involved in the pilot lost their jobs or moved on and the organisation was no longer able to participate in the pilot program. In a second project, downsizing, extended shutdowns, and the loss of major tenders that occurred as a result of the GFC diverted attention away from planned project activities aimed at embedding High Performance Working approaches in pilot enterprises. And in a third enterprise-level project focused on up-skilling workers during a downturn, a post-GFC upswing in production led to a reduction in the time available to train workers in groups. The response of the training coordinator was to conduct one-on-one assessment and training with individual workers.

Other external events that disrupted project schedules related to seasonal or climatic factors. In a project conducted in a regional area involving representatives from farming communities, an early harvest prevented project activities from occurring to schedule. In several others flooding delayed timeframes and led to more muted impacts of projects. It is difficult to anticipate all events that have the potential to affect project timeframes and outcomes. Even so, some parties to projects felt that contingencies may have been built into timeframes and deliverables, had risk assessments been conducted at the outset.

**Expertise in scoping and risk assessment**

Some project parties suggested that project implementation would have been improved had scoping exercises or feasibility processes been undertaken by experts in the field. Such experts, it was suggested, might conduct critical assessments of initial proposals and act as a sounding board by providing feedback on how project design and methodologies might be made more robust. Assessment by an expert could ensure all-important industry specific contexts were taken into account in project design. This was exemplified in a project where consultants failed to deliver most of the project outcomes set out in the proposal. An interviewee in the proponent organisation believed that this would have been avoided had a skilled qualified expert with extensive, practical industry experience provided an assessment of the project design at the proposal stage. Appraisal by an expert would provide an early-stage evaluation of factors that might impede success, and suggestions for strategies to overcome these.

In some projects, a process was followed whereby the project proponent was responsible for drawing up the proposal, submitting it to the Section, receiving funding, and then engaging consultants to implement the project. However in several of these initiatives, the proponents had only minimal knowledge about the project topic or the specific sector in which the project was to be implemented. Proponents and contracted consultants alike expressed the view that the projects would have benefited from the contracted consultant, who was engaged on the basis of their expert knowledge in these fields, being involved in scoping the project parameters at an early stage to improve the robustness and effectiveness of project design and delivery. An alternative to this process, suggested by one consultant involved in delivering a project, was that a process of refining project design and parameters might be undertaken jointly by consultants and the project leadership group after the consultant has been awarded the tender to deliver the initiative.
It was evident in some projects that having experts with research skills and deep contextual knowledge within the project team was a highly effective means of ensuring quality scoping was undertaken. The depth of industry, research and conceptual expertise that existed across the leadership group in one project enabled a very thorough internal understanding of the project context. This was complemented by an embedded research and evaluation group which was tasked with undertaking literature reviews and industry investigations, feeding back findings that assisted in the design of the project (as mentioned earlier in this section) but also providing on-going reflection on the progress of the project across the whole team. This embedded model appeared to work very effectively within that project and contributed to high quality outputs which will be used to disseminate findings more broadly.

4.2 Relationships between project partner organisations

The way that project partners worked together and the various leadership structures that operated in projects were important to project success. Where those relationships were effective and well balanced they added considerable value to projects. Conversely, where there were problems in ensuring on-going senior management support from partner or participating organisations, projects encountered difficulties. In some cases the WIP project operated to build and consolidate important stakeholder relationships as discussed further in Section 5.

The role of project reference and steering groups

Project partners in several projects highlighted how the makeup and workings of the project reference group or steering committee had a major bearing on the success of their projects. Project reference groups typically involved industry stakeholders from key employer and employee representative groups and the relevant Industry Skills Council, as well as representatives from the WIP.

Interviewees in this study were not asked explicit questions about the functioning, input or involvement of steering or reference groups and in many cases they and project reports did not mention reference groups in the course of discussions about project implementation. However in several projects, reference groups were explicitly identified by project parties as contributing to the successful outcome of the project. A partner in one such project stressed the importance of “thinking very carefully and strategically about who is on those reference groups and how they are managed to achieve the best outcomes” at their initial setup, adding: “A lot of this is personality and relationship dependent, but if you get that balance right, then the collaboration that happens to achieve the project outcomes is much greater than tokenism”. In this case, the composition of the reference group had a bearing on the eventual impact of the project as a consequence of dissemination activities, with reference group members prepared and able to “spread the word” about the project outcomes among their stakeholder communities. Reference group members may also act as a sounding board and assist with recruiting participants, as occurred in a second project, where a project partner described how the reference group “threw curly questions” at the project partners and assisted in identifying pilot participants.

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5 There is no requirement in the WIP Guidelines for a steering or reference committee to be established for projects. It should be noted that not all projects had formal steering committees or reference groups.
Steering committee members on a regional workforce development project observed that the role of their committee was a ‘balancing act’. The value members bring is often the deep experience they have had in running similar initiatives. If it is operating well the steering committee can guide and advise the project to avoid pitfalls. Using previous experience to identify project design shortcomings, such as instilling the need to gain concrete employer support, was one example given where a steering committee was able to provide critical guidance. It was also imperative, according to interviewees, that national steering committees must be careful not to ‘intervene’ or determine the detail of regionally-based projects because people outside of the community cannot understand the all-important local dynamics that are invariably at work. Therefore local ‘embedded’ reference or working groups were regarded as fundamental for providing that intelligence, as well as the contacts they bring for building consensus and cohesion around a common local purpose.

Lessons were also evident with regard to the mechanics of how reference groups work. A lesson from one project was that some thought might be given to the logistics of reference group processes. A consultant in this project was commissioned by the proponent organisation to design, write and deliver a new training package and worked with a steering committee comprised of members geographically spread throughout Australia. Communication between the project partners and the reference group occurred by email and telephone communication. Despite this, the consultant found that “distance made it (communication) difficult”. On reflection, a more effective approach would have involved establishing a steering committee of members based in the local area, which would have allowed the consultant to engage in face to face contact with steering committee members in the course of resolving problems that emerged throughout the process.

In two other projects the involvement of local committees that pre-existed the WIP initiative added value to the projects as reference groups. In both cases the committees included representatives from a broad and bipartisan base who were well-known within the local communities for their involvement in workforce development. They were regarded as the ‘go to’ people on such matters. The networks they had were well established and extensive. These structures provided an on-going focus and interest in the project beyond the WIP funding, and a continuation of activity at the local level.

**Project linkages with industry bodies**

Project success was also felt to be a function of the nature of the project partnership or project team, in terms of the types of organisations from which project partners were drawn and the calibre of the relationship between individuals from partner organisations. In a project aimed at building capacity in the family day care workforce, the Community Services and Health ISC (the proponent) worked closely with the peak body representing the sector, Family Day Care Australia (FDCA). The relationship between project partners from the two organisations was described as “a really strong partnership” from beginning to end of the project, and enabled the proponent organisation (via contracted researchers) to engage closely with individuals in the family day care sector. This close relationship with FDCA was of great value as the proponent organisation benefited from FDCA’s detailed knowledge of and close connections with the sector. The project proponents recommended the use of this “model” of partnerships between industry peak associations and independent organisations such as ISCs in producing robust, in-depth “base-level” research on specific industry sectors. The FDCA partner was of the same view, stating (unprompted) that a key lesson to be imparted to practitioners was that where sector stakeholders are seeking to define workforce challenges, it is
“ideal to work with a body like the Industry Skills Council” due to their skills in managing research and their expertise in all matters relating to workforce development. Further, in the eyes of policy makers, the ISC’s stewardship of the project lent significant credibility to the research due to the ISC’s status as an ‘independent’ body, as compared with research commissioned by a peak body in order to lobby on behalf of the sector.

Partnership between peak bodies on another WIP project started ‘a dialogue’ between industry stakeholders where barriers to collaboration had previously existed. Competition for skilled labour in agriculture and mining industries in regional areas can be problematic. Several interviewees noted the challenges this caused in bringing together some local employers to work across industries. One of the WIP projects, in creating a project partnership at the stakeholder level between agriculture and mining employer associations, gave the project credibility in the eyes of local employers in an environment of low trust. In addition, according to a project partner this has opened up a new discourse between the organisations to enable ongoing work for further cross industry collaboration in the areas where pilots took place as well as at the stakeholder level.

This contrasted with the experience of a proponent ISC in a second project which focused on building workforce development around sustainability in the transport, logistics and warehousing sector. A project partner from the ISC described a key learning from this project which related to strategies for increasing levels of participant involvement in the project, by building closer relationships with organisations such as industry peak bodies. The ISC struggled to get sufficient numbers of stakeholder participants to attend industry consultation forums (focus groups) conducted in the early stages of the project. In hindsight, the partner stated that they would have used a variety of strategies to increase participation, including forming partnerships with industry peak associations, explaining:

I would have targeted (individual stakeholder companies) more specifically and I would have liked to have had more “pre-” stuff done before the focus groups, so people had more information and more knowledge before coming to the focus groups, so have it more targeted. And I’d even possibly do something through, say, the Victorian Transport Association, so formal partnerships with industry employer bodies, and go through those organisations.

**Project leadership and organisational commitment**

Project leadership was regarded as a critical factor in project success by many interviewees. This included the need for strong leadership internal to the project, as well as demonstrable and active support from senior people within proponent, partner, and participant organisations.

Ensuring representation and commitment from across key players within an initiative, and having them be an active part of the leadership group, was considered a precondition for success in several projects. In a project that created an integrated higher education (HE) and VET degree, proponents and partners believed that strong involvement from senior people within the partnership organisations had been particularly important given the traditional cultural and organisational divide between HE and VET institutions. In this project it was primarily dealt with by involving VET and HE partners that were co-owned and co-located. However the proponent cautioned that the individuals who take on those leadership roles are fundamental to ‘selling’ the ideas to their respective organisations and that the benefits of the collaboration were “not always obvious to those not directly involved.” In this case (as in several other projects) changes in senior management in one of
the partner organisations put back timeframes and changed the internal dynamics of the project. The commitment of the project leaders was enough to maintain momentum but they proceeded without the same degree of institutional support they started with. A final observation from the project proponent was that it was critical when selecting project partners to consider the alignment of the project aims with the strategic objectives of all the partners - and that a project will have much more traction where those factors are firmly tied. In this case the philosophical commitment of the university to open up access to higher education sat well with the development of a degree that combined VET and HE in the retail sector.

There was patchy leadership support for a pilot run in a large state based volunteer organisation to demonstrate the effect of a ‘competency conversation’ based recognition of prior learning (RPL) process (an approach described in Appendix 2.5). Given the preconceptions many people had about RPL as a ‘poor cousin’ means of assessing skills, the leadership of the organisation was not uniformly ‘in tune’ with the initiative. According to interviewees this was primarily a result of not having been actively involved in the pilot early on. It was felt that if the full executive had participated at the beginning of the project, thereby experiencing the process first hand, then they would have had a better grasp of the intent, purpose and power of the model. As it was, the project suffered from inconsistent outcomes resulting from differences in the application of the model, which was due to the lack of unified leadership support.

The complementary skills and expertise amongst the leadership group in a project with multiple streams was believed to have enhanced the overall success of the initiative, despite having the potential to be cumbersome given the number of people involved. The success of the leadership group was made possible by the structure of the project and the degree to which the different work groups were integrated by on-going communication and engagement across the different streams of activity. This operated well to ensure that the skills and knowledge of the project leaders continued to be shared at critical moments. For example the leaders of the research and evaluation and education teams were actively involved in discussing and designing the partnership integrations, including the selection and recruitment processes for the participating enterprises. This ensured that the benefits of having a range of experts involved was maximised whenever possible, rather than ‘siloing’ the different component parts of the project and missing opportunities for cross-fertilisation of ideas, knowledge and findings. One of the project partners reflected on the importance of the “range of voices in the project” and the challenges that might have presented. In his view the project was effective in structuring the various layers of collaboration while allowing for the autonomy to innovate,

... I mean it's really surprised me with the amount of success, with how well things have gone, and in particular because there's been so many stakeholders, and we've got state level funding, you've got federal level funding, you've got universities, you've got different business, you've got different interactive media teams, and then business mentors. It's been amazing. I think the overall approach with this is that it has been having a very sound structure, but it hasn't been over-prescriptive, if that makes sense.

A final lesson learned from one of the projects was that the organisational commitment of pilot participants may waver when key management champions for project involvement depart the organisation. In this project, aimed at up-skilling senior managers to embed sustainability practices at
their enterprises, the key senior management stakeholder at a pilot site was very enthusiastic about the site’s engagement in the project. However this individual left the company and the pilot process at this site did not involve any senior management team members from that point on. As a result, none of the participants from the company had the authority to plan “a whole of site response” to sustainability demands in the external environment, a factor deemed crucial to the success of site-level project implementation. This company’s involvement was not sustained throughout the duration of the pilot and was deemed relatively unsuccessful. A project partner noted that, to ensure pilot success, “one of the key lessons is definitely to have the most senior managers in the room”. Project partners stressed the importance of senior managers acting as a champion of the site’s involvement for the pilot process to be successful.

4.3 Project management

Effective, responsive and constant project management was identified as a key precondition for project success by partners in a significant number of projects – and was a view that was shared by individuals involved in both ‘successful’ and ‘unsuccessful’ projects. Interviewees described specific skills that were critical for the role to be performed well and the factors that can lead to breakdowns in effective project management that posed significant risk to project success.

The experience of project partners indicated that project managers need to have the appropriate skills and resourcing to implement projects. An individual from a proponent organisation who had managed a project that was considered to be successful by all interviewees described how the success of project management was predicated on the degree of experience of project managers and whether they have well-developed negotiation and liaison skills, adding:

I think that bureaucrats need to make sure that people who manage these projects are people who have appropriate skills to be able to do the collaboration, do the interaction, do the follow up … (who) have those really good negotiation skills, and I think that’s really important in any funding where you’ve got outcomes that need to be met.

The converse was also evident in projects which were considered to be largely unsuccessful by those involved. It was the consensus view among partners in one project that its lack of success stemmed from an absence of project management from the proponent organisation, which was staffed wholly by volunteers in unpaid positions and who, it was assumed, had little time to drive the project. In a second project the combination of a lack of hands-on project management on the part of the proponent organisation and poor performance on the part of consultants contracted to deliver the project outcomes resulted in almost none of the project aims being met, as the proponent failed to enforce the consultants’ obligations. In addition, a formal contract did not exist between the consultants and proponents, nor was there evidence of a detailed budget or milestones to be met by the consultants. In reflecting on the project, an individual who arrived at the proponent organisation after the consultants had begun working on the project emphasised the need for “rigorous vetting” of project managers to ensure that they have the experience, qualifications, and content knowledge required to implement projects.

The importance of having ‘responsive and flexible’ project management was brought home in a project where the incumbent project manager changed, providing a contrast between two quite different styles. It was the view of several people involved that the approach taken by the original
project manager did not reflect the “spirit of what we were trying to do”. Consequently general support for the project was flagging until the new manager came on board with “... a wholly different attitude. Nothing was too hard and everything was worth a try.” What was required in this project, given its exploratory nature, was a capacity to, “... keep on top of the detail but be really adaptable and respond to things as she found them.” The following example was used to show how flexibility and persistence had been important in driving this project:

The venue had to be changed three times before anybody came. In the end we put it in a church hall, a space out the back of a church ... people were not interested in table cloths and fancy meeting rooms with mints ... it intimidated them and frankly, kept them away in droves. I just went with it and said, “well, good, okay”, I got out my wheelie shopping bag and I filled it up with all sorts of biscuits and cheap coffee and then they finally started to drift in...

Continuity and stability in project management processes throughout the lifespan of the projects was deemed critical. There were several elements to this lesson from the projects. In one project, a project manager was employed from outside of the proponent organisation two months after the project had started. According to project partners, a key lesson from this project was the importance of the project manager being involved from the earliest stages of project development and implementation. Where this does not occur, time slippage may occur and important preliminary activities that need to occur may not occur, with the potential to compromise the success of project implementation activities.

Similarly in other projects, turnover of project managers presented challenges to the successful implementation of projects. In several projects, a break in continuity occurred where key project partners were unable to continue working on the project. In one project the initial project manager carried out consultations with stakeholder groups but was then forced to leave the project due to ill-health. This resulted in the project “stalling” while a new project manager was found. The replacement project manager described “having to start again” to bring themselves up to speed on foundation knowledge and key contextual factors driving the project, and felt that the project partners had to “scramble” to get the project up to speed and re-establish stakeholder relationships forged in the early stages of the project. A partner on this project noted that in hindsight, a risk management strategy should have been developed early on in which several of the project partners had responsibility for key project activities, to allow for continuity of the project in the absence of a project manager. However this partner felt that while the project team “need to be better at” anticipating and managing risks such as this, the lean resources of the partner organisations and the relatively small amount of WIP funding they received precluded against partners playing a role in sharing project management activities.

4.4 The role of ‘integrators’

There were several examples in WIP projects where particular individuals acted as powerful enablers and advocates for the ideas and lessons that were generated from projects. They were critical in bringing people together to create change. They did this with deep understanding of the contexts in which they operated, they could draw on expansive professional networks, and they had a philosophical commitment to the projects they were engaged in. We refer to these individuals as ‘integrators’, a self-ascribed term used by one of them, who stated,
I’m a bit of an integrator, so it is my job to sort of draw in the right people and to compose a project model that might give you the right things at the right time for the right reason.

The integrators encountered in WIP projects tended to share certain characteristics. They were often in ‘second’ careers having worked within the industry sectors for a considerable time. As a consequence they were very familiar with the context and operation of those areas. They were invariably passionate about changing them for the better which had driven them to work in their current roles, sometimes having created enterprises to enable that focus, or moving between projects that they regarded as worthwhile. Due to their long experience and ‘activism’ they had accrued deep and expansive networks in their areas of interest. While they were dedicated to their own vision of progress, they sought and used collaborative mechanisms for determining problems, solutions and actions. They often possessed tacit knowledge about other projects and were, without exception, instrumental in the genesis of the WIP project in which they were involved. They also had extensive knowledge of government and other funding sources and how these might be used to resource projects.

These attributes and skills added considerable value to WIP project successes and durability in several ways. Integrators used their credibility within their substantial networks to bring important stakeholders to the projects; their knowledge and understanding of the sector helped improve project design; they were very effective at managing collaborative processes and getting the best out of collective activity; and they were very good at accessing funding to pursue what they considered to be important projects. All of these factors contributed to both accelerating outcomes and expanding their reach. In addition, they continue to operate in these spaces and build the ‘on-going project’ that they had elected to be part of; whether that was building opportunities for Indigenous Australians, building workforce development capacity in particular industry sectors, improving the sustainability of regional Australia, or opening up the capacity for business innovation through creative digitisation. In the self-effacing words of one of these integrators, “Really it was mostly about bringing people together to make things happen.” The WIP did not ‘create’ these roles but projects certainly appeared to benefit from the inclusion of these individuals in project leadership positions.

One project benefitted from the role played by a project integrator in several ways. The genesis of the project came from the integrator. His ongoing engagement with key stakeholders and key people in the industry made him privy to the debates and issues that were front of their minds. His experience and knowledge of running previous government projects had put him in contact with the WIP managers and ultimately, what was to become the project leadership team. The pilot organisations, the centrepiece of the project, were matched up to form partnerships by drawing on his deep and expansive contacts within the interactive media industry. He conducted the initial facilitation processes and developed the framework document to guide partnerships. Essentially, as one of the project team affectionately put it, “… his fingerprints are all over it.”

While the presence of an integrator in a project is not essential, the following examples suggest the difference that they can make in quite practical ways. The proponent of a second project was an integrator. It was originally planned that a project officer would be recruited to do the day to day work required of the project. Had this been the case several initiatives that came out of the project would not have happened. It was due to the existing personal and professional contacts of the integrator that various people came together at various points in the project and created alliances.
The project proponent made the observation that had they used a project officer it would have taken them much longer to build the relationships, which were critical to the level of success the project was able to achieve.

In another project the knowledge and networks of the project proponent were central to the genesis and success of the project. The project was concerned with building the capacity of existing employees in a sub-industry with limited engagement in the national training system. This required convincing large employers to commit to allowing staff to participate in 12 months of training. The proponent’s in-depth knowledge of the inner workings of the businesses, having operated in the sector for many years, gave him the knowledge to design a course that would suit employers, equipped him with the personal contacts to make the necessary arguments, and enabled him to design a training process that would be sustainable.

4.5 The role of consultants

Project consultants were engaged across a range of different projects in a variety of roles. In some cases they performed discrete components of a project, such as conducting a survey of stakeholders; in others they designed, conducted and delivered the major portion of the project. How this was managed differed between projects. In some cases the consultant relationship was a success. In others the quality of the consultant contribution was problematic.

The extent to which project consultants possess the expertise required to undertake their contracted role within WIP-funded projects was highlighted as a significant contributor to the success or otherwise of projects. Project partners particularly valued consultants who had in-depth knowledge of the project’s area of focus or who had significant experience in the field as a result of working on similar projects in the past. For example, in one project which involved the design, development and delivery of a new training program, a proponent felt that a key factor contributing to the success of the project was the consultant partner’s past experience as a trainer who had run an RTO for over a decade. This meant that not only was he well-equipped to design and deliver the training, he also understood the training package framework and was able to shape the program to fit package requirements. In a second project, the proponent similarly believed that the skills and experience of the consultant – a researcher - was a central factor leading to the success of the project. The particular skills highlighted by the proponent included the researcher’s objectivity, their technical research skills, their credibility and good reputation among practitioners working in the sector of focus, and the fact that practitioners trusted the consultant, who had worked previously in the sector as a practitioner. These factors resulted in a very high level of involvement and engagement – including extensive feedback on research findings - from participants in the project.

On the flipside, previous sections have touched on lessons relating to how project partners might safeguard against poor performance on the part of consultants. In several projects, project partners and proponents were let down, to various degrees, by subcontracted consultants. A lack of appropriate skills and knowledge among contracted consultants emerged as a barrier to success in several projects. Project partners engaged consultants in the expectation that the latter possessed contextual knowledge of the particular sectors in which projects were to be conducted. However in each case, it emerged, partway through project completion, that consultants’ espoused knowledge was minimal. This resulted in, for example, consultants engaging in large-scale processes of collecting data that was already widely publicly available, or failing to collect sufficient or appropriate data.
because they had not honed data collection methods to the characteristics of the population in the sector. One interviewee, who was employed by a proponent organisation after consultants had commenced a project that eventually failed to meet its aims, suggested that the poor project outcome might have been avoided if assessment of WIP proposals had included a process of subjecting consultants’ credentials to “much stronger scrutiny”, prior to their (proposed) engagement by proponents.

In another project, the experience of the partners highlighted the importance of the stakeholders working together to shape research design. In this case the commissioned consultants were engaged on the basis of their strong reputation for conducting research and their expertise in a particular topic area, described by the proponent as their “credibility around research and their experience around green skills”. However, in hindsight, the proponents were guided by “expectations that the researchers had more knowledge and research skills than they actually had.” The commissioned researchers failed to tailor their approach to recruiting research participants (industry stakeholders) to the characteristics of the industry, which resulted in fewer than expected participants. As a result, the quality of the research was compromised as the survey sample size was too small to allow for robust analysis (n=45) and was unrepresentative of the population of interest. Those commissioning the research from the proponent organisation had little research expertise themselves so were unaware of what they should expect from contract researchers or from the research model the contractors had proposed. They suggested that a key lesson was that rather than expecting consultants to have in depth knowledge of the particularities of industry sectors, proponents should work closely with researchers to impart their knowledge of the sector and to help shape the research design. A proponent explained,

I guess it’s around being fairly clear in terms of - yes, a research organisation may have conducted consultation this way before but in our sector it’s not going to work, because people don’t work those hours. ... and not just be led, well, this is what the research experts have always done and it’s always worked.

Input from the commissioning organisation, it was suggested, would lead to a better fit between the research design (including proposed research budgets) and the context within which the research will be conducted, leading to more successful research outcomes. A second recommendation was that research contractors who had not worked in particular sectors or topic areas in the past should engage in an initial scoping process, prior to undertaking main-stage research, to build their understanding of the sector or topic of interest. A proponent explained “I would probably have a way in the project of not going straight into that [main] stage of the project but have your research people spend a little bit more time getting to know your sector if they don’t and kind of test that”. A third suggestion was that the project contract should have some sort of “contingency” provision in place that enabled further survey work to be conducted if the achieved sample size was smaller than initially proposed in the proposal.

4.6 Engaging project participants: challenges and strategies

Previous parts of this report have touched on lessons learned in relation to the challenges of, and strategies for, engaging project participants. Engaging participants in projects presented one of the key challenges to project partners. This section considers several aspects of participant engagement,
including the initial ‘recruitment’ of participants, as well as issues relating to their ongoing engagement throughout the duration of the project.

The characteristics of participants in the WIP projects varied markedly depending on the design and focus of the project. Indicative examples of participants in projects include: representatives of project partner or stakeholder organisations; individuals engaged in pilot training programs or project research exercises; and where the focus of the project was at site (pilot) level, managers and/or workers, volunteer workers, first year apprentices, and Indigenous job seekers.

The lessons recounted by project parties allow us to examine: the challenges to recruiting and retaining participants they faced; the approaches they developed to counter these challenges; and their views on ‘what works’ with regard to successful approaches to participant recruitment and retention. The success or failure of project partners in recruiting participants often rested on the ability of the partners to ‘sell’ engagement in the project to potential participants in the face of the challenges they encountered. One project proponent referred to this as establishing the “value proposition”. In several projects where the focus was on recruiting organisations to participate in pilot programs, the value proposition often related to the potential cost savings the organisation could make as a result of having participated in the project.

Examples of engagement ‘challenges’ included the following:

- In several projects, lessons were learned that related to the challenges of recruiting, and engendering sustained commitment among, long hours-working, ‘time poor’ participants such as farmers, senior managers, volunteers and family day care educators.
- Partners in several projects where the support of local agencies was vital to the successful implementation of the project, but was absent, reflected that in hindsight they might have engendered the commitment of these organisations if project leaders had spent more time developing ‘face to face’ relationships with these bodies and building their commitment to the projects, prior to their launch.

Assessment of lessons learned from the breadth of projects studied indicated that the range of issues relating to participant engagement that needed to be managed includes:

- Identifying hard to locate participants
- Communicating with participants in the right medium and the right language
- Allaying suspicion amongst more vulnerable participants
- Designing participation for time efficiency
- Dealing with participant fatigue and cynicism of ‘outsider’ organisations
- Effectively communicating the value the project would have for them

These issues are discussed in more detail in relation to three projects described below which describe challenges and strategies in relation to: recruiting employee participants to a workplace-level training program; recruiting farmers and farming industry representatives to local committees in regional areas; and recruiting pilot enterprises in the food processing industries.
Building buy-in at a manufacturing site

One project that was partially-funded by the WIP had the aim of up-skilling workers during a downturn in production. This was to be achieved using an RPL process and training workers using Competitive Manufacturing and Engineering training packages. Representatives of the company, union, and an RTO steered the project and project participants were employed across three sites of the company. The project manager, seconded from an RTO, had no difficulty persuading company managers of the merits of the Competitive Manufacturing qualification on the basis that it had produced substantial cost savings for other organisations, state-wide, which had adopted it. However employees and site opinion leaders were suspicious of the training program amid a “whispering campaign” that managers were going to conduct a skills audit in order to target workers for redundancy. Amidst rumours that the company was about to be shut down and jobs lost, many employees could not see the benefit of involvement in the up-skilling program, including the RPL process. As one partner explained:

[Employees] had been there a long time, they were apprehensive about, “If it [the company] does close, what’s going to happen? What’s going to happen to me? If I get a qualification, what difference is it going to make?” And they couldn’t see that what they did already related to a large chunk of the qualification (via RPL processes).

As a result, the partners faced difficulties persuading employees to engage in the training program. A key lesson learned, according to a partner, was the need for the project team to develop an early understanding of employees’ priorities and views in order to tailor arguments around the worth of training to their personal circumstances and to convince employees to participate in the project. A partner stated that they needed to “understand what motivates people a bit better” in light of employee concerns about their inability to pay mortgages during the slowdown in production, or the possibility of leaving the enterprise to work in the resources sector. This knowledge would have allowed them to convince employees of the value of engaging in the up-skilling program. He reflected:

We did survey people and we tried hard, but we didn’t quite grasp the depths of some people’s concerns about their future. If you underestimate that, then you lose the capacity to understand what motivates them, you lose the capacity to allay their concerns, you then lose the capacity to persuade them. You actually should really understand all of those things.

A key lesson from this project was the need for initial communication at the project’s outset to explain the purpose and aim of the program, in order to gain initial buy-in and maximise participation. In order to convince employees of the merits of participating, the project manager engaged in a communication campaign. He held monthly all-employee communication meetings, and fortnightly plant level steering group meetings of employees, union representatives and managers. These committees acted as an effective communications conduit which assisted in initial sign up and retention of employees throughout the program. He added: “It was pretty full-on communication that was required to keep the whole thing going. I think if anything, the communication with all stakeholders is the most important part”. He described his role at meetings as “doing the spiel on what this is about, what this training can do for you, the difference it can make to your life”. He stressed that accreditation would result in a transferrable, national qualification. As a result, over time
... everybody started to understand, “okay, this is what we’re trying to do, this is what we are achieving”. We explained the outcomes, where we were ending up, with how many people trained in what competencies, what qualifications, and how close we were to completions, things like that. Once people could see that, we had much better buy-in.

It took some time for employees to understand that they did not have to complete an entire qualification because their prior learning and experience would be mapped across to the qualification. As a result of these communication efforts, they eventually gained commitment to the program among the majority of employees, with most going on to complete Certificate III and IV level qualifications.

**Barriers to engagement amongst time poor farmers**

Multiple barriers to participant engagement in local committees were encountered in a project designed to build workforce development capacity in farming areas through the establishment of sub-regional committees of community stakeholders. Chief among these were: a lack of involvement in the project by local government agencies due to their low resource capacity; individual farmers and farming industry representatives being “time poor” and not viewing workforce development as a priority issue; and, as described earlier, the high degree of initiative fatigue in some farming areas, which led to a lack of local commitment to government-funded projects.

All project partners felt that the project would have been markedly more successful had there been more consistent commitment to the local committees from among regional development agencies. Those located in the areas in which the project was implemented were described as only lightly resourced and as not having an explicit workforce development remit as part of their role in the region. As a result there was highly variable engagement from this key stakeholder group across the four regions in the project. Project partners noted that the project’s impact and success was greater in those areas where regional development agencies played an active role in the regional structures established. One partner reflected that a lesson from their experience in this project (as in others) was for project leaders to engage in discussions with state bodies at the local level “early on, ahead of time”, to engender their commitment and encourage them to work jointly with project leaders to implement the project.

Partners also reflected on the lack of willingness among local farming industry representative bodies to take action on workforce development, as other priorities took precedent. This was because these organisations were time poor, resource poor, more focused on the technical side of farming, and did not see workforce development as their core business. Representatives’ lack of willingness to be involved in the project might also be reflective of their expectations that their members may not be receptive to adopting new workforce development practices, reflecting a prevailing view that “their constituents … are just going to keep on doing what they’ve always done”. One partner described the response to approaches for involvement in the project from among local farming representative bodies as,

... “we’re happy to talk about it with you because clearly it’s about our industry” but there's this kind of hesitation: “If we talk about it, does that mean you’re going to give us a job, or does that mean we're
going to be expected to do something? Because right now we’re busy trying to make a living and trying to win a whole lot of battles on a whole lot of other fronts.”

This response was said to be indicative of the priorities of the farmers these bodies represented. While a “handful” of farmers in some areas were described as taking a strategic approach to workforce development, these individuals were often not prepared to “be a part of a very time-consuming and long-winded and long term process of turning a big ship around called primary industry workforce development”. The experience of this partner was that farmers in the regional area in which they implemented the project were happy to be involved in workforce development-related programs if they saw that it was directly relevant to their individual circumstances. However they were too time-constrained to become engaged in developing broader workforce development plans and strategies which would benefit local farming employers and communities more broadly. According to this partner, workforce development was a lower order priority for farmers than other priorities relating to the day to day survival of their farming businesses. First-order concerns for farmers included succession issues relating to family ownership and the associated legal and financial complexities attached to these, as well as issues relating to financial constraints, market volatility, and uncertainties relating to supply chains.

In the view of this partner, a further factor bearing on farmers’ commitment to participate in projects such as the WIP project was the uncertainty surrounding government policy in regional areas and a lack of resource for regional development strategies. This partner reflected on the prevalence of ‘initiative fatigue’ in local areas described earlier:

In a way I think Regional Australia is over having things just come and go on the whim of policy. … getting people together to talk about something and have a collective course to influence policy for the long term positiveness, it just all seems like political waffle. They’re all sick of it to be honest I think, that’s my take on it. So they don’t engage quite so well.

Strategies for engaging regional stakeholders were developed or suggested by project partners to overcome these impediments to engagement. One partner suggested that in order to overcome scepticism about government-funded initiatives, project timeframes need to be extended so that projects are seen as more enduring and credible in the minds of local farmers and community stakeholders, thus improving the likelihood of obtaining these individuals’ involvement.

Strategies for gaining the participation of farmers in the first instance might also involve utilising existing regional social and community structures. Project parties found that data on skills shortages and workforce development needs was hard to find in local areas and realised that they would have to go directly to farmers for this information. However, it was recognised that farmers are dispersed and busy, as well as reluctant to participate in telephone surveys, all of which presented barriers to their participation. In response, the project team consulted a local farmer who acted as a sounding board on strategies they might use to access farmers.

Under his guidance, a strategy was developed by the project team in one region to survey or convene groups of local farmers en masse at key community hubs or focal points where they regularly gathered – most prominently, local football and netball clubs and pubs. Other suggested venues were field days or clearing sales – places where, according to this farmer, “there tends to be a lot of people with a bit of spare time”. He explained:
If you want to talk to farmers in the farming community you have to go to the areas or meetings or wherever they’re currently involved with, the groups that they’re involved with, to seek their opinions and stuff like that rather than call a meeting and expect them to come, because it just doesn’t seem to happen.

A face to face survey conducted at a football club yielded a sample of 100 farmers who provided information and commentary on skills shortages and other workforce development issues. According to project partners, this approach worked, “because you were getting commentary from people without bothering them”. However the timing of such initiatives requires consideration: it was noted that this strategy may have yielded even larger numbers of participants had it been implemented at the beginning of the football season, to tap into greater numbers of attendees. The approach taken also included individual and group discussions (of between three and ten farmers) which were held in informal environments such as local pubs. According to a project partner, these discursive conversations were particularly effective in that they led to a dawning realisation among the farmers involved that workforce development was critical to business survival.

A key lesson from this project was that face to face contact between the project team and participants (where this was possible) yielded the most effective project outcomes in terms of building knowledge and relationships with participants. This contrasted with the experience of the project team in one area, where ongoing engagement with participants occurred mainly via telephone meetings. This approach was only partially successful. A farmer involved in these meetings felt that discussion was more difficult when conducted by telephone, whilst acknowledging that he and other farmers in the local area “didn’t have the time to be talking face to face”.

The value proposition for food manufacturers

Two consecutive projects which were designed to up-skill owners and senior managers in small to medium food processing enterprises in sustainability practices were targeted at a constituency for who workforce development was described as a lower order priority. Food industry employers, according to the project partners, are focused primarily on company survival in a difficult operating environment and workforce development is not seen as essential to their longer term survival. Therefore the “value proposition” developed to persuade employers to participate in this project centred on how their involvement in the project would equip them to find solutions to commercial problems relating to sustainability and supply chains, and in doing so, would allow them to make cost savings and stay in business within a supply chain. According to the proponent, the aim of the project was to demonstrate to site management teams how they could do this by using a “skills and workforce development approach” to embedding sustainable practices:

We were saying “Look, a lot of you will be out of business unless you start taking this seriously”. It was another way of saying “It’s not just about training. It’s about being strategic about your skills interventions in your company and ultimately to get culture change going, you’ve got to take your staff with you. How do you take your staff with you? It’s workforce development, recognition and reward…”

Sustainability issues were discussed in the context of how site managers could provide the workforce with the skills needed to identify cost savings and solutions to problems. As a partner noted, of the
managers targeted as participants, “these guys, unless they’re going to save money or make money, you can't get them into a room”.

Despite considerable time spent developing their value proposition, the proponent was nonetheless disappointed that the number of management participants in the second of the two programs was significantly lower than they expected, with just over half of the available places eventually filled. Proponents speculated that this could be due to a number of reasons. Managers were described as being “a bit tired of sustainability”. Others may have felt that they were sufficiently knowledgeable about the topic having attended a short seminar or workshop on sustainability in the past. Senior leaders had insufficient time to attend the course given the pressures of their job, or may have been unable to afford the costs of attending (despite the program places being heavily subsidised by the WIP and other funds).

The time-poor nature of the target audience shaped the training programs, which were of relatively short duration. However it was found to be difficult to sustain managers’ engagement throughout the course in the second of the two programs, despite its short length, in the face of immediate pressures on participants in their role as CEO, owner, or senior manager. The project proponent highlighted this, stating “not everyone would have come to the party for a whole lot of commercial reasons, something goes wrong at the factory and they don’t turn up … It’s difficult”.

In contrast to the difficulties experienced in many projects seeking to engage enterprise level involvement, the Interactive Skills Integration System (ISIS) project team was required to turn away interested potential participants, reinforcing the importance of the project context and the effect this can have on the relative success or otherwise of initiatives. It is also likely that the specific networks used to recruit participants were highly suitable to seeking organisations predisposed to business growth and innovation. They included contacts linked to Enterprise Connect, and in Victorian organisations that had been awarded for their export achievements. The project instigated a rigorous process of selection whereby the partner organisations had to make a series of commitments to be involved. The following extract from the Expression of Interest (EOI) circulated amongst networks that attracted over 60 applications demonstrates the type of commitments that partnering non-interactive media companies (the mainstream companies that were to be the subject of the business innovation) were required to make:

- Commitment to the ISIS Integration Pilot Project by senior level management (including the owner and/or Chair of Board and/or GM of the company);
- A clearly defined project in your organisation that can benefit from interactive media skills which has the potential to have a measurable impact on your business productivity / skills;
- Commitment of cash and in-kind support to match the project funding of AU$75,000;
- Commitment from your organisation to further pursue the realisation of the concept and/or prototype initiated and designed through this project;
- Involvement in the associated ISIS Research and Evaluation process by your business(including agreed evaluation and review meetings with stakeholders to provide perspectives, opinions and comment to track the impact of ISIS on your business);
- Entering into mutually beneficial collaborative agreements between stakeholders (i.e. between Interactive Media Teams and Pilot Businesses) pertaining to legal agreements and sharing of Intellectual Property;
• Agreement that your business will engage with the ISIS Management Team and provide information required on the Integration Pilot Project outcomes to funding bodies and partners;

• Subject to final business outcomes, participation at the ISIS Conference and other showcasing events.

Project partners believed that the degree of interest that came from the EOI process had tapped into a “latent understanding in the economy that interactive media has a role in business innovation”, and that in this case, the value proposition was already understood by the forward thinking operators they had targeted.

4.7 Summary

This section outlined critical factors in the conduct of WIP projects that significantly influenced the extent to which projects achieved their planned aims or outcomes.

Undertaking scoping activities as an initial phase of projects is critical for understanding context and circumventing risks. It is evident that scoping through activities such as reviews of existing knowledge and information and seeking expert advice and feedback allows improved research design, more realistic timeframes, and keener understanding of budget allocation. It allows for project methods to be tailored, taking into consideration the state of relevant industries and communities and the receptiveness of target audiences.

Expertise is required to undertake risk analysis of project design to improve the prospect of project success. WIP projects provide examples of where external expertise may have been very useful, as well as projects where relying on internal project capacity was of benefit. It was clear that having access to a range of skills and knowledge areas was critical to enable effective scoping. Where there are gaps in the scoping capacity of the project team, consideration needs to be given to how those roles can be performed.

The relationships between project partner organisations - how they worked together, and the degree of commitment they demonstrated to projects - had tangible impacts on project outcomes. Steering committees and reference groups could play a valuable role in guiding projects to avoid problems, were active in overcoming barriers, and could be valuable in assisting with dissemination. Project partnerships in WIP projects led to strengthening critical relationships that continued after the WIP projects. It was also clear that garnering support from senior figures across partner organisations rather than relying on individuals provided greater security for the ongoing involvement of project partners. Structural supports for enabling collaboration amongst partners maximised the benefits of having a range of experts and stakeholders involved.

The quality and suitability of project management processes and the skills and experience of project managers were critical for ensuring the smooth operation of projects. In some cases matters such as resource constraints and ill-defined roles led to poorer outcomes. Project management needed to be conducted by consistent and dedicated staff. Where this did not happen projects were more likely to stall, or in extreme cases, fail to meet project outcomes.

The inclusion of ‘integrators’ in projects appeared to take projects to a higher level, accelerating outcomes and enhancing impacts as a result. Integrators were individuals that were engaged in all
aspects of the project, operating at a very high level due to their wealth of experience and expansive personal and professional networks, and their capacity to work collaboratively across a broad range of people and organisations. They were central to the genesis of the projects in which they were engaged.

Projects provided evidence that consultants can add considerable value due to their expertise and experience but can lead to disappointing outcomes where their skills and knowledge are inadequate. It is apparent that care needs to be taken to scrutinise the credentials and capacity of consultants before they are contracted to project roles. Other models of working with consultants may be considered such as partnering with consultants or working closely to combine knowledge and skills with project partners. It is not always feasible for a consultancy to provide the range of skills and knowledge that are required in exploratory projects so consideration might be given to allowing time for more preparatory work to be undertaken.

The most common difficulty experienced by proponents and partners in the conduct of projects was recruiting and retaining the involvement of project participants. Issues such as locating ‘invisible’ or hard-to-access populations, knowing how to communicate the value of projects for different groups, and designing projects to enable access and involvement were considerable challenges and highlighted the need to adequately resource and allocate time for these activities. Strategies to overcome barriers included undertaking work to better understand target populations, winning the support of key opinion leaders, incorporating partners in projects that provide targeted access, and modifying project design to make it possible for people and organisations to be involved.
Section 5: Lessons learned relating to increasing, sustaining and measuring impact

The WIP guidelines state that projects should have an evaluation plan to measure and quantify the impact of the initiatives being piloted. This includes articulating performance indicators, before and after measures, and any “control” arrangements that may be required to compare participating organisations with similar organisations that are not undertaking interventions. Evaluation plans should also include post-project measurement at regular intervals (such as biannually) for a relevant period, to record the ongoing benefits (or otherwise) of activities, tools and processes.

The WIP guidelines also note that projects should have a post-project implementation plan that may include a communications plan to promote the outcomes of the project, listing industry responsibilities and actions to apply lessons more widely, details of how tools will be maintained and how users of the tools will be supported.

This section of the report assesses the nature, evaluation and dissemination of project outcomes and impacts. Impacts are the changes or effects that have been caused by the activities and outcomes of the projects. It became apparent from an analysis of project reports and interviews that there are different ways of considering impacts generated by WIP projects. Immediate impacts (or outcomes) were generally, although not always, associated with explicit project aims and generated in the life of the project. Ongoing or longer term impacts were deeper changes that took place on a broader scale, emerging some time after the conclusion of the project. Some outcomes were reported using metrics, including training outcomes and numbers of visitors to websites. However, most impacts described were qualitative and, in some cases, more difficult to demonstrate and validate.

To enable an examination of the ‘generative outcomes’ of WIP projects, in terms of how impacts have been generated beyond the project parameters, interviewees were asked to reflect on activities and outcomes that had emerged since the completion of the final WIP report. This enabled project partners, proponents and participants to reflect more fully on project effects, and to consider changes that were not explicitly linked to the project aims. However it was relatively common for insufficient time to have passed for deeper impacts to have emerged; or, there was little of substance to report given cessation of activity at the conclusion of the project.

As such this study can describe immediate outcomes of WIP projects with some confidence. With two exceptions, project parties reported having successfully achieved the outcomes that were set out in their initial project aims. The focus of this section is therefore not the extent to which outcomes were achieved, but the extent of the projects’ impacts. Most data relating to project impact was derived from interviews with project proponents, partners, or participants, and reflects their views of key impacts. A more thorough examination of each project for the purposes of a more fulsome ‘impact evaluation’ was not the purpose of this study. That would be a considerably larger undertaking and in many cases adequate time has not passed to discern deeper impacts that take time to emerge.

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Three different types of output or outcomes were generated by WIP projects and form the basis for discussion in this section. They are:

1. **Reports**: Written outputs with a primary purpose to inform and share ideas and knowledge
2. **Products**: Such as tools, toolkits, and resources that assist in the conduct of a particular workforce development activity
3. **Models**: A process or a procedure to be implemented, often utilising purpose-built tools that have been produced to demonstrate or assist those seeking to implement the model.

Any combination of these outputs could be generated by each project, sometimes all three coming from a single project.

This section starts by discussing the issues associated with measurement of impacts in WIP projects. It then provides a summary of the different types of impacts the WIP projects have generated whilst noting that detailed descriptions of the various project impacts are provided in the case studies contained in Appendix 2. This is followed by assessment of what can be learned from the cases in regard to the barriers to, and opportunities for, perpetuating and building impacts beyond the conclusion of WIP projects.

### 5.1 Measuring impact in WIP projects

Quantitative and qualitative measures were used by proponents and parties to describe the outcomes and impact of WIP projects. Quantitative measures described the *extent* of impact, for example how many people were affected by a project, or how much money an organisation may have saved as a consequence of an initiative. Qualitative information enabled reflection on the non-measurable qualities of change that had occurred. These included, for example, how training may have changed an individual’s self-perception, or how collaboration in the course of a project may have built stronger relationships between those involved.

Explicit and intentional processes are needed to ensure that adequate information is collected to enable assessment of impact. Given the WIP’s interest in impact, it is worth considering how the measurement and reporting of impacts was approached in projects and dealt with in final reports. However, difficulties in establishing specific outcomes and impacts were experienced in the course of efforts to evaluate impact and these are described in this section. They related to:

- The lack of planned processes and structures built into projects to enable analysis or evaluation of impacts to occur
- The fact that impacts take time to emerge and insufficient time had passed since completion of projects to allow full assessment of intermediate and longer term impacts
- Where projects led to the development of publicly accessible, free of charge outputs, it was often difficult to track or assess their uptake, use or influence in the wider world.

**The presence or absence of evaluation frameworks**

It appears that most projects did not use an explicit framework to examine and assess their impact beyond reporting whether numerical targets (outcomes) set out in the initial project phases had been achieved. Other reflections on immediate impact were more impressionistic or anecdotal in nature as little or no data had been collected to substantiate claims. It was apparent from some projects that this was due to both a lack of data collection processes as well as the difficulties inherent in some
data collection. The following report extract outlines some of the difficulties in collecting data to measure productivity and other improvements in organisations where employees undertook skills training:

... with no access to the transactions that take place in various businesses we are unable to provide a tangible figure as to the improvement in productivity collaborating businesses might have experienced from this training exercise. Similarly, there are a number of largely intangible outcomes from the training that is equally hard to measure. Some of the topics introduced during the course such as time management, which were acknowledged by most of the participants to be one of the very important segments to be covered, does provide a real benefit to the business they work in, but cannot be easily measured. However, despite these difficulties in gauging these things, most employers were aware of the ramifications of these aspects and usually reassured us that they appreciated the critical value of these topics, and that they were of real worth to their employees and subsequently their businesses.

A handful of WIP projects did undertake either structured internal evaluative processes or engaged external consultants to undertake a formal evaluation, of which impact was a component. Highly structured evaluation that was planned and had an explicit method was discernible in seven of the WIP projects. Of these, one was conducted by a project partner and in another an embedded research and evaluation team made up of academics undertook the evaluative work. In the other five, external evaluators were employed to assess the project outcomes, including impact. It is apparent that WIP projects taking place earlier in the program did not always conduct evaluations. In later projects the program managers required proponents to include evaluation processes.

**Embedded evaluation**

The ISIS project had an embedded academic research and evaluation team that was able to reflect on the immediate impacts of the ISIS integration model using a case study approach and a method designed to capture factors associated with innovation. The project team was made up of individuals from a consortium of academic institutions. Accordingly, the research and evaluation process was intrinsic to their practice as academics. The process also enabled the accurate codification of the ISIS process for dissemination to the interactive media industry by way of a ‘how to guide’, which was an explicit aim of the project, as well as production of a robust evaluation report.

The evaluation was based on conducting comparative case studies and included a control group of potential partnerships operating outside the ISIS model. The evaluation team conducted three waves of in-depth interviews with the participating ISIS parties, allowing for the collection of insights from all perspectives. The team observed the project from inception to completion. They attended project meetings, facilitated structured reflection on the progress and contributed to refining the design of the project as it proceeded. Case study participants had been required to commit to involvement in the evaluation during the application process. Key to the success of this evaluation was the involvement of experienced researchers with high level contextual knowledge of the subject areas as well as the buy-in of all parties as to its importance. The final evaluation report provides a powerful means of promoting the success of ISIS, based on the robust collection and presentation of evidence of the immediate and potential impacts. It also contributed significantly to a framework document that describes the key elements in collaborative practice.
The timing of evaluation
In those projects where structured efforts were made to examine impact, the timing of those evaluations precluded measurement and reporting of longer term effects. For example the ISIS evaluation showed that all three case studies had succeeded in developing prototypes for new products or services, but none had yet been tested in the marketplace. As such, it was too early for the report to examine impact to that extent. Equally an external evaluation of sustainability skills training across three separate projects could report the number of participants who had undertaken the training but it was too early for many of the participating enterprises to discern impacts at their workplaces other than amongst a handful where whole of enterprise approaches had been undertaken. In these manufacturing sites, workplace level impacts emerged sooner than where an individual from a workplace was given training. And in a project where an e-learning course was developed and delivered, project partners noted that the results of an evaluation undertaken after the course had been online for 12 months were not reflective of the longer term impacts they anticipated from the product. In their view, a 12 month period was not long enough to provide useful data on traffic to the site and usage as it takes time to optimise search engine capacity to allow users to access the site.

It was evident in many cases that project proponents did not describe the full extent of impacts in the final WIP reports, which were produced at the end of the funding period. In most cases the timing of the reports did not allow interviewees an opportunity to reflect on impacts, but it also seemed that proponents were less likely to report on impacts that did not link directly to the stated aims of the project. In effect the WIP reporting process did not operate to encourage a more reflective and thorough examination of impact, even where those effects were considered important by the proponents. Interviews with project proponents and partners conducted as part of this research elicited greater reflection on the range of impacts and outcomes flowing from projects.

Difficulties assessing impact
There was some evidence of problems with the collection of data for examining project outcomes, examples of which are provided below.

Evaluating usage of products: Two issues emerged with respect to assessing the impact of products developed in the course of WIP projects. The first related to an absence of efforts by project parties to evaluate whether the usage of WIP products by organisational actors led to improved business or organisational performance outcomes at the enterprise level. The second issue was raised by a number of parties in projects that developed outputs which were then made publicly available for use by other organisations. Once these outputs were launched into the wider world, proponents had no means of measuring the extent to which they were used by other parties. However one proponent organisation intended to attempt measurement of use in a project that designed and delivered a sustainability skills development program for executives. The partners in this project had made a concerted effort to train RTOs in how to deliver the program. However they noted that they had no way of knowing how many of these or other RTOs had subsequently registered and delivered the course to trainees. They intended to conduct a formal survey of RTOs in late 2012 to assess usage, as well as informally seeking feedback on usage among those RTOs who attended workshops which were

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A handful of organisations reported having made savings by reducing waste and others had expanded their services to increase revenue, but not enough time had elapsed for a reliable and thorough analysis.
planned to publicise the follow-on Sustainability Essentials for Executives (SEE) program, on its completion.

**Evaluating the influence of research reports:** In one project a series of research reports containing recommendations was disseminated publicly and those recommendations were then carried forward by bodies other than the project proponent and partners. The researcher on this project had heard anecdotally through their networks that some recommendations had been implemented but noted that they had no way of assessing the full impact of the reports, in terms of being able to systematically assess how many of the recommendations had been taken forward by interested bodies. This was because those delivering initiatives based on report recommendations did not tend to provide “direct feedback” to the researcher or proponent organisation. The proponent was also keen to assess the extent of the project’s impact and advocated undertaking an evaluation of “whether the recommendations had been implemented, where they had been implemented, and what outcomes were effected” as a consequence. It was felt that the primary value of an evaluation exercise of this type would be in sustaining interest in the project’s findings and maintaining project momentum over a longer term. They described the nature of the evaluation that they felt would have value:

What have been the changes? What have been the successes? What have not been the successes? What didn't get taken up and why? And that's where all government funding falls over, really, doesn't it? Because you have these funding opportunities, things like this (project) happen and then you never hear of them again.

**Inherent difficulties in measuring some impacts:** The impact of changes to knowledge, to the empowerment or self-worth of project participants, or to the operation of networks, can be hard to demonstrate, particularly in the short term. For example, the knowledge gained in a project is not likely to affect behaviour or practice immediately and there are multiple factors leading to changes in behaviour or practice so that establishing links between them is complex. Equally, improved confidence may be an immediate impact experienced by an individual, but it might take some time to lead to a more ‘measurable’ change, such as gaining employment, going on to further study, or being more demonstrably active in the local community. Lack of explicit measurement does not diminish the impact that building confidence or building knowledge can have. However, to gain the full value of an evaluation a structured, timely and robust process is required. This is particularly the case for those projects seeking to further promote the models, products and ideas that came out of the projects. While this does not necessarily require the use of external evaluators, independent verification of espoused impacts can carry much weight.

Despite the difficulties associated with measuring impacts, particularly qualitative ones, it is possible to do so, and the following sections of this report provide numerous examples of such impacts which are drawn from analysis of interview data. Given the high proportion of impacts that are qualitative, careful consideration in the design of projects to approaches for capturing those impacts would be a valuable feature of any other program similar in nature to the WIP. In addition the timing of impact evaluation would need to be considered for each project, keeping in mind that many important impacts take time to emerge. A framework to assist in this would be useful.
5.2 Types of outcomes and impacts
A wide variety of impacts were generated by the WIP projects. This is perhaps unsurprising given the unique nature of each of the 28 projects subjected to assessment in this report. Notwithstanding the diversity of approaches used and outcomes achieved, the following section summarises the key types of impact that were discernible across the projects. The individual projects exhibiting these impacts are not identified in this section. Details of outcomes and impacts specific to particular projects are provided in Appendix 2.

Knowledge attainment that enhanced capacity to act on matters of workforce development
The knowledge attained as a result of project initiatives was claimed by parties as having a valuable impact in the following ways: in terms of project parties’ own organisational capacity building; as a means of raising awareness of workforce development issues within partner organisations and externally; in providing tools to constituents; and by improving the design of other activities within the project by providing deeper understanding and critical contextual information. Knowledge impacts of varying degrees were discernible across all of the projects.

In most cases the benefits of knowledge creation were diffuse and difficult to distil into measurable outcomes. It was not always obvious how knowledge outcomes led to changes in specific practices, particularly as WIP projects were generally not sole contributors to knowledge creation, but played a part in the overall accretion of understandings and ideas.

The following list outlines some qualitative project impacts that were not easy to demonstrate but were regarded by proponents and partners as significant.

- A number of projects contributed to building in-depth knowledge within one or more partner organisations which had subsequent impacts at a sectoral level. Key project impacts included increased ISC and employer association understanding of industry attitudes and activities relating to workforce development. This important contextual information was believed to improve their planning and approaches for increasing uptake of training, and in some cases, workforce development practices. For example, they developed what they believed were better strategies for engaging with specific types of stakeholders. Some also developed highly innovative research designs which might be replicated by the proponent or other organisations.

- Improvement in their knowledge base, by means of what were described as “evidence-based approaches”, increased the capacity of project proponents and partners to engage in policy discussions with much greater confidence and understanding of the matters confronting particular groups. This assisted in building the profile of an issue or sector in policy circles.

- Documented findings and insights that added to a ‘library of knowledge’ called upon by project proponents and parties to contribute to debates, submissions and reviews (including reviews and revision of training packages undertaken by ISCs). In several projects the knowledge built enabled them to develop an informed response to imminent changes in government regulation.

- The creation of deeper knowledge for the project parties involved. For example the project allowed for exploration of critical ideas, such as innovation and partnerships; or to take practice to a new level by bringing people together to brainstorm and test new methods or models.
At a sectoral level, project outputs have generated dialogue and built consensus between stakeholders.

Stakeholders in regions got to know the contours of their local skill systems and the barriers to and facilitators of improved regional workforce development capacity. This provided the base knowledge needed to develop models for future implementation by proponents and other stakeholder organisations.

New knowledge for project participants (for example, trainees) enabled them to navigate the training system and labour markets to better plot career and training paths.

New knowledge and understanding of previously under-studied sub-industries and sub-populations.

Where knowledge was codified in accessible and well disseminated outputs, these outputs contributed to public knowledge and broader understanding of workforce development. This generated diffuse impacts beyond the boundaries of the WIP project. This included the codification and dissemination of knowledge about topics and sectors about which little was previously documented. Examples of impacts included those that:

- Contributed new knowledge to the academic and policy discourse on VET teachers and on practices for ‘open collaboration’. Research papers have been quoted in policy documents and new understandings appeared to have influenced policy direction.
- Led to greater self-worth, recognition and the “professionalisation” of occupations due to the codification of knowledge attesting to their value and skill level.
- Resulted in the development of ‘how to’ guides and kits to provide frameworks to improve practice that have been taken up by external practitioners and enterprises.
- Successfully used knowledge to solicit further funding or support to pursue issues and activities initially generated or identified by the WIP project.
- Led to the review and improvement of internal administrative and policy procedures for an organisation as a by-product of implementing the project model.

Effects on the operation of organisations

In some cases WIP projects led to discernible changes for those organisations involved in projects. These included: single enterprises or organisations which used or piloted project models or products; groups of businesses or organisations involved in pilot programs; and a broad array of participating employing organisations drawn from across industries whose employees engaged in training or recognition programs. In most of the projects where organisations were involved in pilot programs the project impacts did not extend beyond the pilot sites, except where ongoing dissemination and funding for broader implementation were pursued.

It was difficult to assess the extent of workplace change resulting from pilot programs in some projects. This was due to a number of factors. First, because pilot organisations failed to collect baseline business metrics data to assess whether improvement had subsequently occurred as a result of the project. Second, because proponents did not go back to pilot organisations after pilot completion to evaluate whether impacts were evident. Third, it is difficult to isolate the impact of a specific WIP initiative at enterprise level given a range of other factors at work: these may be economic factors (such as the GFC or currency fluctuations, as in one project); other sector-specific factors relating to changes in an organisation’s trading environment; or, in cases where multiple
initiatives are being implemented at the enterprise level simultaneously, this presents challenges in establishing a direct causal link between the pilot and improvements in organisational performance. Nonetheless, a range of impacts were reported by partners in both pilot, participant and project partner organisations, described below.

- At an enterprise level, increased business efficiency, cost savings and greater prospects for organisational survival as a result of skill acquisition and recognition or the piloting of tools to improve workplace performance.
- Reductions in the time taken for new employees to be ‘productive’ due to the provision of bridging training and mentoring.
- Indigenous employment taking place in employing organisations that had failed to make this happen in the past.
- Transformation of businesses through the application of open innovation and intellectual property sharing. This led to increased enterprise security, new business ventures and potential new product or service lines.
- Improving recognition of volunteers in the welfare system, which created greater incentives for volunteerism in school communities.
- Some of the WIP proponents were enterprises or organisations that brokered and linked aspects of training and employment across different actors in the skill eco-systems. These intermediaries played a critical role in many of the WIP projects. They included ISCs, employer associations, employment service providers, apprenticeship centres and consultants. In several projects these enterprises built internal capabilities as a result of their involvement in the WIP project. They gained new skills and knowledge, established broader networks and relationships, and in some cases increased their business viability. In this way the WIP projects built the capacity of those workforce development intermediaries.

**Effects on employment systems, structures, opportunities and outcomes**

Project parties reported impacts of projects on the employment opportunities and job security of individual employees who were either project participants or the constituents or clients of partner organisations, as listed.

- Improvements in the definition of some occupational groups which led to appropriate occupational classification, skills recognition and placement in internal and external career and employment structures.
- Several projects increased the capacity of job seekers to secure employment.
- Participants secured employment or improved the quality of their employment by negotiating better conditions or winning new jobs due to increased confidence and the support of intermediaries.
- Improvement in the retention of at-risk apprentices.
- Increase in employee numbers in a handful of proponent and partner organisations that had grown, at least in part, due to the WIP project they were involved in.

**Effects on skill formation at industry, enterprise, occupational and regional levels**

The projects led to improved workforce development capacity in a number of ways and at a number of levels, described next.
Increased skill development in critical occupations and those where no workforce development structures previously existed, and in thin regional training markets (the latter improving population retention in local areas and building viable training markets).

Brought ‘hard to access’ candidates, and candidates who had never envisaged having their skills recognised, into the national skills system.

Brought major employers in particular sub-sectors into the national training system.

Increased confidence and competence amongst employers to seek assistance from intermediaries for improving their skill profiles.

Updated and improved training packages, including cross fertilisation between training packages.

Improved industry, occupational and local area workforce data collection.

In some cases it was apparent that the activities in the project enabled the parties to share aspects of their practice, leading to cross-skilling. For example academics in one project became more proficient in designing courses that explicitly supported the development of skills due to their close involvement with VET practitioners.

Indications of other parties, external to projects, taking up and implementing models piloted in the WIP projects in order to improve skill formation or workforce development capacity.

Supporting employers into the apprenticeship system.

Effects on the empowerment of individuals and groups of workers
These were changes that improved the capacity of individuals and groups of workers to participate in training, the labour market and their local communities or workplaces. These impacts were most discernible in projects that targeted disadvantaged groups for intensive assistance. However, proponents in other projects also noted that groups of workers benefitted in some workplaces from increased involvement in decision making as a result of WIP initiatives.

Citizens were able to ‘name’ their skills when previously they had not recognised their own competencies, or did not have the language to express them.

Increased self-esteem and confidence, which motivated individuals to change their personal circumstances.

Increased capacity to engage in family life and in local communities.

Increased desire to be involved in decision making in both volunteer and employing organisations.

New understandings of the training system and labour markets that enabled people to better map out their own learning and employment futures.

Effects on collaborative structures and practices
These impacts relate to how the project changed or influenced collaborative practices and structures, thereby increasing the opportunity for innovation and alliance building for ongoing activity in workforce development. Collaborative relationships were built between project parties, between these organisations and stakeholders, within regions, sectors, and supply chains, and within the skills system. Inherent in these impacts is the potential for the lessons and outcomes of each project ‘living on’ as they are transmitted throughout collaborative networks, thus keeping the activities, accumulated knowledge and ideas of projects alive. The following effects of the projects were evident in respect of collaborative outcomes:
The consolidation and increased cohesion of pre-existing regional networks concentrating on increasing the uptake and quality of different aspects of workforce development in local area.

Deepened relationships between project partners, and between partners and project participants in a sector or location. This has led to ongoing collaboration, to partnerships around new projects and to the creation of new businesses.

Projects have allowed ISCs to build stronger networks with stakeholder communities, which in many cases has led them to assist stakeholders in building workforce development capacity through training needs analyses and obtaining funding for skills formation from the NWDF or other funding streams.

Communities of practice have emerged out of some projects, where project participants have established network structures that enable them to share information and ideas, provide ongoing support and peer to peer mentoring, and combine business operations.

In one project the initiative enabled companies along supply chains to investigate innovative ways to work with each other to improve sustainability and reduce business costs.

In a related project, new relationships were built around regional and sectoral eco-efficiency initiatives between regional and sectoral agencies, industry peak bodies and ISCs.

New relationships built between RTOs over the course of a project led to a collaborative means of testing and refining courses and training resources.

Several projects enabled the expansion and/or consolidation of networks into new areas.

Working together on projects allowed parties to engender better understandings of each other and to build trust.

One project built understandings of the nature of collaborations and partnerships, and established how they can work better.

Effects on organisational cultures
Partners in a small number of projects described impacts relating to a change in organisational culture, either in proponent or partner organisations. They included:

- The transformation of workplace cultures by each of the project partners becoming closely exposed to the practices of other parties.
- Changes to workplace culture through enterprise-wide initiatives that fostered the adoption of lean manufacturing principles and built senior management skills in sustainable practice (which led to the organisation-wide application of sustainability practices). In both cases these projects led to greater consultation with and decision-making autonomy among shop-floor employees and, according to project parties, greater levels of employee engagement.
- In a project focusing on skill recognition among volunteers, the internal cultures of the proponent and partner organisations changed as they took the model’s principles to heart.

5.3 Factors that maximised or constrained generative outcomes or on-going impact
The WIP funded one-off projects of a given timeframe with the expectation that the models and tools developed would be perpetuated and actively transferred by proponents. As described throughout this report, the potential impact of a project was shaped by the nature of the aims guiding it, the management of the overall process, and the outcomes it produced, and there were many variables that came into play during the life of the projects that shaped the relative success of initiatives.
A broad theme that emerged was that project parties believed that the ongoing life of projects beyond their completion date was dependent on continued resourcing from bodies other than proponent and partner organisations, most prominently government funding sources. According to interviewees, externally-derived resources were required in order to:

- take forward the recommendations in research reports, or use the research findings of WIP-sponsored projects to build models of practice
- facilitate the continued use of products, for example by promoting and marketing tools among target audiences, or by providing subsidies to those undertaking training courses designed and delivered by WIP recipients, and
- extend the use of models of practice to a broader sweep of organisations beyond pilot sites, or to build upon or develop them further, in some cases by designing new initiatives.

Factors that were found to constrain or reduce the ongoing effect of projects of all types included a lack of planning to maximise impact at the project inception stage, and, in several projects, the departure of the individual directly involved in steering the project from the proponent organisation. The latter resulted in loss of organisational knowledge about projects resulting in a lack of impetus to sustain projects within proponent organisations. Alongside consideration of these factors, this section profiles other features of projects that have led to enduring and generative outcomes, as well as those that appear to constrain activity beyond project completion.

**Dissemination practices and generative mechanisms used to broaden the impact of WIP projects**

The generative outcomes of projects were highly contingent on the activities undertaken by the project proponents and partners to disseminate and promote the project outcomes. This section will examine dissemination practices and impact relative to the three main types of output generated by WIP projects, as set out earlier:

- **Reports**: written outputs with a primary purpose to inform and share ideas and knowledge
- **Products**: tools, toolkits, and resources that assist in the conduct of workforce development-related activity; and
- **Models of practice**: processes or procedures to be implemented, often utilising purpose-built tools that have been produced to demonstrate or assist those seeking to implement the model.

The existence of an output from a project did not guarantee that a dissemination process took place or generative outcomes occurred. In some projects it is apparent that the only outputs were the reports submitted by proponents to the WIP - which have not, to the authors’ knowledge, been circulated beyond the project parties and the Department. Some projects undertook far more exacting and thorough processes of dissemination than others. It is important to note that not all WIP initiatives have been completed for long enough to allow for planned dissemination processes to have been undertaken at the time of writing this report.

**Dissemination and use of research reports**

Research reports were generated on the following topics:

- Family day care workforce
- Sustainability skills in transport and logistics
- Quality teaching in VET
- The impact of mentoring on retention of apprentices
- A review of education and training offerings in the Interactive Media and related industries

Reports were more likely to have an effect and trigger debate and discussion where they were tailored to specific audiences and actively disseminated with those audiences in mind. Quite sophisticated approaches were taken in some projects to ensure that key messages made it to the right audiences. This involved the production of multiple reports or summary publications, targeted publications disseminated via specific networks, publicity of the research findings at stakeholder conferences, recommendations set out for specific audiences to build debate, and in some cases adaption of reports into targeted resources and tools. Strategies appeared to work best where all or many of these processes were undertaken in a planned rollout of activity. Examples of this approach were evident in projects involving research into the family day care and VET teaching workforces (as described in Appendix 2).

Active promotion of the findings of reports by the researchers and the proponents was an effective way of generating interest. The reach of reports and their findings appeared to be improved where well-known and respected researchers expert in the field were involved. It was clear in one project that the lead researcher was able to use their professional networks and standing within the sector to promote findings and generate debate. They were invited to give presentations at many conferences in the months following the publication of project reports and the subject of the reports continues to be of interest two years after publication.

In addition to the promotion of findings among academic and policy audiences, findings were also actively fed back to participants in two projects where the subjects of the research were under-studied and ‘hard to find’ populations. Dissemination of the findings took place amongst these groups using appropriate language and circulation strategies and these efforts helped build knowledge and self-identity among project participants and broader occupational constituencies. The additional benefit of these research projects is that they have defined new ‘networks’ that provide the capacity for an ongoing dialogue and consultation between proponents and constituencies.

Reports circulated by peak organisations and through generic networks were good for widening the dispersal of new knowledge. Where this strategy was the only one used, the exposure and impact of the findings was difficult to assess. However, it is clear from two projects that made concerted efforts to promulgate new ideas and knowledge that there have been demonstrable effects as a result. It should be noted that in those cases the policy context provided fertile ground for interest to be taken and debates to ensue. In one case the research project was one of a suite of concurrent studies on the topic and this provided a collective momentum for spreading ideas and findings. In another case regulatory changes about to affect the target population drove heightened interest in the findings of the study and the reports provided critical information to guide the changes that needed to take place in the industry. Other reports, while generating new findings, were required to build an interest without the same immediate regulatory drivers or current policy focus.

The main barrier to planned, tailored and active dissemination of research reports and their findings appeared to be a lack of dedicated resourcing to do the work required. It was suggested by some project parties that other strategies would have been useful in promoting and building on the findings.
of reports. They included public launches with relevant government ministers showing support, and follow-up work to test and further the ideas generated by the research.

**Dissemination and uptake of products**

Several WIP projects created stand-alone products designed to guide and improve workforce development practices in regions, specific industries, sub-industries, enterprises or groups of enterprises. They included:

- new training courses
- information websites
- training resources
- ‘how to’ guides
- kits to assist employers with recruitment and retention
- kits to assist employees in choosing registered training providers
- an online diagnostic tool for developing innovative capacity
- a paper-based diagnostic tool to measure capacity for implementing high performance work practices

As with the dissemination of research reports, the key to successful promotion of products was a planned and targeted process of marketing and circulation. This concerted strategy happened in a limited number of projects for products that had been created. On the flipside there were also examples of dissemination and promotion that appeared to have gained only limited traction in terms of creating interest in the products.

The most common means of promotion was posting products on the proponent organisations’ websites or circulation or advertising through generic (non-targeted) networks. In cases where this was the only source of dissemination it is difficult to assess the usage and subsequent impact of the products developed as it was rare for proponents to have the technical capacity to measure and report take-up. However, feedback from proponents who were able to track basic metrics such as website activity indicated that this ‘generic marketing’ approach did not attract a significant number of users. Efforts by project parties to improve traffic to the host websites, for example by convincing other organisations to provide links to host websites from their site, did little to boost usage of products.

In other projects, the proponent or partner organisations that developed the outputs have actively referred members or clients to them on an as-needs basis. No measurement has been conducted to establish how widespread this has been (as noted previously in regard to new training resources and their usage by RTOs). Although several ISCs reported increased training places in industries subject to WIP project activity, it is not possible to assess the part played by the WIP products in this growth.

There was evidence that where the target market for the product was actively involved in its development, ongoing dissemination and take up was enhanced. Active participation assisted in improving the quality and suitability of the products as well as creating a network through which dissemination could take place. This was exemplified in a project that aimed to build the capacity of RTOs in regional areas to deliver training in thin markets by centralising the creation of and access to training resources. The proponent tested resources amongst a pre-existing network of RTOs who provided feedback and made suggestions for refinement. This collaborative group was sustained by
the proponent continuing to supply them with further resources to test and use. It is apparent that this process built a network of actively engaged RTOs that have taken on and utilised the resources to deliver regional training - which was the main aim of the project. In this way the project design incorporated dissemination in the project process.

Factors influencing product durability: demand; resourcing; ongoing modification; and institutional ‘champions’

There were three main barriers to the dissemination and subsequent uptake of WIP project products. First, in some cases it became apparent that there was only limited demand for the outputs. It was evident that some products were created prior to adequately assessing demand for tools and competing tools in the marketplace and parties within projects were critical of the lack of market testing undertaken (as described in Section 4.1). For example, even within the WIP, two separate projects developed similar recruitment and retention tools for apprentices in the same industry. Projects that struggled to generate uptake generally did not roll out full scale promotions but applied a more ad hoc approach to their marketing by occasionally including advertising in newsletters and placing web links in more prominent positions on websites. It was apparent from searches undertaken by the researchers in this study that publicly available products on websites were often difficult to find, limiting access and incidental traffic and usage. In one case a purpose built website remains on the internet but has clearly long since ceased being updated or maintained in the period since the project completion date.

Second, in many projects no plan for marketing or promoting products had been developed at the project inception phase to guide dissemination activities once the product had been developed and tested. This was a matter of concern for some project parties and has been discussed in Section 4.1.

Third, the proponents had either not undertaken the necessary work to upgrade, market and promote products due to a lack of dedicated funding to do so, or, they lacked the resources to continue delivering the product beyond the pilot phase. Some proponents expressed disappointment at the absence of dissemination undertaken under the auspices of the WIP project and the lack of adequate resources to pursue different avenues for marketing. A proponent who continues to run a course developed under the WIP, and is keen for others to do so, has received anecdotal reports of other training providers offering the program as a result of having learned about it from their training participants. This word-of-mouth promotion might be adequate in some circumstances, such as in small and closed markets, but for courses that are of national interest and relevance and have the potential to feed existing demand, this strategy is falling short. The same project party related being in forums where it was clear that key stakeholders were unaware of the course. In this project and another in which a tool was developed, budget items were submitted for dissemination costs in initial proposals put forward to the WIP, however funding for publicity activities was not provided.

Partners in several projects noted that it was not viable for the proponent organisations to continue to deliver training courses that they had developed under the WIP unless future participants’ course costs were heavily subsidised by government. Proponent organisations could not afford to continue delivering the training product beyond the pilot phase and interviewees noted that trainees found the costs of undertaking the course prohibitive, in addition to the costs involved in taking time off work to participate in training. In some cases proponent organisations had gained funding from other...
government sources (such as the Critical Skills Investment Fund) which allowed them to continue to offer subsidised training places and deliver the products they had developed.

Ongoing modification of products may serve to broaden their usage. Two projects involved the design and delivery of Certificate III-level and skills set training programs at, according to project partners, relatively high cost. These were subsequently converted into new programs and piloted at Certificate IV level (with additional modules added), or were planned for conversion to Masters’ level (with less ‘demonstration’ content). The redesigned programs were modified or planned such that they could be delivered by external institutions (RTOs and universities) at much lower costs than those incurred during WIP project pilot phases. In addition, they were targeted at market sectors more willing to pay higher fees for higher level qualifications.

In two projects it was felt by the proponents that the tool they created would have benefitted from being transferred to an online platform to improve accessibility and uptake among time-poor or regional trainees. In both cases the costs of such an exercise prohibited this from taking place. Further, a proponent highlighted their project experience that tools and products promoting workforce development are often of little use to organisations that are “not in that headspace” and are more likely to require more intensive guidance such as mentoring, than “being handed a website address or a box of tricks”. Consequently, while the organisation will guide some constituents to online tools they do not regard them as generators of workforce development activity.

In several projects in which products were developed with the aim of building regional workforce development capacity the proponent organisations lacked sufficient funds to engage in extensive dissemination activities. Instead, they utilised partnerships with national peak bodies such as the National Farmers’ Federation and the Agrifood ISC, with these organisations committing to actively publicise products through established, targeted networks and agreeing to act as gatekeepers of products by hosting them on their websites. This approach stands in contrast to the experience of a proponent whose organisation developed a business sustainability assessors’ course. As noted later in this report, the training product they developed had only limited dissemination due to the absence of a sustainability ‘infrastructure’ or peak bodies (for example ISCs) able to champion and publicise this product. Comparison of these experiences suggests that dissemination of products is most effective where dedicated established networks exist, including effective peak bodies.

**Disseminating and sustaining models of practice**

Several WIP projects created and tested models of new practices to address specific workforce development issues, problems, or gaps in practice. In some cases the aim of the project was the creation and testing of a model. In other cases new practices or ways of doing things evolved out of the project whilst not being a specific objective. Not all new practices explored in WIP projects were codified as models for dissemination, and they have consequently remained tacit within the proponent organisations and parties to the project. The following outcomes in WIP projects were identified as having the characteristics of models:

- Rapid response models to up-skill existing workers in sustainability skills, or during a downturn
- A training practice to service a thin market using a collaborative model of developing e-learning methods
• Processes for blending higher education and vocational education and training pedagogy and practice into fully integrated courses
• A process for creating innovation through inter-sectoral partnerships
• Processes for up-skilling CEOs, senior managers and business owners in sustainability and small business management practices through blended training and mentoring approaches
• A process for providing skill recognition to volunteers in regions
• A process of regional cross-industry training and employment for entry level job seekers and school leavers
• A method for identifying and building organisational capacity for adopting high performance work practices
• A model for building workforce development capacity in regional primary industry
• A process of mentoring that focusses on at risk apprentices

In rare cases these models were actively promoted by proponents or parties to try and encourage others to replicate their use after the completion of the project. In one case the proponent (a representative from a peak body that worked as an integrator) employed well-planned and exacting strategies to generate broader interest in the process. As a consequence, the project has achieved broad and sustained impact beyond its formal completion and the strategy used by the ISC might be considered a model for others to follow. Key elements of the strategy, and project activities, are described as follows:

• This project was one of the few that conducted an impact evaluation at sites where the model was piloted. This involved follow-up diagnostic evaluation and mentoring at sites five months after pilot completion. The five-month gap was designed in to allow for “time needed to provoke cultural change in management thinking”. This evaluation provided the raw material for case studies and various publicity efforts described below.
• The proponents used the content of the training product which was developed within the model as the basis for a second training program that integrated higher education and VET learning methods, and obtained funding from government sources to design and deliver the program.
• The proponent organisation funded training workshops for sector RTOs to demonstrate delivery of the training product, which is fairly complex with a strong demonstration and action learning component.
• Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) from pilot sites acted as ambassadors for the model at workshops attended by other CEOs, business owners and senior managers. These were conducted by the proponent in localities comprising ‘clusters’ of targeted businesses. Project ambassadors attested to the success of the model and described the positive benefits resulting from its application at their enterprises. This approach was taken as sector employers are more likely to respond positively to messages delivered by peers (other CEOs, owners or senior managers) and to see the potential to emulate their experience.
• The workshops have been successful in drawing in enterprises that the proponent would otherwise have found it difficult to connect with. They also allowed the proponent to direct these enterprises to the RTOs and consultants who are skilled in delivering training and acting as mentors.
Proponents developed exemplar case studies of organisations that had experienced measurable benefit from applying the model at site level. These have been used in a number of publicity initiatives, including workshops.

These approaches have resulted in the model and products developed from the project having widespread effects. Examples of this include the results of networking and dissemination efforts by the proponent and partner organisation. These efforts have led to a number of state government departments in NSW delivering the course content to new constituencies such as small business people and manufacturing senior executives. In addition the proponent has obtained government funding to contextualise and apply the training in other sectors including foundries and other agrifood subsectors including dairy, winemaking and meat processing.

Factors influencing model durability: resourcing, exemplar case studies, and stewardship by proponents

In contrast to the initiatives undertaken in the project described above, there were several reasons offered by proponents in other projects to explain why strategies to expand or extend the application of models had not taken place. Primary among them was the lack of resourcing available to either take the model to the next level or to actively encourage others to take it up. In many cases the WIP funded the piloting of the model only and proponents had not planned for the extension or ongoing life of the model beyond the pilot period. One proponent expressed it this way,

We’ve done the work. We’ve provided something to the Department. This here is a model; this is the one that we think that would work. But it’s the Department’s property now. We did it under their auspices and with their money. We just don’t have the resources to be able to go out and do that, as well as the other things that we’re actually contracted to do. As much as we’d like to.

In most of the projects that established models, these models are held within the knowledge and resource base of the respective intermediary organisations, but are not being actively promoted or sustained internally or externally. Rather, the proponents await opportunities and resourcing to build on or deploy the model. In the absence of dedicated funding this is all they feel able to do. In several cases the model has been written up as a framework guide and is available on the proponent’s website. Each of the parties involved in these projects were able to identify other settings in which the model might work but they did not have the resources to follow up and pursue those leads as they were outside of their own networks or beyond their organisational responsibilities or resource capabilities. As it stands, the knowledge of these models has gone no further than the project proponents, parties and the Department.

Proponents did identify ways in which they would have liked to further build on models or increase their uptake. With available resources the following strategies were discussed:

- Tapping into existing entrepreneurial structures (where there was a business case) or government structures (where there was a public good argument) to adopt and/or take models forward;
• Building locally-based institutional structures to house and act as a hub for models to be deployed, with regional agencies and state government bodies providing stewardship and resourcing of the model;
• Gaining commitment from other agencies to fund activities in areas identified in models as strategically important;
• Generating further case studies to expand the evidence of demonstrations. It was felt by some parties that funding to build more evidence would create more momentum to bring industries on board; and
• Extending a model of recognition assessment and training used to up-skill an enterprise’s production workers to its management and administration staff (funding is being sought to achieve this).

Each of these strategies would require considerable work to implement. Proponents from two projects are planning to make further active attempts to perpetuate the models developed. The ISIS team is one of these and is a good example of a project that has been explicitly designed, structured and conducted to maximise generative opportunities. However, as the project had only just been completed at the time of writing this report the success of those efforts to continue and grow the impact of ISIS is unknown.

In two cases, difficulties experienced in implementing the model within the pilot projects have constrained the potential to roll the model out any further. The parties in both projects felt that the lack of an outstanding exemplar case study made it more difficult to sell the more successful aspects of the model. In one case it was believed the best way to proceed with the model was to use the lessons from the original pilot to better design a next attempt. In their view the potential benefits of the model were such that this was worthwhile. However, there was no way of proceeding in the absence of dedicated funding to undertake this work.

Another barrier to the spread of models was a lack of thorough evaluation and assessment of impacts in some projects. While there is a belief from proponents that a model is workable and worthwhile, the absence of evidence to attest to this is likely to limit its saleability or widespread adoption. This may not necessarily require a formal evaluation of a project. However the importance of compelling exemplar case studies and the personal testimonies of project participants drawn from pilot site evaluations have been effective elements in the dissemination and uptake of, for example, the Carbon Tools sustainability model. The evidence of impact drawn from pilot sites in this project was likely to have increased the power of the opportunistic promotional activity that has been undertaken by some of the individuals associated with developing and implementing this model. A partner in another project which was conducted in a sector characterised by low workforce development capacity likewise suggested that the best way to convince employers in that sector of the merits of adopting the workforce development approach that was developed was by exposing them to ‘like’ employers identified in the project who used ‘best practice’ workforce development practices which led to improved business performance.

In two cases, while the model has not been codified or promoted more broadly, the proponents continue to use the practices within their own organisations to good effect. The model of mentoring at-risk apprentices continues to be deployed by the proponents who developed it, subject to ongoing government funding. Similarly the RTO proponent that developed an e-learning model for training in a
thin market continues to develop resources using a similar model. Each of the proponents champions the principles of the model when given the opportunity, but their focus is primarily on continuing the work within their own operations.

5.4 Summary
This section of the report canvassed issues relating to project outcomes (the achievement of project aims) and impacts occurring beyond the completion of the project. Evaluation of the latter presented difficulties as in some cases insufficient time had elapsed for impact to occur. However, immediate project outcomes were evident in the form of reports, products and models, with most projects producing one or more of these outputs.

A number of problems were inherent in evaluating the impact of projects. They included an absence of impact evaluation by proponents or partners; a short interval of time elapsing between project completion and this study (leaving insufficient time for impacts to emerge); and difficulties tracking the uptake, use or influence of publicly available project outputs (reports, tools and models). In addition, many longer-term impacts of projects were somewhat intangible and non-quantifiable in nature, and thus difficult for proponents to measure in the absence of a detailed evaluation framework or dedicated resources for in-depth evaluation.

Final reports submitted to the WIP at project completion were able to outline the achievement or otherwise of project outcomes, but contained little data relating to impact beyond the project due to the timing of report production. If a priority of those administering funding programs is to track project impact, this might be achieved by providing proponents with a framework or methodology for evaluating qualitative impacts at a sufficient interval following completion. Proponents and partners in a minority of projects also acknowledged that impact evaluations can assist in maximising project impacts by: sustaining interest in projects; guiding ongoing promotion or resourcing efforts; evaluating the public value of individual projects; and providing opportunities to build on project outcomes.

Analysing the impacts of 28 highly diverse projects presented a challenge. However, assessment of the broad sweep of project impacts indicated that six key categories of impact were discernible. They were:

- Knowledge attainment through research that enhanced the workforce development capacity of project proponents and partners, external organisations, and individuals (and where disseminated, contributed to public knowledge)
- Effects on the operation of organisations – mainly through improved functioning or capability
- Effects on the employment opportunities, outcomes and job security of individual project participants or project parties’ constituencies or clients
- Effects on skill formation at industry, enterprise, occupational and regional levels (leading to enhanced capability for individuals, employers and those operating in the skills system)
- Effects on collaborative structures and practices built between organisations in workforce development, regional and sectoral communities of interest
- Positive effects on organisational cultures in proponent or partner organisations

The breadth or extent of a project’s impact appeared to be a function of (among other factors): the nature and scope of the project (as initially designed); the positioning and resource base of the
proponent organisation; and the extent of dissemination or other activities aimed at extending the life of the project. In some projects little or no dissemination or ongoing activities took place to extend impact. In others, multiple initiatives were undertaken to build impact. Factors influencing proponent's propensity for disseminating project outputs or continuing project activities included whether planning to maximise impact had taken place at the project inception or proposal stage, whether individuals in the proponent organisation remained in place and committed to disseminating project outputs, and whether internal or external resources were available to the proponent for dissemination or the continuation of project activities.

Findings indicated that the generative outcomes of research reports are greater in number where planned, targeted and active dissemination of research reports takes place using multiple channels, activities and methods. Likewise, the impact of products generated from WIP projects was maximised as a result of: planned and targeted marketing and circulation activities; modification of products for new audiences or for lower delivery costs; sufficient resourcing for dissemination and continued project activity; stewardship of outputs by well-networked ‘champions’ or institutions; the presence of established dissemination networks; and importantly, a threshold level of demand for products.

Finally, factors influencing the impact or continuance of models produced under the WIP include many of those described for reports and products: the level of resourcing available to disseminate, extend or build on models; once again, the extent to which stewardship of models occurs by proponents or other integrated organisations; and the scope for producing exemplar case studies to extend the uptake of models.
Section 6: A summary of factors relating to project success

Sections 4 and 5 of this report have detailed lessons relating to project conduct and implementation and approaches to increasing and sustaining project impact. Throughout these sections we have highlighted a range of features that were central to successful approaches in each of these project elements. This section summarises the success factors. The criticality of these factors was more acute in more exploratory projects where wholly new processes and outcomes are evident. Project ‘success’ is defined in this context as projects having achieved their aims or outcomes as initially stated, and having achieved broad and sustained impact (in terms of the continuation or dissemination of project findings, models, products). The first part of this section summarises elements that have a bearing on successful project conduct and outcomes, whilst the second part details success factors in relation to sustaining and measuring impact.

6.1 Factors relating to successful project conduct and outcomes

| The use of a scoping phase at the commencement of projects to better understand contexts |
| Projects were better equipped to apply appropriate methods when they were scoped to understand critical project contexts by examining: contemporary knowledge; the state of target populations, communities, regions and industries; and similar or competing initiatives. Many problems experienced in projects could have been avoided or better managed had there been adequate scoping. |

| The application of a risk management framework to project planning |
| Risk assessments of project design, staffing and the potential for unforeseen eventualities allow for possible flaws and skill gaps to be dealt with prior to the main project activities. They also provide for contingency planning to take remedial action where there are cases of unforeseeable project disruptions. Had this been undertaken in all projects, outcomes in several projects would have been more secure. |

| Engagement of skilled experts to develop, test and validate project designs |
| Project scoping and risk assessment processes require certain skills. In some projects these skills were held internal to, and utilised by, the project team. Where there were gaps in research and project design skills, projects would have benefitted greatly from external examination and guidance. Conversely, it is clear in some cases that the on-going involvement of experts ensures the consistent application of knowledge across the project. |

| Project structures that maximise the contribution of partners to the project |
| The establishment of strong project partner relationships had a bearing on the quality of advice and assistance that projects received. The make-up of steering committee and reference group membership, and how those groups were managed, assisted in facilitating benefits to projects. Internal project partnership teams worked particularly well where they had demonstrable and deep support from decision makers in their organisations, and where project structures ensured that the benefits of collaborative activity were fully realised. |
**Effective, responsive and consistent project management**

Experienced and appropriately skilled project managers were intrinsic to project success. Attributes such as flexibility, adaptability, and the capacity to collaborate, negotiate and liaise effectively were highlighted as important to ‘exploratory’ projects. Where project management was inconsistent, either due to turnover, or poor role definition, or a lack of resourcing, projects were much more likely to falter.

**The central involvement of dynamic, knowledgeable, networked and skilled individuals**

Where project leadership teams included ‘integrators’ the outcomes and impacts of projects were accelerated and taken to a higher level. Integrators were characterised by having longstanding experience in their area of expertise, expansive and relevant networks, and an ‘activist’ approach that ensured progression of the broader project aims beyond the project itself.

**The effective selection and management of consultants working in projects**

Consultants with in-depth knowledge and appropriate skills and experience added value to projects. However in some projects consultant involvement was problematic. Caution needs to be taken when engaging consultants to ensure their credentials, capability and capacity to undertake the contract. It was suggested that closer collaboration between consultants and partners from the outset of projects might secure better outcomes.

**The ability to meet the challenges of participant recruitment and retention within projects**

The greatest challenge across the projects was engaging participation from difficult to recruit populations. In several projects it was also their greatest success. The factors that led to success included effectively communicating the project benefits to target populations, gaining the involvement of key partners, and designing project methods to overcome participation barriers. This worked best when adequate time and resourcing was factored into the project plan.
6.2 Success factors in increasing and sustaining impact

The extent of demand for, interest in, and salience of the project output to the target market

Where there is a basic lack of demand for a project output, no amount of dissemination or ongoing project activity will increase the impact of the project. Project outputs were found to have little impact where the output was not attractive to, or valued by, the target audience. Section 4 highlighted the importance of project scoping (including market testing) in assessing latent demand for outputs. One approach found to improve demand and support for products was to closely involve the target audience in their development.

The extent (or absence) of planning for sustained impact in the early phases of the project

Where projects were guided from the earliest stages by a roadmap of activities aimed at furthering or disseminating project outcomes, project dissemination processes and other efforts to sustain impact were more effective and strategically targeted. Again, this related to issues identified in Section 4 in relation to the benefits of sound project design, management and scoping.

The quality and breadth of targeted dissemination activities

Section 5 demonstrated the diverse range of dissemination activities undertaken in relation to project outcomes. Key lessons included the need for dissemination activities to be targeted and tailored to specific audiences, for outputs to be accessible to these audiences, and the success of approaches where a broad range of dissemination activities were undertaken, using multiple channels and methods. Successful approaches entailed project parties forming relationships with networks of relevant stakeholders and institutional ‘champions’ to gain assistance in dissemination activities or support for initiatives to sustain project impacts.

Whether structured evaluation of outcomes or impacts occurred

Structured evaluation of project outcomes was relatively rare in the projects examined but was nonetheless seen to have a number of benefits, including: sustaining interest in projects; guiding or contributing material to ongoing promotion or resourcing efforts; evaluating the public good or worth of individual projects; and providing opportunities to build on project outcomes or “take them to the next level”.

The extent to which there is concerted, ongoing stewardship of projects by proponents or effective intermediary organisations acting as champions

Building and sustaining impact required effort and resourcing from project parties and other organisations assisting in this process. Where project parties lacked the resources to disseminate outputs or continue project activities, a successful approach involved building relationships with other organisations that were better-resourced to carry out this role. Enduring stewardship was found to be important. Where individuals key to projects departed proponent or partner organisations soon after project completion, projects often had little or no impact beyond these organisations.

The extent to which dedicated, established networks, institutions or an infrastructure exists that can facilitate efforts to increase or sustain impact
The context within which projects sat, in terms of industry, regional, jurisdictional or skills system infrastructures, had a bearing on the success of efforts to build and sustain impact. Some sectors (for example agrifood) had well-established networks with strong peak bodies at their centre and this assisted efforts to disseminate and build on outputs. Others (for example volunteering, or sustainability) had no recognised, central peak body and few networks that could be utilised for dissemination purposes. Resourcing for activities within sectors also varied significantly and impacted on proponents’ capacity to sustain impact.

The extent of resourcing available for dissemination or follow-on activities; or, the extent to which modifications were made to convert project outputs to other forms

Project impact was increased where the life of projects was prolonged through proponents or other bodies gaining funding to extend project activities. Where few resources were available to fund efforts to increase or sustain impact, alternative strategies were used in some projects to convert project outputs, through cost-neutral or low-cost means, into new forms. In some cases this involved proponents handing stewardship of outputs over to partner or other organisations, who modified them into forms which enabled greater usage or tailored them to new target audiences.

Assessment of the projects indicated several other factors inherent in the design or conduct of projects that served to minimise impact. They were:

- Projects that did not achieve their aims: in these projects, no outcomes were generated so there was no ‘output’ for the parties to disseminate or sustain
- Where projects were not intended to have widespread impact by design: the scope of some projects precluded impacts beyond the proponent organisation
- Where the project’s duration was too short to achieve project aims: in such cases, further resources were needed to achieve project outcomes beyond the completion date and to maximise project impact beyond this point.
Section 7: Lessons learned relating to specific policy areas and topics

7.1 Training design, development and delivery

A total of eleven projects designed, developed and/or delivered training courses as a central or component project activity. They included skill set training for existing workers in sustainability, courses for senior managers in sustainability, business sustainability assessment training for small business operators, cross industry training for entry level participants, VET resources for young people in thin regional markets, an integrated VET and HE course in retail management, and an agronomy course for existing employees in major agribusinesses. A further three projects piloted aspects of training and education including a new system of competency recognition, student placements in interactive media companies involved in partnerships, and a ‘rapid response’ process of recognition of prior learning and skill development during a slow-down in manufacturing.

This section examines the lessons gleaned from these projects based on projects teams’ experiences of designing curriculum, delivering courses and applying systems of recognition of prior learning. It also examines the specific benefits of the projects to young people, as well as discussing cautionary lessons relating to barriers to developing and delivering training more broadly.

Lessons from the projects

Internships and entry level training placements expose students to the reality of industries, making them more employable: Interns placed in interactive media companies while completing the final year of their degrees, and young people engaged in cross industry training at entry level, were exposed to workplaces in two WIP projects. This benefitted them in several ways. According to the interns in the ISIS project, they gained understanding of the ‘generic’ or ‘employability’ skills that would improve their chances of successful employment. Such skills included the need to show initiative, be self-motivated and think laterally to solve problems. Interns in this project also gained important knowledge about the structure of the industry and came to understand the importance of a more ‘general’ education base beyond the gaming technologies they personally favoured. Consequently those other skill areas, such as business and client management, were ones they were more likely to choose in their future training pathways. This reinforces the need for gaining industry knowledge and experiences early enough in training and education courses to enable those decisions to be made. Proponents in a second project believed that the entry level trainees improved their employability and their career options in their local areas by having experience in more than one industry through work placements. This in turn could improve the retention of young people in regional areas. It was also felt that the support they received in the pilot to gain generic employability skills, such as the need to get to work on time, dressing appropriately and asking questions when in doubt, were all critical factors in their successful transition to workplaces.

Involving training deliverers, recipients and employers in resource and course design leads to better outcomes: A course designed to up-skill existing agronomists benefitted considerably from being adapted after the first few sessions. It became apparent that the participants weren’t “getting it”, which prompted changes to the pedagogic approach, and a shift from a “stand and deliver” style to what the proponent described as a “Socratic” teaching method. Candidates were encouraged to share what they knew on a topic and then trainers would guide them towards filling gaps in their
knowledge and practice. This also worked well because the knowledge that students needed was generally location specific and not always known to the trainer. Candidates learned how to find things out on their own while building professional networks amongst those people they consulted in the process.

A project built generic resources for RTOs to use with young people by working very closely with both groups. Initially the proponent was careful to map the key employers and industries in the relevant regions to ensure that the resource topics fit with the relevant competencies that were likely to be favoured. Students were provided with resources and provided feedback on their usability. This established that they preferred YouTube presentations and other web resources to dense documentation and text. Consequently modifications were made to make the resources more attractive to 18-25 year olds. RTOs in the region were incorporated into an informal ‘community of practice’ by the proponent. They gave important feedback on the resources on an iterative basis and worked together to refine them further.

It was also apparent that this degree of consultation and adaptation was easier to provide at a regional or workplace pilot level. It was difficult to refine courses and resources with the same degree of responsiveness where pilot courses were designed for individuals across a large range of enterprises. This was exemplified in projects piloting sustainability skill set courses run in three different industries. General work was used in the manufacturing industry training, where four of the five pilots were run at enterprises. The enterprise level pilots ensured a more fit for purpose approach was taken, including coaching for senior managers. This lesson was reinforced during the development of a course that integrated VET and HE. One of the reasons employers were reluctant to be involved was their apprehension that a ‘general’ course would not satisfy the specific needs of their enterprises. Whether this was a problem was never tested as the course did not proceed beyond the first university session. One party to the project felt it would have been far more constructive had the employers been involved in a longer lead in, including having more engagement in the curriculum development phase.

**Bringing experts together is an efficient means of integrating VET and HE curriculums:** In two projects work was done to integrate vocational education and training and higher education curriculums. The experience of those working in one of these projects indicated that the most efficient way of working between a higher education knowledge-based framework and mapping it with relevant competencies was to have experts in each curriculum area work closely together. Having either party attempt to ‘learn’ the curriculum and system of the other was difficult and, in the words of one party, “likely to take a lifetime”. In this project, experts from the HE and VET parties “sat together in a room for a day and just nutted it out.” In a third project, where a Certificate IV-level course was developed, the course designer, who had a history in higher education, worked with a VET sector mentor, and was also assisted by a curriculum committee. Project proponents felt those processes worked exceptionally well.

**Training system factors inhibiting course creation:** All three of the projects referred to above experienced constraints when seeking course accreditation. Each of the partners from one project described the lengthy timeframes and difficulties they encountered, including dealing with several
layers of bureaucracy. While all interviewees recognised the need for careful application of course accreditation and the importance of ensuring quality, they felt the processes as they currently exist act as a barrier to developing further innovative and important training offerings. The project team that developed an integrated HE and VET course encountered other training system barriers to delivery of their project outcomes. They included the difficulties they faced in establishing the traineeship status for each individual enrolled in the course and the incentives available to employers. The proponent maintains that the procedures to ensure the funding for the RTO was so complex that a separate stream of funding should be considered rather than repeating the difficulties they faced in the pilot project.

**Benefits of effective skills recognition systems:** In a project where an enterprise rolled out a comprehensive up-skilling process amongst its entire non-management workforce, the RTO involved explained the enormous efficiencies of having the appropriate data and access to workers to account for the skills workers already had. He maintained that the 12-month timeframe in which the training had to be delivered would have been unachievable had it not been for the capacity to undertake the initial RPL process. In addition it assisted in bringing on board employees, once their suspicions were allayed that the mapping was not being used to target redundancies. It gave workers a great sense of confidence to be shown the skills they already possessed which created an environment more conducive and responsive to the training that followed. Another project that piloted the benefits of a ‘competency conversation’ approach to skill recognition (or RPL) appeared to deliver a series of benefits. Foremost amongst them, according to the project manager who oversaw and was engaged in the process as a participant and assessor, was the “transformative impact” it had on those who were subject to the process. The critical effects were giving candidates a language and framework to name their skills and understand how they were valued in the national training system; and the confidence and know-how to map their careers and future learning. Benefits for employers included an increase in the potential labour pool of qualified workers, particularly amongst groups that are difficult for the national training system to access.

**The importance of assessor skills for effective competency recognition:** The skills required of assessors in conducting a constructive ‘competency conversation’ were regarded as critical by all those interviewed about the process. It was necessary for mentors and assessors to guide the candidate through their life and previous work to identify skills that were able to be mapped to the national training packages. This required emotional management skills, knowledge of the activities generally undertaken by volunteers, and considerable knowledge of the national training packages. This project dealt with the range of skills required by having several levels of mentor/assessor. Mentors did the initial work to assist in ‘unearthing’ the skills that candidates had and probe into their experiences to draw them out. They also assisted in gathering supporting documentation. These people were also volunteers and as such used plain language rather than training jargon, which was considered very important by participants and project parties alike. Other qualified assessors then became involved to ensure that effective mapping to competencies was being performed, and the RTO conducted the final assessment for accreditation.

**Barriers to skills recognition systems:** The project manager that led a skill recognition process for volunteers described coming up against considerable resistance to the value of skill recognition. It was common for people to regard it as a ‘lesser’ option to formal training, and they questioned the quality of qualifications that were awarded. There was also animosity from people who had received
qualifications and felt that RPL undervalued their own efforts. To a large degree this was countered during the project by the experiences people went on to have. Those close to the process, and who applied the spirit of the conversation style, recognised the rigour that was applied and expected of candidates to establish their skills. Several of these people described an ‘epiphany’ moment when they realised the benefits and power of the model, in particular, for building esteem in people who were marginalised and socially excluded.

Skills recognition processes create access to the national training system: A project that delivered skill recognition to volunteers was very effective in accessing candidates that are generally beyond the reach of the national training system. The project, by recruiting candidates through school networks in disadvantaged areas, gave skill recognition to the following hard to reach groups: people who were not in the labour market and therefore not able to use government services for job assistance; people working in service sector jobs characterised by high turnover, casual employment and part time hours; people with responsibilities that make it difficult for them to undertake formal learning; individuals with low confidence in their capacity to engage in training; and people with a limited understanding of the training system.

7.2 Innovation

There are two ways to consider innovation as manifest in the WIP. First, the innovation that took place within each of the projects, that is, what they did that was ‘new’ and/or led to the creation of new ideas, products, services or models of practice. In a broad sense this has been examined across the report as a discussion of the lessons learned about process and impact. The second way is to consider projects that are aimed at encouraging the uptake of innovation, and what was learned about the nature and generation of innovation as a consequence of those projects. It is this latter perspective on innovation that this section will examine.

There are two WIP projects that concentrated on increasing the uptake of innovation in the economy. The first was the ISIS project, which is discussed in detail in this section. A second project, which developed an online diagnostic tool for assessing innovative capacity within organisations, is discussed in other sections of the report addressing lessons learned in relation to issues of project conduct and impact. However this project offers few insights in terms of whether and how it raised innovative capacity in target organisations, as no evaluation of this had taken place, and accordingly it is not profiled in this section.

The generation and codification of processes leading to innovation were of particular and explicit interest to the ISIS project team. As experts they were well-versed in the theory and practices associated with innovation and for most of them it was central to their professional endeavour. They deliberately designed a project to create the conditions for very different organisations (interactive media companies and non-interactive media companies) to come together to identify and implement innovative digital solutions for the non-interactive media partner using a co-creation model. This section summarises the lessons learned about creating partnerships for innovation based on activity undertaken in the ISIS project, and some of the apparent implications of cross-industry collaboration for the interactive media economy and education system. A fuller account of the ISIS project appears in Appendix 2 of this report.
Lessons from the project

Cross-industry collaboration has the potential to ‘transform’ businesses: Each of the partners involved in the project attested to the unexpected and pleasing success experienced by each of the businesses involved in the ISIS integrations. It is apparent that they underwent intense professional development as well as being party to new services, products and processes that had been co-created in the partnerships.

Cross-industry innovation is driven by collaboration: The innovation in services, products and processes that was achieved in the project integrations (or partnerships) was driven by cross-industry collaboration. This was not a ‘service model’ of partnership whereby an expert company (the interactive media firm) was contracted to solve a problem posed by the client (the mainstream company). The ISIS model was based on a ‘meeting of the minds’ of the partners. The skills and expertise across both companies were combined to create something that neither company had envisaged when they started. According to the ISIS team members interviewed, this co-creation form of cross-industry collaboration was “at the heart” of the innovation that emerged.

Intellectual property sharing for co-creation impacts positively on innovative activity: It was felt by project team members that co-creation based collaboration benefitted from structures to establish an ‘equal’ relationship between the partners. Traditional fee-for-service arrangements were set aside in ISIS and it was agreed that partners would share any intellectual property (IP) that was created. As one partner explained,

What is important about ISIS is it’s not just a guy from [the mainstream company] saying, “Come here, I want to give you 30 grand so you can build me a website”. It’s nothing to do with that. What’s really important about ISIS is it’s like a meeting of expertise. It’s a very balanced thing. So it’s not a fee for service model; it’s a collaborative co-creation.”

This arrangement enabled interactive media companies to share in any on-going benefits. Members of the team also felt that the contractual arrangements were important for establishing an environment conducive to collaborative innovation. While cross-industry innovation might occur under fee-for-service conditions it would not have the same qualities and ‘hybridity’ as a co-creation arrangement. The following explanation from one of the ISIS team describes how the mainstream company staff, through the co-creation process, changed their perceptions from being ‘technology focussed’ to ‘solution focussed’,

...they [the partnership] haven't talked about technology for technology's sake. So if someone had said you need to develop a website, they would have all thought within the constraints of the website. ... they were pleased when [the mainstream partner] started thinking about things from what their products could do, or what their processes were doing, rather than when they first engaged, they kept on trying to imagine how technology could work and how technology could solve the problem.

Intermediaries increase uptake and application of cross-industry partnerships, particularly amongst SMEs: The involvement of the ISIS team in the collaborative partnerships was considered by many as a critical ingredient for the innovations that ensued. A series of factors were identified by the ISIS team as instrumental in shepherding the partnerships toward innovation.
The ISIS selection and brokerage process introduced partners to each other that were not likely to have met under other circumstances. In particular, it was noted that while larger companies in the Australian economy were likely to, sooner rather than later, commence using interactive media strategies in their businesses, this transition was much less available to cost sensitive SMEs. In addition SMEs with interactive media skills were less likely to be engaged by larger mainstream companies to provide interactive media services, because traditional procurement and tendering approaches generally exclude SME providers. As such one of the ongoing benefits of the ISIS project was to demonstrate to interactive media SMEs and the large mainstream companies that they could work together productively.

The facilitation of early encounters between the partners by the ISIS team built a firm foundation of trust which was critical to the co-creation process. The differences between the partners in terms of organisational and business cultures and areas of expertise were significant. The ISIS facilitators played a critical role in bridging that divide, acting as ‘translators’ between the groups and keeping the environment productive.

Because what we’ve identified early on too is there is such a massive clash of cultures. You know, you’ve got ‘games guy’ and ‘superannuation guy’. They’re not going to bump into each other much. Superannuation guy hangs out with superannuation people, just as the games people do. They don’t go to the same conferences and they don’t know how to speak the same language.

On-going mentoring was also critical to ensure that the partnerships did not get side-tracked by problems or diverted from the initiative they were part of. The mentors were instrumental in managing expectations, averting conflict, providing advice, and keeping to deadlines. The nature of innovation is such that unknown factors will emerge, so having access to expert advice at crucial moments was critical. This was particularly beneficial for SMEs vulnerable to time lags and cost blow outs due to their relatively low cash reserves.

Interactive media skills will be required increasingly across industries: It was apparent from interviews with ISIS team members that skills in the interactive media industry will be increasingly in demand across the economy. One project partner compared the “ubiquitous and convergent” nature of the interactive media platform to that of social media, suggesting the project companies involved in cross-industry collaborations will have a leadership role in demonstrating its potential to improve business productivity across the economy.

The quality of interactive media education and training is critical to that end: The research work in the project confirmed that the interactive media industry perceives a gap between graduates’ skills and what interactive media companies require. A review of interactive media courses established that there is a wide variety of gaming and interactive media content on offer and there is no clear distinction between content levels in ‘generalist’ and ‘specialist’ courses. One of the interviewees described some curriculum development in interactive media education as a “grab bag” of existing course units with some gaming content thrown in,

My analogy is you’ve got a little shopping trolley and you’re going through existing units of university and you go, okay, we will have a couple design subjects, a couple of ICT (information and communications technology) subjects, yep, we will call that a games course.
It would appear from the ISIS education report that less than half of the graduates go on to work in interactive media companies and the rate of enrolments in the context of current industry trends suggests this mismatch will worsen. The experience of interns confirmed that their formal education is not equipping them with all the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about courses and subjects suited to gaining employment in the sector. Taken with the potential for increased demand for high end interactive media skills in the economy, the need for improvements in course development and industry engagement is growing in importance.

7.3 Participation in apprenticeships and Indigenous employment
This section examines three projects relating to improving the uptake and conduct of apprenticeships, and another that concentrated on improving levels of Indigenous employment. One of the projects aimed to assess the impact of mentoring on the retention rates of apprentices by undertaking a large study that provided face-to-face mentoring to approximately 700 apprentices and compared their retention with a further 600 apprentices that did not receive mentoring. Another apprenticeship project targeted apprenticeship uptake in the civil construction industry. This project undertook surveys of employer practices and attitudes to apprenticeships and also provided support to educators to raise awareness of civil construction jobs and careers. The third apprenticeship project was located in a region of NSW with high youth unemployment. A well-established local bi-partisan committee oversaw a strategy of supporting SME employers into apprenticeships with matched support to job seekers to undertake apprenticeships as they became available. The project focussed on Indigenous employment was piloted in a metropolitan region in NSW and built partnerships to support local employers with Indigenous employment, while assisting local Indigenous job seekers to become job ready. Further information on each of these projects can be found in Appendix 2.

Lessons from the projects
Barriers to SMEs employing apprentices remain present: Two projects were concerned with overcoming the barriers to employing apprentices that were experienced by employers. A project that surveyed civil construction employers found that SMEs know very little about the national training system, and many do not know how to engage an apprentice. They also found that SMEs were reluctant to take on apprentices due to having inadequate numbers of staff to train and supervise them, uncertainty around workflows, and to a lesser degree, insufficient numbers of suitable candidates. These findings were echoed in the experience of a project officer working in another project. In this second case it was observed that when SMEs were willing to take on an apprentice they did not have the resources to navigate through the training system and administer the process. They also found that SMEs were increasingly reluctant due to a growth in third or fourth year apprentices leaving to take up work in the mining industry. As a result the burden of training costs was falling primarily on the original SME employer while the mining industry was reaping the benefits of the training contract by ‘inheriting’ apprentices for the period that they are most productive.

Efforts to increase SME apprenticeship engagement were successful: One of the projects referred to in the previous point concentrated effort on bringing SME employers into the apprenticeship system. This was primarily achieved by raising awareness amongst employers of what is required to employ an apprentice and directing them to organisations that might assist and actively support employers with the recruitment and selection exercises. These activities were complemented with activities designed to get job seekers prepared for employment. This brokerage service increased SME
employment of apprentices in the region. It was observed by the project officer that while it did not overcome all barriers to employing apprentices, it did provide an alternative to a group training model that presented an expense that some SMEs could not afford.

**Employers respond well to targeted assistance with Indigenous employment:** It was evident from the experience of the project proponent involved in creating partnerships for Indigenous employment that employers can be attracted to undertaking programs of Indigenous employment when they receive ‘packaged’ assistance from experts in the area. The key elements in engaging employers in Indigenous employment partnerships were identified by the proponent as: targeting industries that are in growth to ensure the likelihood of more secure and enduring employment options; undertaking a thorough scoping of each of the potential employers to establish their labour needs and flows; approaching employers, armed with that intelligence, at a point in the business cycle where they are free to talk; and offering them a packaged solution. This entailed providing them with services from the initial planning right through to on-going mentoring contact with employees. This approach contrasted with the experiences that employers had previously had with employment services which had failed to translate into jobs for Indigenous job seekers. In some cases contracts for services had been signed but there had been no activity beyond that. Employers were unsure how to manage a system of Indigenous employment effectively, including how to locate candidates and how to provide appropriate support. Given most of these employers were large and in at least one case they had an employee dedicated to managing Indigenous employment, the barriers were less to do with cost and mostly to do with ‘know how’.

**Intensive support provided to job-seekers improves their employability:** Two projects, one of which focussed on improving employment outcomes for apprentices and another which was assisting Indigenous job seekers into work, used similar strategies to achieve outcomes. Both projects identified that candidates need support to identify their strengths and skills and to be able to discuss them in job interviews. The naming of skills was considered of particular importance by the Indigenous employment project leader, who explained,

> What we do is we actually help the candidate to get to know themselves and become self-aware so that they're better able to sell themselves. Aboriginal people, we have such a hard time selling ourselves - culturally it's inappropriate. And if in addition you don't have a lot of work experience or interview experience or education, it's really hard - it's really hard for you to put labels on your skills, your knowledge and experience.

The apprentice project officer recounted experiences of seeing very good candidates miss opportunities due to their poor presentation at interviews. Both projects also stressed the importance of listening to the views of job seekers about their aspirations, and then designing responses accordingly. A project leader seeking to improve the employment prospects of people with multi-generational disadvantages in the labour market explained,

> ... if we're going to make a difference to an individual person's life through employment, that's the only way we're going to make it happen, is help them see how employment can help them get to where they want to be. You've got to help them figure out where they want to be, because generally you've no idea because you've come from a background where everyone around you has either not had a job or they've had entry level type jobs forever.
They explained how it was counter-productive to send candidates to jobs that they did not want. In both cases, proponents had seen this lead to fatigue and disillusionment for job seekers and employers where this had occurred.

**Reluctance to use employment services and barriers to employment service collaboration:** There were examples across the projects of job seekers and their families being reluctant to use job services. They complained of receiving ‘generic’ rather than tailored assistance, which meant undertaking courses or going to interviews for jobs they were not interested in. There were examples of school leavers being asked to return at a later date when they had been unemployed for a longer period, presumably to maximise outcomes payments for the service provider. There was also evidence in one project that competition for outcomes payments between employment services undermined efforts to work collaboratively to place job seekers in existing vacancies. This contrasts with the other initiative which was being led by a strong regional committee where it was felt that the cohesion within the group, which included employment service agencies, guarded against such ‘turf wars’ from occurring.

**Mentoring for disadvantaged job seekers and apprentices improves retention and career paths:** A research study designed to ascertain the impact of mentoring on apprenticeship retention rates found that mentoring had a slight positive effect across the population (a retention rate gap of 3.4 percentage points), and a significant positive impact on female apprentices (11.4 per cent), services and hospitality apprentices (9.4 per cent) and apprentices in building and construction (9 per cent). The project proponent noted that mentors had reported that mentoring provided the most benefit for apprentices at risk. In the course of the project they established ‘working categories’ for apprentices they perceived to be at risk. They included very young people, young people that did not live at home, apprentices with low literacy and numeracy skills, and apprentices to small employers. The formal research project was not designed to interrogate these categories so there is no statistical record of the impact of mentoring on these particular groups. The study also established that on-going mentoring had positive impacts. Mentoring ended after six months for apprentices in two states, however, in the third state the project mentor continued to provide informal support to the apprentices they had been in contact with. In the non-mentoring states the retention rate gap closed and there was no significant difference between the groups that had been mentored and the group for whom mentoring had stopped. In the state where mentoring was continued, the positive retention gap was maintained.

The retention benefits of mentoring established in the apprentice retention study accorded with anecdotal evidence from two other projects that were focussed on supporting job seekers into entry level employment. Proponents in those projects noted that the period of transition into work was critical and mentoring was an effective means of providing assistance to people through that difficult stage. The proponent on the Indigenous employment project explained that mentoring was best when it continued ‘the journey’ with the candidate and used the time to assist them on a career path and to set new goals. In their view mentoring that simply ‘checked in’ was missing opportunities to deepen the impact for candidates.

**7.4 Regional workforce development**

Five WIP-funded projects addressed issues relating to workforce development in regional and rural areas. Three of the five had as their principal focus the development and delivery of training in thin
regional markets and sought to equip participants with foundation skills necessary to work in the agrifood and/or mining sectors. Three projects involved workforce development mapping and planning in local areas. All but one of the projects had, as their aim, the development of strategies to support local labour markets to reduce exit from the regions, in particular the exit of school leavers pursuing training or job opportunities elsewhere.

The projects that were focused on training design and delivery piloted a range of methods of delivery, including local, face to face delivery via RTOs, and remote online delivery. Some used a mix of methods through a blended learning approach combining online learning with face to face delivery for larger local groups and skype and telephone mentoring for more remote participants. A number of issues relating to broadband capacity in regional areas impacted on the effectiveness of training delivery and these are reported in Section 7.7.

Lessons from the projects

Multiple barriers to implementing a workforce development approach exist in regional areas: Projects sought to overcome barriers to building a workforce development approach in local areas that largely stemmed from the ‘tyranny of distance’; that is, population dispersion, isolation, and competition for labour from the resources sector in some areas. A general reflection from a number of project partners was that the farming sector more broadly was characterised by low business management capacity and that within this, workforce management and workforce development capability was particularly low. The point was made that farm owners and managers themselves need to be the focus of workforce development efforts in the form of basic management training. Workforce development was more likely to be addressed by those farming employers who were characterised by high business and workforce management capacity and by farmers and industry associations who work to a longer term business and staffing strategy. It was felt that the most effective strategy for drawing the attention of low capacity farming employers to the benefits of good workforce development practices would involve profiling the practices of local ‘exemplar’ employers and highlighting the benefits of their approach to their farming business, or by meshing training on business management with training that may be of more interest to farmers (for example, on the latest cultivars).

In one project, informal and largely reactive employment practices presented a challenge to attempts to implement formalised, planned workforce development approaches in farming areas. In this project and another, low levels of employer investment in workforce training occurred due to employer fears that trained staff would then be poached by other farmers or the mining sector. These projects also uncovered a lack of collaboration among agriculture employers, who actively competed to recruit and retain the few available skilled staff in local areas. A partner in one project described the features of local ‘exemplar’ employers – those who, in taking a strategic approach to workforce development, successfully recruit and retain employees in areas of skills shortage. However it was noted that these employers do not actively publicise their ‘best practice’ workforce development approach among other farmers, because it allows them to be the employer of choice in a particular area.

Workforce development solutions must be attuned to local characteristics: A lesson that may seem obvious is that local context plays a large part in shaping workforce development approaches and solutions to local problems. Projects identified that smaller sub-regions and communities within
regional areas can be very different in terms of: the nature of dominant local industries and employers; areas of skills shortage and particular training needs; and solutions required. A key lesson for those seeking to implement cross-region workforce development solutions is that there is no ‘one size fits all’ model or solution for regional workforce development and that tailored solutions to workforce development needs or problems must be attuned to the diverse characteristics of local areas.

The need for local communities to identify and champion solutions: The solutions to workforce development problems that are developed at the local level must be integrated within a region and championed by locals. All but one of the projects successfully used processes of consultation with local stakeholders to build knowledge of local workforce development issues and develop solutions to address these issues. Most of the projects established steering groups of community participants to guide project activities, and evidence from these projects reinforced the importance of initiatives coming from local communities if they are to have wider credibility and maintain momentum. This is more likely to ensure high levels of local ‘buy-in’ or commitment to implementing project activities.

Embedded project managers and longer project durations enhance workforce development outcomes: As noted above, lessons from the projects indicated that regional workforce development projects need to be integrated in a local area. In addition, those implementing them (project officers or local ‘champions’) need to be known or ‘embedded’ in local communities and play a continuous role over a long period. Longer term relationships were found to be critical to establishing trust and legitimacy for the project at the community level and this takes time. These factors should be taken into account in the design of projects in regional areas, in particular with respect to project duration and timeframes.

The importance of support from regional agencies and employer associations: Implementation of the local solutions developed by project participants was hindered in areas where there was an absence of sustained agency and employer association support for the project, and was identified as a factor leading to project success in those areas where support was provided. A clear lesson from two projects was that well-resourced local agencies (such as shire/local councils or local development agencies) provide the bulwark for successful project implementation steered by stakeholder committees in regional areas.

Taken together, these lessons suggest that the success of regional workforce development initiatives is more likely to be assured where they involve locally generated and supported solutions, and local agency and employer organisation support for implementation.

The impact of seasonal/climatic events: Projects in regional areas may be more prone to external events which are out of the control of project partners and which have the potential to disrupt project activities and timelines. In the projects in regional areas this included an early harvest and flooding. This indicates a need for risk management strategies in the design of projects to account for such events occurring.
7.5 Workforce development for owners and senior managers

Three projects aimed to build the management capacity of small business owners and managers in SMEs by means of training. Two of these projects involved the face to face delivery of training to teams of senior managers and owners in small food processing firms (at site level, and two training locations). The third involved open access and blended training for individuals who owned or intended to own small businesses. Other projects involved the participation of small business owners such as family day care educators, farmers and those who completed business sustainability assessors’ training, however particular issues relating to the workforce development of these individuals in their identities as small business owners or managers did not emerge as crucial themes in the collection of data from these projects.

Lessons from the projects

Barriers to engaging owners and managers in workforce development initiatives: Owners and senior managers in SMEs are time-poor and this acts as an impediment to engaging them in skills development. It is difficult for them to take periods of time away from the business to engage in training due to their pivotal role as key decision makers, or because, as small business owners, they have little spare time that is not spent on business activities (even outside of standard work hours). One proponent noted, in regard to engaging small business owners in training,

It’s the last thing on their minds. They’re time poor. They’ve got to get through the day. To get people to sit down and engage in training - it’s a challenge overall. I always say - don’t get your hopes up too high. Because this is a tough market to engage.

A key learning was that workforce development initiatives must be designed to reflect these impediments to training. An example of this was the Business Building Blocks project, which provided flexibility for small business owners via online learning. Proponents described this approach as “just in time, just for me”. In the case of another two projects, difficulties sustaining managers’ attendance in course sessions over a two or three week period resulted in planned changes to course delivery, away from face to face workshop sessions to more flexible online delivery, thus enabling participants to complete coursework out of standard business hours.

Establishing a “value proposition”: Given the barriers to engaging business owners and managers in workforce development initiatives, strong incentives must be provided for them to consider participating in training. Crudely put, these include both carrot and stick incentives. Project findings indicated that the key (‘carrot’) factor motivating individuals to engage in training was benefit to the business, either through cost savings (in the case of three projects via sustainable practice) or improved business performance and viability (in the case of one other). However there were also corresponding ‘stick’ incentives at work: many of those participants in initiatives designed to improve business sustainability were motivated to attend in order to adhere to heightened compliance requirements. Similarly, a key aim of the small business owners participating in the BBB project was to gain knowledge relating to many facets of small business compliance and regulation.

The importance of skills development at senior levels: The guiding premise of two consecutive projects was that, to effect culture change towards a workforce development (and sustainability) approach in small food processing companies, “you don’t start with the HR people. You start with the boss”. This was achieved by building the business management capacity of key organisational
decision-makers such as business owners and senior managers. These projects took place in a context where workforce development was a lower-order priority for CEOs and business owners in the sector. It was not viewed as a business-critical issue and was instead relegated to the lesser status of “an HR issue”. An awareness of this widely-held view among owners and senior managers led to the proponent organisation no longer using the term ‘workforce development’ in their discussions with senior managers, and in this project, re-casting the project’s management training initiatives as training around “business solutions”.

**Formal qualifications are not valued by business owners and managers:** Business owners’ and managers’ preference for training that provided “solutions”, or a means of enhancing their practical business knowledge, meant that formal qualifications were not viewed by project participants and partners as valuable or relevant. As the proponent of two linked projects noted, course participants were not interested in obtaining qualifications from training as they had been attracted to the course on the basis that it would allow them, first and foremost, to “find solutions to commercial issues”. This proponent argued that business leaders and decision makers did not need qualifications, but they needed skill sets for particular tasks.

Similarly the aim of one other project as to test the relevance of accredited training for small business owners. In this project, the low number of participants who were recorded as accredited (only two) reinforced proponents’ initial supposition that small business owners were not interested in accreditation. As one noted, “for a small business, most of them really don’t care about the accreditation. They’re only interested in running their business and improving their productivity or their output, their performance.” A project partner argued that a more effective means of accreditation should reflect the fact that small business owners or their employees tend to have gaps in particular areas of expertise (for example, marketing) and that they would be more receptive to attaining a (paid for) statement of attainment on completion of a module. A proponent reflected, of the project outcomes:

I think there’s a really important learning there. Because people (small business owners) won’t go to TAFE two times a week, that doesn’t mean we should sit there and say ‘that means they won’t engage in training’. We’ve seen they will engage informal training, but in some instances we’ve got to decouple it from that certification requirement.

**Workforce development initiatives are necessary, costly and require government subsidisation:**

The proponent in two projects aimed at up-skilling senior managers and owners in sustainable practice described how there was a market failure in terms of the lack of short courses providing practical skills for managers to improve business sustainability. Given that market failure, it was necessary for government to subsidise training and invest in high level management skill development. This proponent argued:

We’re under-investing or investing in the wrong things, in skills. There needs to be an emphasis on high level management skills, business skills. If you’re going to invest anywhere, you might as well invest there first. Then subsequently you’ll get better results from VET and other educational and training and skillling.

The cost per participant of engaging in this training was very high, particularly in the second of two projects involving this proponent. This was due to the costs attached to: project management by the
proponent organisation; engaging sustainability consultants to conduct training; and engaging university lecturers to develop and conduct training and assessment activities. The costs of conducting the training were funded almost wholly by the WIP with a nominal fee for training paid by participants. Given the high costs of delivery, it was argued that future delivery of training of this type to SMEs would require “a pretty hefty subsidy” from government. However a university-based project partner felt that the extensive costs of running the program could be reduced substantially if it was converted to a well-designed university (postgraduate) course, as planned. There was potential to condense the costs involved quite significantly if run as a standard University postgraduate course by consolidating presentations, with students paying a smaller fee per unit.

**Sustaining learning through ongoing mentoring:** Partners in the linked projects detailed above described how the nature of owners’ and senior managers’ jobs posed a challenge to sustaining the application of the skills learned, beyond the ‘off the job’ training sessions, once they returned to the workplace. It was envisaged that the pressures of their daily jobs would reduce the opportunities available to owners/managers to reflect on strategies for business improvement through sustainable practice. Without ongoing peer support from other senior management training participants, and from the consultants and lecturers conducting the training, there was a concern that trainees would lose the momentum to apply the skills they had learned and carry forward culture change in their organisations. It was felt that culture change programs might be sustained with ongoing mentoring, for example through the project consultants or lecturers maintaining regular ongoing contact with participants. A project partner explained:

> What more could be done to increase the outcomes around culture change? I think it would be revisiting these guys (participant managers) every three months or so and just giving them that air time again to re-capture some of the theoretical basis for what they're trying to achieve, and probably revisit their plans and compare notes and get back on the track.

This model had been successful in a second project where a project partner from a local Business Enterprise Centre delivered blended training to small business owners and, in maintaining on-going contact with training participants, had continued to provide them with advice and mentoring. The partner described how the BEC was able to assist training participants to apply the skills and knowledge they had received in the training, explaining how these small business people approached him for advice that built on course learning. He explained, “I had one the other day say to me ‘remember in the course we spoke about blah blah blah, well, how do you take that to the next level?’.”

### 7.6 Workforce development for sustainability

Seven of the WIP-funded projects examined in this study were workforce development initiatives focused on building capacity around sustainability or “green skills”. One was a research project; another three comprised the design and delivery of training programs (targeted at business sustainability assessors and senior managers); and three involved training employees in the energy, construction and manufacturing sectors in existing green skill sets. An additional project indirectly provided up-skilling in sustainability skills as it involved the workforce of an enterprise engaging in training under the Competitive Manufacturing package, which ‘builds in’ sustainable practice.
A key impetus for all eco-efficiency or sustainability projects, directly or indirectly, was the anticipated introduction of a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS). At the time that many of these projects were initiated, sustainability practice was not widespread as it was a relatively new concept and was yet to gain currency with employers and training providers. At the time of this research there were still few sustainability ‘industry’ networks in existence and proponents in one project remarked on the absence of a sustainability skills infrastructure for providers or consumers of sustainability training. As described in Section 5, this was found to reduce the dissemination and take-up of new sustainability skills offerings.

Lessons from the projects

Factors influencing business receptivity to skills for sustainability: Project participants identified several factors that appeared to reduce enterprise receptiveness to building the green skills base of their workforce or managers. The first related to a lack of understanding or confusion about what sustainability is and what it involves within an organisational context. Project partners described how participants tended to conflate sustainability with “1970s environmentalism”. An ISC proponent in one project described how consultation with stakeholders over their views on green skills in training packages highlighted the “emotive, political” views held by some. Particular stakeholders could not understand why content relating to “the environment” should be included in training packages, with the ISC accused of being “greenies”. In a second project, which focused on linking sustainability practice to business outcomes, a partner described how the project led to a shift away from an outmoded concept of sustainability among participants, noting “CEOs and business owners, a lot of them actually declared through the program that they now ... better understood how sustainability was core business and no longer part of the environmental agenda, you know, the sort of ’70s version of the environmental agenda.”

Making a ‘business case’ for skills for sustainability improves receptiveness: It was evident in several projects that ‘buy-in’ from enterprises is more likely if they are able to see clear business benefits flowing from sustainable practice. Project partners therefore ‘pitched’ engagement to potential participants on the basis that their involvement would increase business efficiencies and lead to cost reductions. In one project, a key motivation for small business people to undertake business sustainability assessor’s training was the cost savings that it would enable them to make in running their businesses. A proponent noted, of the project-based sustainability initiatives that trainees implemented at workplaces as part of the course, “they clearly show that if businesses become more sustainable - forget the green fuzzy stuff - they actually save money as well. That’s a really important thing that a lot of people overlook.” Some participants viewed sustainability outcomes as a side effect of more efficient practice rather than raison d’être for engaging in more efficient practice, regarding the key rationale for engaging in more efficient energy and resource use as the need to make ‘bottom line savings’. A key finding of research conducted in the transport and logistics sector for example found that many employers in the sector had long been inadvertently engaging in sustainable practice as they sought to reduce business costs or comply with regulations. The proponent described how businesses in the sector “have been doing environmental things for a long, long time, for economic reasons”, an example of which was “having drivers well trained in driving their vehicles, because didn’t want them to use more fuel than necessary”. The proponents had embarked on this project believing that “green skills were new skills, so we were looking for new skills and confirmation that green skill was going to be new skill”. However the research found that in many respects, they were not new skills. As in other projects profiled in this research, there was
found to be considerable willingness among employers to engage in sustainable behaviours both for “altruistic reasons”, and to capitalise on cost savings.

Lessons from the projects indicate that industry engagement in sustainable practice is more likely to be gained where employers are able to discern demonstrated benefits from engaging in workforce development initiatives focused on sustainability. Where this did not occur, in another project, employer engagement in the program was low. A key lesson is that the process of convincing organisations of the benefits of sustainability skills takes time, particularly when the target audience is SMEs. In two consecutive, linked projects the proponent engaged in an active campaign of conducting numerous workshops for SME stakeholders in a number of states to publicise the business benefits of up-skilling their management teams through the WIP projects. This was done in order to recruit participants for the WIP projects. Yet despite these efforts, participation in the second of these projects was much lower than hoped for, for reasons described in section 4.6.

**The capacity of RTOs to deliver sustainability training may vary considerably:** Projects conducted in different sectors highlighted disparities in the capacity of RTOs to undertake green skills training. In a project in the transport and logistics sector, which was conducted early in 2009 when the notion of green skills was new to many in the sector, stakeholder consultations found that a key concern of participants related to RTOs’ perceived lack of environmental and sustainability knowledge and low capability to deliver sustainability training or advise on training needs and courses. However in projects in other sectors conducted throughout 2010, RTOs successfully delivered what participants regarded as high-quality green skills training. RTO capability in skills for sustainability may improve as time passes and sustainability skills gain greater currency, but a key lesson is that it may also vary by sector.

**An environment of regulatory change:** Existing regulation or legislation relating to sustainability practice has been subject to regular and rapid change over the two year period between 2010 and 2012 and is likely to continue to be subject to a similar or greater level of change in coming years. As a consequence, those delivering and designing sustainability training are required to regularly update training content and create new competencies. A partner in one project noted the importance of those engaged in designing courses building flexibility into course design at the initial stages to provide scope for change as it is needed beyond this point.

**Building skills for behavioural and cultural change - the unique focus of the WIP projects:** The focus of three of the training projects was to embed a holistic or rounded view of sustainability and eco-efficiency that extended beyond simple technical or energy and water efficiency solutions. While a key stated aim of these projects was to assist small businesses to meet their regulatory and compliance obligations with regard to sustainable practice, partners in these projects stressed the importance of providing training participants with foundation knowledge of broader elements of sustainability relating to the environment and policy formulation. As one noted, “... They (trainees) need the practical skills, but it needs to be built into a larger picture.” Those who developed the content for these courses noted that it was a challenge to get the balance right between practical and theoretical (foundation knowledge) content. According to partners in all three projects who had conducted reviews of existing training offerings related to sustainability, existing sustainability ‘products’ were limited in scope. One partner explained: “there wasn’t the depth of understanding about that it (sustainability) was beyond compliance and eco-efficiency and meant a change of
attitude in the business sector. So yeah, I think it was important to have something in the training marketplace that did that.” In two further projects the partners highlighted the difference between the bulk of sustainability training offerings which focused on short term “technical fixes” and the training that they had developed. The latter was designed to engender cultural change towards sustainability through businesses engaging the ‘people’ element or soft skills needed by managers and employees to make improvements on an ongoing basis. It was also noted that, other than the courses developed as part of these projects, there were no courses available for senior managers who wished to develop sustainability within their company, and that this might be a consideration for policy makers funding future sustainability skills initiatives.

**Impact is greatest where a whole of enterprise approach is taken and senior managers are committed:** Lessons from the bulk of the projects indicated that training delivery had the most successful impact at workplaces (in terms of producing cost savings and improving operational efficiencies) where a critical mass of staff were trained in sustainability skills or where skilling was top-down – that is, where senior managers developed new skills and spread this approach throughout the workplace. The approach taken in two sustainability skills projects in the agrifood sector was to secure the commitment of business CEOs and owners to improving sustainability with the expectation that, in the words of one partner, “workforce development is a major tool that emerges out of that, or a major process they would need to engage with to help them to do this.” A partner explained how owners and senior managers such as CEOs were targeted for sustainability skill formation because

... they had the ability to plan a whole of site response to what was going on outside their business, whether that be rising energy costs, increased compliance, price on carbon, et cetera. You really couldn’t get the attention of the middle level of the organisation because they didn’t really have the authority to really do anything about it. So it’s really important to engage with the senior team.

**Effective models of training combine mentoring alongside training delivery:** The importance of ongoing mentoring - in enabling participants to focus and apply learning at the business level - was evident with regard to two linked projects. The project proponent noted that mentoring need not be integrated with the training process, as it was in the two WIP projects they oversaw, but could be obtained from other sources of business mentoring outside of those delivering training. In a third project which involved training of manufacturing employees in sustainability skills, feedback from employers similarly highlighted the benefits for enterprises of models providing both training and coaching, with coaching allowing training participants to maximise the use of new skills alongside the provision of systems advice.

**Skill sets most appropriate for up-skilling most managers in sustainability:** Project partners engaged in delivering a sustainability skills training program to CEOs and owners in small food processing enterprises described how sustainability up-skilling in the sector is primarily suited to the delivery of skill sets rather than via full qualifications. They argued this on the basis that much sustainability skilling involves learning how to perform and embed particular tasks at all levels within an enterprise. In addition, where training is targeting senior managers they are unlikely to need or want a qualification. This, they felt, applies equally to the most senior decision makers and managers of entire plants. Thus while formal qualifications were important, a more ‘pragmatic’ approach was needed to up-skilling company leaders. A proponent explained,
If you really want to get these small companies sustainable, you've got to deliver skill sets and you've got to fund them. ... you'll need somebody to be the environmental sustainability manager and he will need a qualification. Somebody else will need a qualification in competitive manufacturing. But leaders and decision makers don’t need it. They need skill sets.

7.7 Developing web-based workforce development tools, resources, and e-learning

Three WIP-funded projects offered a number of practical insights into the development of web-based workforce development resources. These projects involved the development and piloting of an online diagnostic tool designed to measure workers’ innovative capacity; the design, development and delivery of an online training program to build the capacity of those who owned or intended to own a small business; and the design and delivery of training for young people in remote and regional areas, using online resources in an interactive PDF format.

Lessons from the projects

An online platform does not assure usage of a tool: Usage of the diagnostic tool designed to measure innovative capacity was considerably lower than anticipated or desired by project partners. They suggested that this may be due to a range of reasons, some of which are discussed in Section 4 and Appendix 2. In the first stage of this project, a research process was conducted which led to the sourcing of a paper-based tool which was modified for use by Australian users. It was recommended at this stage of the project that the tool be converted to an online format to widen its potential usage. However, as described in Section 4, a lack of demand for the tool among the target audience has resulted in low usage, despite the shift to a more publicly-accessible and flexible format and ongoing publicity efforts undertaken by the partners. A lesson from this project is that while web use may be pervasive, an online platform does not assure widespread usage of a tool for which there is little latent demand.

A preference for relationship-based ‘bespoke’ offerings rather than static and generic online tools: A partner in the same project described in the point above suggested that the tool’s target audience (primarily human resources and other senior management professionals) preferred to purchase, from consultants, customised services tailored to the specific characteristics and needs of their organisation, rather than using generic off the shelf tools such as the innovation tool developed. In addition, publicly available online diagnostic tools were somewhat ubiquitous, which tended to diminish their value within a ‘crowded’ market. In comparison to online tools, the success of tailored consultant interventions was often considered by commissioning clients to rest on the quality of the relationship they developed with the consultant. The partner explained “the success seems to be determined more by relationship development than by tool or product. ... It's pretty hard to do, build a relationship via an online diagnostic”. There was some scope for the diagnostic tool to be customised by potential users (with questions modified, presumably with the assistance of the software developer). However although potential users were made aware of this, it had no impact in terms of eliciting interest in using the tool. As noted in Section 4, partners believed that this was because developing innovation capability was not seen as a priority for organisations.

Some users may prefer to use online content in an ‘offline’ context: The projects demonstrated that in some contexts, users of the online resources developed preferred to deliver or use them ‘offline’, in a non-web context. Some users of the innovation diagnostic tool had opted to use a paper-
based version of the tool as this was easier to use in workshop settings, and because of concerns about the online version in relation to security of access and data. In a second project the delivery of a pilot training course by instructors at a Business Enterprise Centre (BEC) demonstrated that some training modules were possibly not suited to online delivery and were more successfully delivered by means of a blended, face to face learning approach. A BEC instructor described how the content of one unit relating to compliance with regulatory, taxation and insurance requirements was quite complex and dense, which made online delivery difficult. As a consequence, the BECs, based on feedback from participants, chose to deliver the content face to face, using as resources publications from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) and Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) and hosting workshops addressed by representatives from organisations such as WorkCover and the Office of Fair Trading. This was considered a very successful approach from instructors in terms of fostering positive student engagement and learning outcomes. A further lesson relates to the evaluation of usage of online resources such as training courses, in that capacity needs to be provided for the recording of offline delivery to trainees. In this instance there was no capacity for the BEC instructors to over-ride the training program’s online system in order to record the numbers of students who had completed the unit ‘offline’. Subsequently, user figures incorrectly indicated only a very small number of registered users as having completed this unit, which caused some concern among project partners when reported in an evaluation of the project’s impact.

**Lessons for evaluating online training usage – make it easy for users:** In the same project few of the training participants – mainly small business owners - completed the online evaluation survey of the course, despite efforts by BEC instructors to persuade them to do so. As a consequence, evaluation of the course was based on a small sample of users (n=10). The BEC instructor noted that in his experience, a module by module evaluation strategy is more likely to encourage users to complete feedback forms, as users are often unable to remember their experience of completing modules when asked to complete an evaluation on completion of all modules in the course.

**Upfront user registration may reduce usage of online tools or resources:** In two projects, low traffic and usage of resources was linked to initial requirements for users or trainees to register details before they were able to access the tool or training content. In a project to develop an online training course, upfront registration led to a technical glitch that reduced search engine optimisation and prevented traffic from reaching the site. In a second project the complex upfront registration process required of users of a diagnostic to tool served to deter many from using the tool. In both cases, registration was moved to the ‘back end’ of the process, and was made optional for users of the diagnostic tool. This had the effect of increasing traffic and usage in both cases.

**Online learning is key to building regional skills and training capability in thin markets:** A course providing bridging training to agronomists in dispersed locations used a collaborative method of online delivery. Major employers in the sector which had been disengaged from formal training were attracted by the relatively low cost and by the fact that the project provided a solution to improving the skills of non-work ready graduates and existing employees with limited agronomy education. The course was conducted by phone and interactive computer technology. Groups were enterprise-specific to overcome employer apprehension about corporate commercial confidentiality. Employees did not have to leave the workplace, reducing both lost work time and accommodation and travel expenses incurred by centralised training delivery. Another project concentrated on
developing generic web-based training resources (using an interactive PDF format) that could be used by RTOs to train young people in regional areas. This allowed RTOs to train viable groups of trainees which then enabled them to deliver more cost effective training in thin markets. The ultimate benefit was that young people were less inclined to leave their regional home towns to seek suitable training elsewhere, as they now had a market in which it was available locally.

Open learning hampered by poor broadband access in regional areas: Several projects conducted in regional areas identified limitations on open learning through a lack of broadband access. In two projects that piloted online blended training with participants in regional areas, broadband access in remote locations was found to be poor, and the size of the training resources made it difficult to download them using ‘dial-up’ access only. This meant that training providers were required to download all materials on to USBs or CDs and send them to participants. It was anticipated that the National Broadband Network should lead to improvements in capacity for e-learning in regional areas but that in the intervening period, limited bandwidth in remote areas would continue to pose difficulties for delivery of programs.

The need to minimise content to improve usability of resources and tools: Consistent with the experience of parties in projects developing class-room based training programs, a lesson learned by those developing online resources was the need to reduce the amount of text in training content and tools delivered in this platform. Learners were said to prefer graphics and video content to large amounts of text in an online course designed for school-based trainees. In a diagnostic tool, the comment was made that potential users may be less likely to engage with or use the tool because the initial interface was text heavy.
Section 8: Views on the WIP fund

Project partners provided views on how effective the operation of the WIP fund was for the purposes of the project they were involved in. In some cases (where time permitted, and where it was relevant to a specific project) they were also asked whether there was anything they might consider changing about the management of the WIP fund, or whether there were any aspects of the design of the fund that they found particularly valuable.

Project parties were asked to provide assessments of the role played by the individuals who administered, on behalf of DEEWR and DIISRTE, WIP projects and other programs and projects that eventually came under the broad umbrella of the WIP. These individuals are described in this section as program ‘staff’ or ‘administrators’.

Proponent and partner views on the intent behind the fund were universally positive. In a minority of cases, where projects were relatively unsuccessful and had not met their stated aims, views were less positive. It was felt in these cases that the fund’s staff might have performed more initial risk analysis or due diligence of project partners who subsequently failed to meet their obligations, or could have provided partners with greater flexibility during the conduct of the project to allow for changes in approach which may have led to more successful outcomes. However, it should be noted that in several projects where partners voiced such criticisms, their colleagues in the project (other partners) held positive views of the fund’s administration and management. It should also be noted that this section presents only project parties’ views of how the fund was administered and operated. Accordingly, this section is wholly weighted towards the views of these parties as WIP staff were not interviewed in depth about events that occurred in every project.

8.1 Project parties’ views on project contract management and their relationships with fund administrators

Overall, project parties provided highly positive feedback on the staff of the WIP fund, describing them and their management of the fund’s contracts in terms including very good, excellent, or great. Many described a positive working relationship with the individuals administering the fund, noting that they were quick and responsive to their needs where changes to project conduct were required as the project unfolded. A number noted the high level of enthusiasm and passion WIP staff had for particular projects, or their breadth of knowledge of the project.

Most interviewees appreciated the high level of support the administrators provided to partners throughout the project’s course, and their role as a sounding board in meeting with project partners, “posing some very constructive questions and giving good input”. Others valued the role of WIP staff in information-sharing across the projects funded by the program. In one project where the outcome was a series of research reports, a partner described how administrators showed their support for the project and its partners by: not endeavouring to influence the research findings in any way throughout the conduct of the project; by supporting the research findings that emerged; by actively attending all project meetings; and by providing detailed feedback on the reports. In another, the partner described how staff assisted them in taking an idea through to the proposal stage by extending the project ‘development’ phase and vetting iterations of proposals submitted by the proponent. This gave proponents more space to think about how they would conduct the project, and eventually provided them with a sound roadmap for project implementation. This approach aligns
with much of the discussion in Section 4.1 relating to the need for adequate scoping of highly exploratory projects. A partner in a second project had a similar experience, explaining (of staff), “they had a good handle on what we were doing ... (the contract manager was) very receptive and open and incredibly helpful right the way through, in helping me navigate their systems”. Another project benefitted from interventions by the fund administrators, including the suggestion that a specific partner organisation be incorporated in the project team, and guiding the partners to broaden their scope in a particular piece of research. In retrospect the partners recognised the value that those additions made to the project, with one stating, “So it's actually the fact that the Department didn't go arms' length with us, but they stayed, saying 'these are the things that are important to us’, that made it very successful.”

Diverse views were expressed about the degree of strictness with which staff adhered to funding guidelines and policies. It appeared that the extent to which guidelines were followed to a precise degree appeared to depend on the particular staff member and their approach, or the context and characteristics of the project concerned. Some administrators were described as pedantic in their approach to drawing up contracts with clear descriptors and milestones, which was seen as a positive by some partners, as it assisted them in structuring project activities. Other staff members were described as more flexible in approach, as detailed in the following section.

The largely positive views of WIP staff and processes detailed above were offset by more critical evaluations by some project partners. One described how they sought guidance from WIP staff on the framework required for evaluating the conduct and impact of their project. However they received little structured assistance on what was required and despite receiving assurance that one would be provided, they were not given a framework for partners to use. A partner in a second project was critical of the protracted negotiation process around funding that took place. This partner deemed the process to be “unnecessary”, describing it as “... funding tango. We pulled forward, they pulled back, we pulled forward, they pulled back, until someone coughed up ... I can think of easily no less than 16, 17 hours that was spent on negotiating around the money”. This individual found the bureaucracy surrounding the program frustrating and difficult to understand and navigate, and was critical about the project finances being scrutinised to a greater degree than the plan or intent of the project. In this case, WIP administrators required the project partners to engage in a particular dissemination activity as a precondition for funding. It was the view of one project partner that a more effective approach would have involved the WIP providing additional funds for this activity instead of requiring that it was paid for out of core project funds. This requirement was seen as reducing the breadth of project outcomes as it resulted in the project providing tangible benefits for a smaller number of pilot participants. However, it should be noted that a second partner within same project held quite different views, positively describing WIP staff as “pragmatic” and fairly flexible in their approach to project timeframes and other elements of project conduct.

Partners in several projects which were unsuccessful in meeting their aims recounted experiences in which particular project partners or proponents did not meet their obligations and reflected, in hindsight, that WIP staff might have played a more prominent role in subjecting the capacity of contractors or proponents to undertake the project to greater scrutiny. In one case a partner suggested that WIP staff might have been more involved in the initial project planning process and might have engaged in more initial stakeholder engagement in order to assess the proponent’s
suitability to conduct the project. It was felt that if such initial procedures had been “tighter”, this might have led to more successful project outcomes.

8.2 Views on the ‘flexibility’ of the program

The word ‘flexibility’ featured prominently, unprompted, in discussions with partners on the merits or otherwise of the program. Some project partners described as positive the ease with which they were able to pitch an idea to DEEWR/DIISRTE staff, discuss it with a given staff member, gain assistance from department staff in formulating a proposal, and then have their proposal and funding accepted. A number stated that a unique benefit of the WIP was that it allowed funding for “ideas from the ground up” without placing restrictions on the types of ideas or outcomes generated. One proponent felt that this allowed the Department to “keep those doors open to ideas” because the ideas did not have to fit within or be shaped by “a structure”.

Proponents in other projects detailed how the fund and its management were unique among other funds in that it provided flexibility to test multiple initiatives or elements within projects; and that WIP staff provided partners with the discretion and flexibility to let projects take their course. A partner reflected, of WIP staff, “they’ve been able to let the project innovate itself which meant, at times, not having a really clear idea of where it was going to go … it allowed the project to find its feet and the way it was going to deliver.” In this project and several others, partners appreciated the flexibility provided by the WIP’s “broad guidelines”, with one stating, “if you could identify potential outcomes, WIP allowed you to develop your own strategy for getting there”. Examples were also given in other projects of WIP staff allowing for flexibility in terms of a change of methods or activities part-way through the completion of projects as it became obvious that the aims would be best met by engaging in new and different activities, or as new opportunities came to the fore.

This approach might be expected given the exploratory nature of many of the projects subject to funding but should be contrasted with the views of partners who described having to adhere rigidly to project plans and budget constraints. In one such case, a partner described experiencing significant difficulties in their attempt to make their project ‘idea’ fit within the fund guidelines. This was a project where the second stage of implementation was to be financed through a different funding stream and WIP funding was sought for necessary first-stage activities that would guide the implementation activities planned for the second stage. This partner made the observation that training delivery funding through structural and labour adjustment programs would be more effectively used if there was the ability to conduct some skills analysis to guide decision making about what training would result in the greatest benefit for the employees and the company, such as had ultimately been possible in this case due to the WIP fund.

A partner in a second project expressed views that contrasted with comments related above about how the WIP provided flexibility for project activities to be revised as the implementation phase unfolded. In this case, it became clear as the project evolved that its conduct would yield more effective outcomes if changes were made to the original project plan. Accordingly, partners desired “some flexibility around how the funding was expended”, yet WIP staff rigidly held them to delivering contract outcomes, which precluded the use of alternative methods to meet project aims. This partner described WIP staff as “rigid, inflexible … there was no way to mould their (WIP) needs with the needs of the project as it was unfolding.”
These contrasting views relating to the flexibility of the WIP fund’s management highlight the challenges program managers and project parties face when balancing the ‘freedom for projects to explore’ with the importance of projects being conducted in an accountable and structured manner. A certain proportion of projects may have benefitted from stricter contract management, when viewed in retrospect. However, other projects achieved highly successful outcomes due to a degree of flexibility afforded them by fund administrators. Perhaps then a key learning from this study is that when assessing programs sponsoring exploratory work it is important not to measure success on the achievement of planned outcomes alone but also on the application of the ‘balanced flexibility’ that appears to be required.

8.3 The ways in which the fund led to innovation

Partners and proponents in a number of projects expressed the firm belief that they would not have had the capacity or the resources to conduct the projects without WIP funding. Some noted that funds such as the WIP that allow for innovative or exploratory initiatives were ‘desperately needed’ — whilst adding (in the case of a project that failed to meet its aims) that it was necessary to ensure that the funded projects produced tangible ‘public good’ outcomes.

Views on the WIP conveyed by project partners from a range of organisations – and most prominently ISCs – centred on how WIP funding enabled them to think and work outside of the boundaries of their relatively restrictive organisational remit or role. In many cases WIP projects provided an opportunity to broaden the Council’s knowledge of a sector within their stakeholder constituency and allowed them to be innovative about the strategies they employed to reach a certain end goal, particularly in relation to difficult-to-reach constituencies including volunteer workers, SME owner-managers, or family day care educators.

Partners in a number of knowledge-building projects described how the WIP provided them with a unique opportunity to conduct in-depth research on national sectors that had been relatively under-researched in the past. Other projects had allowed the proponents to be creative and test solutions to known problems, “without being limited by, “Well, we [as an ISC] don’t do that, or we don’t do this.” In one project to develop a workplace-based training course for senior managers, a partner noted that WIP funding “allowed them to work outside the constraints of the VET system” in that the project assisted them to develop innovative ways of developing skills in a workplace “and then subsequently mapping that back to the VET standard, rather than the other way around”. This project achieved this by developing training materials based on unmet industry needs.

In a project conducted by an Indigenous employment services provider, WIP funding allowed the proponent organisation to take their work to another level by engaging in broader community outreach and developing innovative solutions to problems. The WIP project provided a means of broadening out their strategy and allowed them to “think more consciously” about strategic, longer term solutions. The comment was made by the proponent that “We were able to put a level of imagination into that which, when you’ve just got an IEP (Indigenous Employment Program) contract and you’re attracting, recruiting and retaining, you don’t have much time for that.”

Partners from ISCs conveyed how the projects they conducted enabled them to engage with stakeholder views and assess what was important to stakeholders, rather than limiting their focus to training packages. This was described as providing more of a “holistic” workforce development
approach in contrast to a more “restrictive” training approach. Some ISC partners described how the WIP project they conducted, which developed a national workforce development strategy for a sector, afforded them the ability to look at qualifications and competencies, but within “the broader workforce development picture”, adding,

This is actually how it should be done all the time. I think that was the brilliant thing about WIP, and it is a real shame that it’s gone, because there goes that broader holistic look that doesn’t equate to a training place or whatever it is. It allowed people to think ‘out there’ and research things.

These partners noted that the fund was unique in the workforce development area in that, by its very nature, it encouraged innovation. When asked what it was about the fund that encouraged them to innovate, they responded, “It lies in the guidelines, in that it is an innovative and flexible program. You didn’t have to map it back to incoming training places and the tracking of student progression.”

Partners from ISCs and RTOs compared the WIP with the National Workforce Development Fund (NWDF) and the latter’s focus on training places as funding outcomes. In several cases, partners noted that while funding linked to training places is important, one valuable aspect of the WIP was that it allowed for exploratory projects or “strategic” work to be undertaken which established what training needed to be done, in that it identified skills gaps and training needs. When this was done it meant that funding for training places was better targeted and training was of more benefit to those it was delivered to. Partners from two ISCs felt that the NWDF should be “opened up” to mirror the WIP by enabling greater flexibility and innovation. One noted, “A project can end in qualifications and training places, that’s fine, but there’s a whole heap of work to be done before that point, to get people there.” Another partner echoed these views, stating,

The beauty of the Workforce Innovation Program was it was gave you the flexibility to test stuff at multiple levels, in multiple initiatives, as we did here. The lesson is that, now that it is gone, we need flexibility through the NWDF and in programs like it, to be able to mix and match… and do some multi-stage stuff. In other words, yes, the ultimate outcome will be formal qualifications, but the method of getting there might be skill needs analysis, skill sets training.

A proponent from an RTO felt that the NWDF would have the effect of stifling innovation among sustainability training providers as those bodies seeking NWDF funding for training places need to be aligned with an ISC and there was no relevant ISC for an RTO like them, which offered cross-sectoral sustainability training. This partner contrasted the WIP with the current situation under the NWDF and explained,

I just found it (the WIP fund) very, very good, being … able to turn it into an innovative idea, that didn’t have to fit into a box, where now you’ve got to fit into a box. As soon as you fit into a box, that means you’re locking a lot of things out…. With that new Workforce Fund (NWDF), it’s all locked in a box, because you’ve got to go through a skills council.

8.4 The role of the WIP in sustaining project outcomes
Several project partners felt that a unique benefit of the WIP fund related to its ‘public good’ outcomes, most particularly in cases where the outputs of WIP projects (resources, tools or training programs) could be used by the training sector at large.
Others, however, who were involved in projects that had developed new models or training courses, expressed disappointment that the program made no provision for disseminating these resources or sustaining the impact of projects on a continued basis. In one case the proponent noted that their project’s proposed budget had originally included an amount of money apportioned to publicity activities, but that fund administrators had not approved this parcel of money in the project budget. This proponent had assumed that publicity and dissemination of the new training package they had developed would therefore be undertaken by the fund and was disappointed on learning that this was not to occur, as the proponent organisation had no resources to take on this role. Partners in other projects expressed concern that when the WIP funding ran out, the project would too, and that there was no planning done by the fund administrators to establish a future path for the project lessons and activities. These issues are discussed further in Section 5 of this report.
Section 9: Conclusion

The Workforce Innovation Program funded projects for innovative and exploratory work to further workforce development practice and policy. Outstanding examples of success were achieved in key projects while impacts in others have been more diffuse and subtle. Some projects struggled to flourish and maximise their potential impact due to a range of factors discussed in Sections 4 and 5.

The value of conducting exploratory work into matters that affect workforce development was strongly felt across the range of project proponents and partners interviewed. In an environment where most government funding is concentrated on training activity, the opportunities the Fund provided for pushing into new areas of practice and activity were welcomed. While not all projects were strictly ‘exploratory’ in that they were not aiming to gain new insights, the greatest proportion involved elements of practice that might be considered exploratory. It is also apparent that those that were exploratory in their aims or practices were amongst the most innovative of the WIP projects and appeared to have the greatest impact.

The nature of exploratory and innovative project work is such that it inherently presents greater risk and less tangible and immediate outcomes than more ‘straightforward’ initiatives that replicate tried and tested models. Exploratory work also has the potential for the realisation of unanticipated or ‘untargeted’ outcomes that may be of significant value. Consequently the role played by the funding body administering such projects requires a different approach to that of a standard program where delivery involves application of standardised models and procedures and is more rigidly set against fixed milestones and quantifiable outcomes. In such cases, as in the WIP, program management is crucial in conducting all the checks and balances of a more mainstream program, in addition to other more complex monitoring, advisory and guidance functions. As such, program management appears to work best where it ensures strong structures are in place for the management of projects but allows for the flexibility that exploration and innovation require. Based on what this study has found, the following inter-connected factors suggest the key ways in which that ‘balanced flexibility’ can be achieved in such a program:

**Facilitating partnerships:** Collaboration proved to be a critical factor in enhancing the conduct and outcomes of projects where partners worked closely and well together. Fund administrators play a role in ensuring that the right organisations and individuals are involved to ensure effective management and conduct of projects as well as maximising the potential for on-going benefits. Equally the fund might actively build ‘productive’ project environments by facilitating introductory events to build trust between partners. Finally, such a fund should be regarded as a critical and active partner in each project. To be able to make administrative judgements, program managers need to have intimate knowledge and understanding of the project aims and activities from commencement to conclusion.

**Scoping:** The importance of undertaking fit-for-purpose scoping activities was made clear by the experiences across the WIP projects. An exploratory fund should ensure that adequate and appropriate scoping occurs prior to the commencement of primary or ‘main-stage’ project activities. This study has identified key areas where scoping exercises to assess the context of projects were critical in regard to examining and building upon existing knowledge, understanding target populations, assessing and building participant engagement strategies, and ‘testing’ the market for planned project outputs. Accordingly scoping activities need to be allocated funding within project
budgets. The findings of scoping exercises play a key role in shaping project design and method, in turn influencing the allocation of budgets and timeframes. A degree of flexibility needs to be exercised. While a budget range might be fixed, the detailed allocation of budgets to activities and milestones can be determined in light of the results of scoping exercises.

**Validation of design:** Exploratory projects frequently call for creative project design. The fund might consider means of ensuring that procedures are in place in each project that allow for the testing and verification of project design. This is particularly critical in projects where there is no embedded research and evaluation expertise. The fund might play a role in providing this type of validation process for projects (via expert assessment) where this is the case. In addition, this process of evaluating design might involve fund administrators acting as a sounding board for ideas or posing ‘what-if’ questions in the process of critically examining the practicalities of proposed project design and scope. They might pay particular attention to the elements of project design that ensure a ‘public good’ outcome.

**Benefits of ‘action learning’ approaches:** It was apparent from this study that key lessons learned in projects were not being collected and recorded within some projects. This was particularly the case where the insights did not directly relate to the target outcomes as set out in initial project aims. In many cases these insights went unrecorded and have not entered the public arena where they would be beneficial in building innovative practice within communities of practice. Funds should consider the application of action learning approaches in exploratory projects where experts are undertaking project activities that have the potential to inform practice more broadly.

**Knowledge capture:** There were cases amongst the WIP projects where new and innovative insights were generated but there was a failure to codify them so that they could be shared with others working in the field. The public good from these WIP projects was not being fully realised. The fund might consider strategies for ensuring that where insights of broader interest are being discovered, this knowledge is being captured to enable dissemination. Active and targeted dissemination of the knowledge captured is equally important in terms of spreading innovative practice and lessons among communities of stakeholders and practitioners.

**Structured evaluations:** There is evidence that ensuring the conduct of structured and appropriate evaluations is beneficial in several ways. Rigorous evaluation created material that assisted in ongoing efforts to promote project outcomes, and provided the understanding and opportunity to identify and build on project lessons. Importantly evaluating projects allowed for an explicit examination of their public good and worth. The design of evaluations, such as whether they are formative or summative, or whether they are conducted internally or externally to the project, are decisions to be made based on the nature of each project but to be effective they should be planned and resourced explicitly within the project design. The fund has a critical role in ensuring evaluations are undertaken and should consider providing project proponents with an appropriate evaluation framework.

**Review of the project skills profiles:** It is clear that there are particular activities and skills required to enhance the conduct and outcomes of exploratory projects. They include: the capacity to facilitate and work with a high degree of collaboration; a capacity to reflect on practice and findings as they emerge; an ability to re-design projects appropriately on the basis of new understandings; and the ability to identify and record project activities, findings and lessons that are of public interest. These
activities require specific skills to be present in the project team. An exploratory fund should ensure that demonstrable experience in these areas is present in the project skill profile, in addition to skills and expertise specific to project content and general management.

**Dissemination:** There is an important role for the fund in facilitating dissemination, or ensuring dissemination takes place, to guarantee the sharing of lessons from projects. This is a central public good that is generated by exploratory projects. WIP contract management processes might ensure that a dissemination plan is in place and that sufficient budget is allocated to dissemination activities, and subsequently monitor that dissemination is undertaken. The fund might also actively assist in circulation, particularly where there are implications for policy and where administrators are able to capitalise on existing government networks and channels for distributing information.

**Building on the foundations:** The nature of exploratory projects is such that discoveries take time to emerge. A ‘marketable’ product or model may not come from the first sweep of innovative activity. A fund should consider the means by which the work commenced in successful exploratory projects will be continued. As with dissemination this requires explicit planning, monitoring and project budgeting. The active assistance of fund staff would also be beneficial in particular by advising project teams of other funding avenues or potential partners.

**Implications for fund management workloads:** For a fund to undertake these roles and activities, adequate resourcing of the program management team is required. Given the complexity of the projects, the considerable up-front work that is required to set in place robust contract and project management procedures, and the need to remain actively engaged across the life of projects, serious consideration should be given to the size and nature of the project portfolio of program managers.

**Measuring the ‘success’ of exploratory programs:** Any assessment of the success of exploratory programs should take into consideration the apparent need for ‘balanced flexibility’. As such the standard practice of assessing success relative to planned outcomes and measurable impacts is likely to miss critical features of the management that is required. It would make better sense to assess program success in terms of the application of factors that build and support innovative and exploratory practice; and how actual outcomes contribute more broadly to the advancement of understanding, practice and activity for workforce development.
## Appendix 1: Summary features of WIP projects in the study

### Workforce development to address industry skill needs and access to the national training system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project name</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Method(s)</th>
<th>Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>WIP 148: Workforce Skills Analysis, Training and Development Pilot Project</strong></td>
<td>One enterprise</td>
<td>Model</td>
<td>RTO-facilitated skills analysis, RPL and workplace training</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WIP 149: Models and tools that may be used by Industry Skills Councils, acting as intermediaries, in engaging enterprises in Workforce</strong></td>
<td>25 SMEs and 9 Large enterprises</td>
<td>WIP report</td>
<td>Survey of SMEs; interviews with large employers; testing of workforce planning tool</td>
<td>SMEs in Electro-technology; Large Organisations in Energy sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WIP 150: A research project to build workforce capacity in the Family Day Care Workforce</strong></td>
<td>Sector-wide: FDC educators and RTOs</td>
<td>Research report</td>
<td>Desktop research, survey, focus groups ‘tracking’ carers in training; best practice case studies</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education and Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WIP 151: A study on the Quality of Teaching in Vocational Education and Training</strong></td>
<td>Sector-wide: all VET teachers and peak/lobby groups</td>
<td>Research report</td>
<td>Desk-based research, surveys and interviews with teachers</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WIP 164: Integrating VET and Higher Education in the Retail Sector</strong></td>
<td>10 trainees</td>
<td>WIP report / Product</td>
<td>Curriculum development; implementation discontinued</td>
<td>VET and Higher education; Retail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WIP 166: Social and Community Services (SACS) Workforce Development Project</strong></td>
<td>4 SACS employers</td>
<td>(Outcomes not achieved)</td>
<td>Interviews with SACS workers</td>
<td>Social and Community Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WIP 178: A project to address skills needs in the civil construction industry</strong></td>
<td>Civil construction industry employers</td>
<td>WIP report/Product</td>
<td>Surveys; industry and school system engagement</td>
<td>Civil construction; Schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Skills for sustainability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project name</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Method(s)</th>
<th>Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WIP 145: Development of Skills for Sustainability in the Transport and Logistics Sector</td>
<td>Small group of employers and peaks</td>
<td>Research report</td>
<td>Small-scale scoping/exploratory study (focus groups, survey)</td>
<td>Transport &amp; Logistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIP 174: Business Sustainability Assessors Course Demonstration Project</td>
<td>60 students across 5 RTOs</td>
<td>Product</td>
<td>Content development and piloting of Certificate IV course</td>
<td>Cross-sectoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIP 152: Up-skilling Existing Australian Energy Industry workers in Skills for Sustainability Project</td>
<td>111 existing employees in QLD and WA</td>
<td>WIP and evaluation reports</td>
<td>Recruit participants; develop training; RTOs deliver; evaluation</td>
<td>Energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIP 153: Up-skilling Existing Manufacturing Industry Workers in Skills for Sustainability</td>
<td>133 existing employees (at 5 enterprises and owner operators)</td>
<td>WIP and evaluation reports</td>
<td>Recruit participants; develop training; RTOs deliver; evaluation</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIP 154: Up-skilling Existing Construction Industry Workers in Skills for Sustainability</td>
<td>40 existing employees</td>
<td>WIP and evaluation reports</td>
<td>Recruit participants; develop skill set training; RTOs deliver; evaluation</td>
<td>Construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIP 191: Carbon Proof - Sustaining the Food Processing Chain</td>
<td>4 pilot organisations; 150 organisations attended seminars</td>
<td>Model/Product</td>
<td>Development and piloting of course, sustainability seminars</td>
<td>Agrifood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIP 256: Sustainability Essentials for Executives (SEE)</td>
<td>25 senior managers; seminar attendees</td>
<td>Model/Product</td>
<td>Development and piloting of course, mentoring, (planned) seminars</td>
<td>Agrifood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Apprenticeship support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project name</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Method(s)</th>
<th>Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WIP 185: Australian Apprenticeships Retention Project</td>
<td>710 apprentices mentored; in three disadvantaged regions</td>
<td>WIP and survey Report</td>
<td>Mentoring delivery and control group; retention analysis; survey of mentor participants</td>
<td>Most sectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIP 186: Apprenticeship Framework</td>
<td>Proponent’s advisory group</td>
<td>Product</td>
<td>Survey of resources sector employers and development of website</td>
<td>Resources sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIP 229: Illawarra Business Chamber Industry Apprenticeships Project</td>
<td>Local employers and employees</td>
<td>WIP Report/Product</td>
<td>Brokerage support to employers; assistance to job-seekers</td>
<td>All sectors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Innovation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project name</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Method(s)</th>
<th>Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WIP 163: Online Workforce Innovation Survey Tool</td>
<td>4 pilot organisations</td>
<td>Product</td>
<td>Development and testing of workplace innovation tool</td>
<td>Cross-sectoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIP 217: Interactive Skills Integration System (ISIS)</td>
<td>6 pilot sites; control sites; 4 internees; VET and HE IM educators</td>
<td>Reports/Product/Model</td>
<td>Surveys; Literature reviews; pilot integrations; pilot internships; evaluation</td>
<td>Interactive Media and Games Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project name</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Outputs</td>
<td>Method(s)</td>
<td>Sector</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>WIP 156: Crop Production Course Demonstration Project</strong></td>
<td>15 existing employees (3 large enterprises)</td>
<td>WIP report/Model</td>
<td>Course development and delivery</td>
<td>Agribusiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WIP 180: ‘Regional Australian Workforce Development driven by local industry and community’ Project</strong></td>
<td>180 students in regional areas; RTOs</td>
<td>Product/Model</td>
<td>Content development and piloting of 53 course units</td>
<td>Cross-sectoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WIP 188: Indigenous workforce development plan for the construction industry in Murdi Paaki NSW</strong></td>
<td>Indigenous leaders; Construction industry employers; Indigenous community members</td>
<td>WIP report/Product</td>
<td>Research and consultation; statistical review</td>
<td>Construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WIP 199: The Building Primary Industries Regional Workforce Development Capacity Project</strong></td>
<td>Community members and agencies in four dry-land areas</td>
<td>Model/product</td>
<td>Regional action teams develop tailored local plans/solutions and resources</td>
<td>Primary industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WIP 212: Regional Agriculture and Mining Integrated Training (RAMIT)</strong></td>
<td>14 unemployed job seekers; 15 school students</td>
<td>WIP report/Model</td>
<td>Course development and delivery, including industry placements</td>
<td>Agriculture; Mining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WIP 220: Business Partnership Project - Blacktown</strong></td>
<td>150 Indigenous job seekers</td>
<td>WIP report/Model</td>
<td>Sector and enterprise profiling; brokerage: business partnerships and job seeker assistance</td>
<td>Cross-sectoral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Skill recognition for volunteers; high performance workplaces; workforce development for SMEs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project name</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Method(s)</th>
<th>Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WIP 165: Discuss, Display, Do: Skills Recognition for Volunteers</td>
<td>89 'assessors'; 150 volunteer workers; 4 regions in NSW</td>
<td>WIP reports/Model</td>
<td>Train network of assessors; competency recognition process</td>
<td>Volunteer sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIP 169: Skills Utilisation Project</td>
<td>7 enterprises</td>
<td>Product/Report</td>
<td>Development and pilot of web based diagnostic tool and in-depth consultancy at pilot sites</td>
<td>Cross-sectoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIP 175: Business Building Blocks</td>
<td>327 online users; 89 pilot trainees</td>
<td>Product</td>
<td>Content development and piloting of online Certificate III course</td>
<td>Cross-sectoral (SMEs)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Case Studies of WIP projects

A2.1 Projects relating to Workforce Development to address industry skill needs and access to the national training system

WIP 148: Workforce Skills Analysis, Training and Development Pilot Project

This project was conducted at an automotive components manufacturer, across three company sites located in two states. WIP funding was used to complete one component of the project and to supplement funding from the Productivity Places Program Structural Adjustment Places Program. The parties to the project included enterprise management, the trade union representing workers at the site, and a project manager who was subcontracted by an RTO as training coordinator for the project’s duration.

The aim of the project was to utilise downtime during a slowdown in production brought about by the GFC to up-skill the workforce, who were subject to stand-down provisions. The up-skillling process was plant-wide, involving all shopfloor workers from process workers through to frontline management. It involved using: recognition of prior learning (RPL) processes to assess each worker’s base of skills; skills gap analyses; and training for Competitive Manufacturing (Certificate III and IV) and Engineering (Certificate IV) qualifications. The decision to use the Competitive Manufacturing Training Package was one that was negotiated jointly between the union and the company management based on the analysis that the WIP funding facilitated.

The duration of the WIP-funded component of the project was one year, from mid-2009 to mid-2010. However the project has continued to yield outcomes up until the time of writing this report in September 2012, with staff continuing to be accredited as they complete training.

Problems encountered in the project’s implementation included a lack of commitment to the program from a key senior manager and initial resistance to training from influential employee opinion leaders (as detailed in Section 4.6). Whilst the influence of employee opinion leaders led to some employees dropping out of the training in the early stages, employee commitment to achieving qualifications increased over time as the company and project manager stepped up communications with the workforce in order to explain the benefits of the training program (also described in Section 4.6). Key to the eventual success of this project was the ability of the project partners to engender workforce commitment to the up-skilling program in the context of employee concerns about company survival and job security.

A project partner described how the project was innovative in that it was the first instance, in his knowledge, of the Competitive Manufacturing package being applied shopfloor-wide to all employees across workforce groups. A key factor facilitating this ‘whole of enterprise approach’ was the high level of buy-in to the project among plant management teams, as a result of efforts made by the project manager to “sell the concept to the top” (management team). Once senior managers understood how competitive management qualifications could benefit the enterprise, they then focused on “getting everybody else to understand and jump on board.” Subsequent buy-in from team

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8 Subsequently re-named the Competitive Systems and Practices training package.
leaders (trained at Certificate IV level) produced a “cascade” effect of engendering commitment to the training among team members undergoing training at Certificate III level. The project manager noted: “It worked well from the top, because they (site managers) knew what we were trying to achieve, they knew that they needed to work leaner, and the qualifications linked nicely to that.”

**Initial (immediate) outcomes:**

- Prior to this program, none of the shopfloor workers, all longstanding employees, held qualifications. A large proportion of the workforce is now accredited with national qualifications, improving their labour market capital. As at November 2012, training outcomes included: (MCM30104) Certificate III in Competitive Manufacturing, 144 completions; (MCM40104) Certificate IV in Competitive Manufacturing, 35 completions; and (MEM40105) Certificate IV in Engineering, 49 completions.
- An unintended outcome is that a small proportion of staff left the enterprise for jobs elsewhere, having obtained qualifications.

**Longer term outcomes/impacts of the up-skilling program**

**Improved employee confidence:** The program has led to a growing sense of self-worth among employees and confidence in their knowledge and abilities. This has been bolstered by the company awarding certificates of accreditation in formal presentations. Employees have experienced increased job satisfaction, according to an interviewee:

> People [trained employees] tend to think now that “okay, so I'm not just a person that works in a foundry or a person that just puts freezing on a car or whatever, I'm actually somebody that understands that I have the concepts or the qualifications, the performance criteria, the elements and the competencies”. I think that once they got that message, it made a huge difference.

**Improved morale:** A project partner explained how the project may have played a role in improving morale and causing a company ‘turnaround’ in terms of improvements in productivity: “the company was in a really bad position ... we did have a complete turnaround, a lot of the morale changed. Now we're going great guns. .... I believe it [the project] turned the company around because of the morale”.

**A change in culture:** One of the aims of the WIP funding was to assist in building a training culture in the company. A project partner described how a key project outcome was that it had built a culture of workforce planning and continuous professional development for management staff, and an organisation-wide commitment to lean manufacturing processes. They reflected, “[The project] did make a big difference. The company has looked at what they do, found better more efficient ways of doing things and it we had some really good [process improvement] projects come out of it.”

**Employees are multi-skilled and make process improvements:** The company now has greater scope to rotate employees around activities on the shopfloor, leading to greater flexibility; employees now have the skills to assess and reconfigure work processes to enable job tasks to be performed more effectively and efficiently; and they are equipped with the knowledge needed to identify cost savings in production processes. A project partner explained: “They are able to move across into different (work) areas that people have made more efficient, which obviously makes you feel a lot happier.”
Greater employee commitment to the company: An interviewee described how the process of groups and individuals managing projects to improve processes in their work areas provided them with greater autonomy and “made them buy into the company, it gave them more ownership to their work areas.”

Improved internal promotions processes: The up-skilling process has made it easier for managers to map internal career pathways as they are now better able to link employees’ qualifications to performance criteria for promotion.

Established training pathways for the long term: Employees who have completed Certificate IV in competitive manufacturing are now encouraged to complete frontline management training (contingent on the company securing state government funding for ongoing training). The project manager continues to work with the company to access other funding pools to extend skills development to other workforce groups in the company (managers, supervisors, team leaders and office staff).

WIP 149: Developing Workforce Development Models for ISCs
This project took place over the course of five months in 2009, when workforce development was a new responsibility of ISCs and a new concept within the industries they represented. The project investigated how ISCs might operate as intermediaries to encourage uptake of workforce development practices at enterprise level. The proponent was Ee-Oz Training Standards9 (the Electro-Communications and Energy Utilities Industry Training Council, an ISC) and it undertook the project with the active assistance of the National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA – a peak body) and a steering committee of representative stakeholders.

In the first phase of the project, work was done to gather information from workplaces to establish their workforce development practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior managers from larger enterprises representative of the energy and utilities industries. A second phase entailed a brief survey completed by 25 electro-technology sector employers (generally micro-business electricians). Five of those respondents subsequently provided feedback on the survey instrument and a SA Government workforce development web-tool they had been directed to. In addition to gathering data to better understand the level of engagement with workforce development practices, participants were also asked about what role they felt the ISC might adopt to support their engagement with workforce development. In a final phase those findings were summarised in a report which proffered a series of recommended activities.

Key Findings
Large enterprises were engaged in training within their organisations. They relied on the national training system (including available subsidies) to support technical training, but tended to use internal structures to train in ‘soft skills’, which included leadership and management development. While most employers spoken to were aware of ‘workforce development’, and the central elements of human resources practice associated with workforce development were evident at the enterprise level (strategies for attraction, recruitment, retention and structured training), it was identified that ‘integrated’ and ‘holistic’ approaches to workforce planning and development were not being

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9 Ee-Oz Training Standards changed their name in November 2012 to E-Oz Energy Skills Australia.
deployed. And introducing such policies and practices were not regarded as an organisational priority by those employers. The benefits of such an approach were not seen as compelling.

SMEs involved in the project were rarely training staff in a formal sense. While SME employers recognised the need to ‘regenerate’ and the difficulties they may face from skill shortages, the immediate needs of working in the business outweighed their propensity to plan around workforce needs. They found the web-tool useful and it reminded them of the importance of a structured approach to workforce planning and development, but the participants did not go on to use the tool.

It was felt by employers that the ISCs did have an important role in acting as intermediaries to enhance the uptake of workforce development. However, no ‘model’ was proposed and tested in the project. Rather, the concept of a model was supported as being useful.

Other findings from the project were identified by the ISC as providing key lessons for improving intermediary engagement with enterprises. They identified the importance of involving employer associations as agents of workforce development advice. This was particularly critical for SMEs, who it was felt needed more hands-on assistance to engage in workforce development capability building. As such they concluded that encouraging and supporting employer associations in the dissemination of workforce development practices was a critical and practical role for ISCs. It was also strongly felt by the proponent that some form of mentoring was likely to be a much more reliable way of building up low capacity SMEs – and that directing them to online tools without that tailored guidance, was likely to have limited impact. Nevertheless they did see a role for stand-alone workforce development tools for assisting employers that had higher levels of internal capacity and were more tuned into the benefits of workforce development for their businesses.

**Barriers for the project**

According to the proponent the most significant problem for the project, and the main reason why the aims were not fully realised, was the project’s overly broad scope and the failure to define the concepts being examined. For example, had the project had a clearer idea of what was meant by workforce development at the outset, investigations at the enterprise level could have been better designed and refined. As it was, the project enabled the parties to ‘scope’ the issues rather than undertake an examination of a viable model of intermediary engagement with enterprises on matters of workforce development.

**Outcomes**

Most of the outcomes from this project were associated with knowledge building for the proponent. They understood their constituents’ engagement with workforce development better and this in turn enabled them to plan an approach to providing support. In particular the project reinforced the need to develop good working relationships with employer associations to broaden the reach of workforce development supports to employers, especially for SMEs.

**Impacts**

The impacts from this project are difficult to measure. It appears that the ISC, due to the knowledge gained in the project, have been better able to encourage employers into the national training system. The ISC stated that, since the project, there has been a significant increase in national qualifications being awarded in those industries. They also made the point that this has not necessarily increased the uptake of workforce development building practices at the enterprise level.
and that the main impetus for the success was being able to offer government incentive money. However, the ISC's understanding of ways to discuss and raise awareness of workforce development benefits means that dialogue is occurring with a greater number of employers than before the project and the Enterprise Based Productivity Places Program (EBPPP).

Due to a change in their role the interviewee was unable to reflect on whether employer associations have become more active in disseminating and encouraging workforce development practices. However the associations are extensively involved with the ISC in assisting SMEs and micro businesses accessing Workforce Development Funding programs being administered by the Federal Government. There is no specific program of activity within the ISC that concentrates on building workforce development capability but the ISC regularly run workshops for their stakeholders, which include employer associations.

**WIP 150: A research project to build workforce capacity in the Family Day Care Workforce**

Between 2009 and 2011 the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (CS&H ISC) and Family Day Care Australia (FDCA – the peak body for family day care services) conducted a multi-method research project to examine issues relating to workforce development in the family day care (FDC) sector. The project was sector-wide and national in scope and it involved the participation of FDC educators and Scheme unit coordinators as well as RTOs.

The aim of the research was to guide recommendations to build the capacity of the FDC workforce in light of recent policy reforms in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector. A further aim was to gain insights into how the FDC workforce would respond to changes in staff-to-child ratios and greater emphasis being placed on skill development with the introduction of mandated qualifications under the National Quality Framework for ECEC.

The research methods used to build knowledge of the sector included: an online survey of educators and unit coordinators; a survey of parent users of FDC services; consultation forums of educators and unit coordinators; a longitudinal focus group exercise to monitor the experiences of educators who were undertaking recognition assessment and training; and interviews with training providers in RTOs.

These data sources were used to develop a profile of the family day care workforce and provide insights into: training needs; barriers to training and assessment; skill demands and gaps; career pathways; and recruitment and retention practices. The research findings were used to develop a Best Practice Training and Assessment Model for the FDC sector and four case studies of high performing partnerships between FDC Schemes and RTOs. Despite some difficulties accessing educators (detailed in Section 4.1) project partners described how there was a high degree of educator commitment to the project as it provided them with an opportunity to voice concerns about the introduction of mandated qualifications. As one partner explained,

... the sector hadn't been heard in a lot of instances. With the forums that we did, people turned up in their hundreds because we made them (at) an accessible time – but (also) ... that was when the [qualification] requirements had just been announced and they just needed somebody to talk to, so... (they) were really like “We've got so much to say and we've been wanting to say it for probably quite a long time”.
The report recommended that recognition assessment was an ideal pathway and starting point for the FDC workforce to meet the mandated qualification requirements. Alongside this, three areas of recommendation were developed. These related to: options for better recognising skills and developing pathways within the CHC08 Training Package; development of a promotion and communication strategy to encourage recruitment and retention in the sector; and access to funding and support for training and assessment.

**Selected project findings**

- There was much initial resistance from educators to being forced 'back to the classroom' as a result of mandated qualifications in the National Quality Framework regulations.
- The research indicated that the breadth, depth and level of complexity of the work performed by educators reflects a Certificate IV level rather than Certificate III (the current level of mandated qualification) and that unit coordinators' work reflects Advanced Diploma level rather than Diploma level.
- The research uncovered multiple barriers to undertaking training and assessment and described educators’ experience of problems with particular modes of training and assessment. Barriers to undertaking training included (among others): the expense of training; inflexible training delivery options; a lack of support and access to trainers; understanding how to study; managing work, life and study balance; and experience of poor quality recognition assessment processes.

**Initial outputs/outcomes:**

An FDCA project partner felt that a key project outcome was “the recognition of the unique challenges or issues that face the sector” in the context of low policy or public awareness of the FDC sector.

The primary initial outputs were a publicly accessible report which set out findings and recommendations and a “plain English” summary of the report recommendations, both of which were distributed by FDCA to Schemes throughout Australia and at FDCA member forums.

The report included resources for use in the sector including:

- A career pathway chart that was also disseminated as a stand-alone resource to all FDCA Schemes and educators; and
- A self-assessment skills audit check list that can be used as a tool for educators to check their understanding of their work components in readiness for completing an application for recognition assessment.

**Reported impacts/longer term outputs**

**The development of resources for educators**

**An RPL kit/checklist:** In response to the report’s recommendations, the project partners developed a ‘good practice’ checklist of questions for educators to ask RTOs to assess the quality of the training and assessment being offered and to identify and choose an appropriate RTO to best meet their development needs. Questions related to, for example, whether the RPL process used will fit with their needs in terms of providing customised processes, and whether assessment processes are conducted in the educator’s home, where they undertake their work. This resource was disseminated...
to all Schemes just as the new regulations, requiring formal accreditation of educators at Certificate III level, came into effect. A finding of the research was that poor recognition assessment processes presented a major barrier to educators beginning and completing training. It was expected that this resource would allow educators to be more assertive in their choice of RTO, and allow them to ‘shop around’ for recognition assessment and training of an acceptable standard that meets their needs.

Project partners felt that the resource would assist educators in the process of gaining Certificate III accreditation as it improved the likelihood that they would experience quality assessment and training. This then increased the likelihood of educators meeting the regulations, and this was expected to improve retention in the sector. While it is too early to judge the impact of this resource, an FDCA partner believed that it will have a significant impact in terms of “getting more educators qualified through a range of different means”.

**Job descriptions:** The first nationally consistent job descriptions for the sector were developed as a result of the report recommendations. These were disseminated to Schemes for use in advertising positions and recruiting.

**Induction kits:** FDCA are developing a nationally standardised induction kit for educators that will be made available to RTOs and Schemes. It will comprise an induction training program, learning resources and assessment tools. The kit includes the mapping of existing induction and orientation processes to units of competency, allowing educators to receive a credit towards an accredited FDC or Children’s Services qualification, on completion.

**Other impacts**

**Providing a ‘bank of knowledge’:** The report has become a key resource for stakeholders in the sector. Project partners from the ISC use the knowledge generated by the project on a regular basis and for many different purposes, including in a recent analysis of training quality, and during a review of the suite of children’s services qualifications (training packages), in which the report was submitted in relation to the development of competencies in FDC. The report’s recommendations around skill sets and the training package had also informed the training package review.

**Strengthening sector identity:** Research of this nature - taking a whole of sector focus – had not been conducted in the FDC sector prior to the WIP project. Partners believe that the research will play a central role in contributing to the professionalization or legitimation of the sector, and will help to carve an identity for workers in the sector as a distinct ‘workforce’. When reflecting on how the research will benefit workers in the sector, partners explained:

> ... you can’t attribute the progression that the sector has made to this report, but it certainly was one piece of the pie. In, I’ve seen a difference in two and a half years of where the workforce was then and where they are now, even just from being at their major conference this year. You know, the talk in the room, the way they’re talking about themselves, they’re all about quals and professionalising and all of this sort of stuff, that I just think gradually the talk is becoming that way, and so that will project and then help build and develop that workforce internally. ... The ‘whole sector’ look at their workforce - which has only just been recognised as ‘a workforce’. That's huge. They've only just moved on from ‘babysitter’ and now we've got this professional report that stipulates all of the things that need to happen for quality care to be given, so it's amazing for them.
Providing assurance to educators at a time of change: The report and plain English summary were distributed to educators just as the National Quality Framework regulations were being introduced. It was felt that the timing of the report’s release helped allay workforce concerns over the introduction of mandated qualifications:

So it was an awareness of, “Yes, things are changing, you have to move to this system now, but there are supports available and we are working toward things to develop your workforce and to make pathways easier”. So it tied in really well, with them [FDCA] promoting that message.

Strengthening the case for further training: The report findings provide a clear rationale for why training and assessment is necessary for the future development and retention of the FDC workforce. Accordingly, Schemes have used the report to bolster their case for funding when making National Workforce Development Fund applications.

A springboard for workforce development innovation and closer engagement: The content of the report has provided the impetus for RTOs and Schemes to generate innovative ideas for training and RPL processes. As the report is located on the ISC’s website, these bodies have accessed the report, read it, and subsequently contacted the CS&H ISC to investigate funding or support options. This has led to closer engagement between the ISC and stakeholders in the sector.

Strengthened relationship between project partners: The strong relationship built between the project partners during and following the project has had a number of flow-on impacts. As a result of building knowledge of the sector through the project the ISC is now more active in “flying the flag” for the FDC sector, on behalf of FDCA, in public and policy circles. And FDCA actively involves the ISC in the process of planning and developing ongoing outputs which have their genesis in the report recommendations, such as the induction kit.

Improving awareness of the sector in the policy arena: An FDCA project partner felt that the report would assist them by fortifying their position when they speak to government. The research findings provide policy makers with a better understanding of what family day care is, in the context of low levels of awareness and knowledge of the sector. The report findings will feed into policy and strategy initiatives on an ongoing basis through FDCA’s advocacy of issues relating to the sector.

WIP 151: A study on the Quality of Teaching in Vocational Education and Training (VET)
This project was managed by the proponent organisation, the Australian College of Educators (ACE), and was conducted by commissioned researchers at the University of Melbourne and Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT). It ran over an 18-month period from mid-2009 until late 2010. The aim of the project was to provide an evaluation of current and needed teaching capacity in the VET sector and to propose a range of strategies for improving the skills and quality of teaching provided by VET teachers. It examined the ways in which VET teaching and training might “contribute to increasing the quality of VET and improved student outcomes, anticipate the knowledge and skills needed for work and changing workplaces, and improve the vocational focus of VET provision regardless of where it is offered”.

Researchers were commissioned to undertake research and make recommendations on: the quality of VET teaching; VET teacher qualifications and continuing professional development; the impact teaching has on the quality of the VET student experience and student outcomes; and how this can be
evaluated. The research methodology used included qualitative interviews with stakeholders in representative bodies, industry peak bodies, key VET bodies, three skills councils, researchers, and senior staff and teachers in nine different types of RTOs. In addition a web survey of VET teachers was conducted with an achieved sample size of n=1,400. This data was melded with desk-based research (secondary analysis of relevant research literature).

This project was one of several coterminous research projects on the VET sector that were being conducted by researchers around Australia at the same time. The lead researchers on each of these projects consulted with each other throughout the conduct of the projects to ensure that they complemented each other and that there was no overlap between them. The researchers on the WIP project also drew on earlier research projects conducted on the topic and spoke to the researchers who led these projects.

As one of a number of studies conducted on this topic, the principal researcher felt that the WIP-funded project had made a contribution by “adding to the discourse” on teaching in the VET sector. As a whole, these initiatives together were seen as having played an important role in “transforming understanding of what needs to be done to support VET teachers”, in terms of “turning around the discourse about VET teachers” and producing “a body of work that recognises the depth and complexity of VET teaching”.

Project partners described the topic of quality teaching in VET as “controversial” and “politicised”. This was due to the nature of the workforce, some of whom did not have tertiary-level degrees in education. Thus the report’s recommendations were highly anticipated among stakeholders who would be affected by the recommendations, if adopted by policy-makers.

**Initial (immediate) outputs:**
The outputs included four research papers which were released at intervals, as they were produced:

- a literature review;
- an overview paper which reported on the primary (qualitative and quantitative) data collected during the project;
- a framework paper which developed a conceptual framework for evaluating the quality of teaching in VET; and
- an evidence paper which reviewed the data available to inform the evaluative framework.

Further outputs included an options paper which proposed options, models and proposals for public discussion. Submissions on the options paper were invited. Evidence from submissions was summarised in a final report, which proposed models for the continuing development of VET teachers and for appropriate evaluation frameworks and quality indicators.

This process of producing and disseminating staged outputs, and iterative theory building, were considered highly innovative and central to building engagement with the VET community by project partners. As each output was released, reports were publicised on ACE and DEEWR websites and ACE newsletters. Stakeholders were reading reports and feeding back to the researchers, which then influenced subsequent publications. A partner described the process:

One of the strengths, I think, of the project, was that a picture was built over a period of time … I think that that was one of the reasons why the project was so successful, because it allowed
people to react to what had been in the report previously and get in touch with [the researcher].

A second innovative aspect of the project was the medium by which the suggested recommendations were conveyed. A table format was used which presented a range of options in sequential stages, from ‘augmented status quo’ to ‘intermediate enhancement’ and finally, ‘ambition’. This was explicitly designed to provide policy direction in light of the “highly contested nature of the topic”. It also reflected the view of the authors that there needed to be time taken to develop a consensus about the steps needed and to marshal the resources needed to improve capacity in the sector.

There continues to be much interest in the research in the VET sector two years after the release of the final report. During that time the principal researcher has given a great many presentations on the research to audiences in almost every state and territory which have included individual TAFEs, groups of practitioners, and policy makers in state governments. An issue here is that the principal researcher has not been funded to do this dissemination work, which is time consuming in nature, as tailored presentations are written to suit quite different audiences.

**Impact and outputs**

**Informing policy and strategy:** The research has been referenced in national policy papers produced by Skills Australia and the Productivity Commission as well as informing the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults, agreed to by the COAG Standing Council on Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment (SCOTSE) in November 2011.

**Informing the development of new VET qualifications:** The research has informed the development of a graduate certificate in tertiary teaching established at the University of Melbourne to address the needs of teachers of higher education in TAFE and private providers, as well as upper level VET.

**A change in the ‘discourse’:** Key research findings – that VET teachers are a widely heterogeneous group, reflecting the differentiated nature of the sector; and that a central element of teaching in VET is its complexity – were said to have informed a ‘culture change’ in thinking about workforce development in the VET sector. According to project partners, the research has brought about a realisation that a single qualification will not adequately serve the purposes of the whole sector, and that a differentiated approach to qualifications is needed, shaped by VET teachers’ individual requirements.

**Building consensus among stakeholders in the sector:** The principal researcher felt that, consistent with its aims, the project had built consensus in the VET sector about the strategies required to improve capacity in the sector. The design of the project had fostered consensus around future directions through actively involving stakeholders and teachers, sector-wide. A second partner described how the extent of stakeholder engagement with the study surprised them, noting

... the engagement was bigger than just people meeting with [the researcher] and talking about [the research] outcomes. I think it did generate a bigger discussion in the VET sector about what was going on ... it made people have discussions around teacher quality and VET pedagogy ... it moved the conversation to a different plane ... [an] impact was the change in conversation around teacher qualifications across the board in the VET sector.
Establishment of a VET teaching award: One of the final report’s recommendations, that a national award be instituted for VET teachers (consistent with awards given to all other categories of teacher), was adopted soon after the report was released.

Assisting national VET teacher data collection: The report was said to have “added to the pressure” for VET workforce data collection coming from other stakeholder organisations, and the research findings fed into the development of strategies for national data collection.

Piloting of a new model for professional development: The report’s recommendation of a new model of continuing, vocationally-specific professional development was said to be gaining the support of stakeholder organisations such as ISCs, and the AEU had received funding to pilot the model in the aged care and manufacturing sectors.

Further work on a national VET professional body: The report’s recommendations for the establishment of a national VET professional body were taken up by Victoria’s VET Development Centre, which commissioned a scoping study of the feasibility of establishing a national association for VET professionals in 2011. The report of this study referenced the WIP-funded report as the source of the study.

Centres for research on VET: According to the principal researcher, a 2012 budget announcement included proposals for the establishment of two centres which reflect the report’s advocated model of professional development (involving research on VET pedagogy and the reform of teaching and learning in vocationally distinct areas). The principal researcher was unsure whether there was a direct link between the two, but noted that the report had “injected that (model) into the policy discussion” for the first time.

Recognition of the VET sector: Partners described how the research recommendations were well-received by teachers working in the VET sector. They also noted an important additional outcome, describing how, as a result of the research, VET teachers felt “validated” and “recognised”.

Potential strategies for sustaining the impact of the project: According to the lead researcher, the project findings might potentially be sustained further by the conduct of pilots relating to selected recommendations from the report, specifically those focused on vocationally specific professional development (similar to the pilots conducted by the AEU described above).

WIP 164: Integrating Higher Education and VET in Retail
This project created a four year undergraduate course in retail management that integrated academic and work-based vocational learning through a traineeship model. It was developed collaboratively with the WIP proponent, Service Skills Australia (SSA - the ISC with responsibility for retail), the University of Western Sydney (UWS) and UWS College (an RTO fully-owned by and co-located with UWS). The course was trialled at UWS and UWS College with a cohort of ten students in the first semester of 2011 but suspended after four candidates pulled out before the second semester.

The impetus for the project came from SSA in response to recurrent complaints from retail employers that graduates were generally ill-prepared for the world of work, and that vocationally trained employees were increasingly in need of underpinning conceptual learning, more associated with academic education. In a policy sense this concern had been generalised across industries in the Bradley Review which had called for improvements in articulation between HE and VET courses. SSA
recognised an opportunity to trial something quite new that might satisfy the need to integrate the two approaches to good effect. UWS has a strong commitment to broaden access to higher education and saw that an integrated model had potential to open up new pathways for potential students via a quality pedagogical offering.

**Challenges for the project**

There were considerable systemic challenges faced in this project. They included:

**Regulatory barriers**: this manifest most significantly around difficulties in getting the course approved for a NSW Vocational Training Order.\(^\text{10}\) This was crucial in terms of achieving funding for the RTO. The project was ultimately successful in achieving the VTO. However, the process would need to be repeated for any new course and in each state jurisdiction. The parties felt those barriers had the potential to frustrate other attempts at the model unless the process was made easier, or a separate funding stream was established.

**Cultural barriers**: the pedagogical differences between HE and VET are significant, as are the organisational structures of the two sectors. The close relationship between UWS and UWS College helped to smooth the way through those differences, and for those involved in the project there was mutual recognition of the power of both approaches to teaching and learning. However, it was noted by all involved that they were not necessarily representative of the traditional attitudes held in each industry about the other.

**Administrative barriers**: considerable effort went into realigning administrative structures and processes within UWS to support the integration of the two types of qualification, particularly in terms of assessment. While this was successfully aligned, it would need to be repeated at every university. It is worth noting that the process was considered worthwhile for UWS beyond the project as it generated a review and refinement of their systems more generally.

**Curricula challenges**: developing a blended curriculum and course plan required the intensive involvement of people expert in relevant academic curriculum and others expert in the VET retail training package. Working together to map the two and construct a seamless whole was described by one of the parties as ‘... challenging but very satisfying because it actually worked so well.’ A partner explained,

... We literally went through - we went through the whole curriculum, the VET, what were the options, the units of competency that were available to us, we looked at every single one of them and asked the question, how does that fit within the higher educational research outcomes out of the AQF (Australian Qualifications Framework) that we're trying to achieve at that level? Where does it fit and what does it add, what skills does it bring to bear and how does that need to be integrated with the knowledge and particularly the application of knowledge in different contexts? The thing was we were developing the bachelor's award but the [VET] competencies had already been developed, so we had less input and controlled less about the competency. Going forward, we would have had input into the development of

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\(^{10}\) VTOs specify the qualifications that need to be achieved by apprentices or trainees, the terms of training and the probationary periods. [http://www.training.nsw.gov.au/about_us/glossary.html#v](http://www.training.nsw.gov.au/about_us/glossary.html#v)
competencies... and indeed we did, we gave feedback in terms of how we would take those competencies forward for the future. So that’s how we did it. That was the process.

**Demand and engagement barriers:** this was the factor that ultimately derailed the implementation of the model. A group of large retail employers had expressed interest and had made verbal commitments to being involved. This did not come to fruition. It also proved very difficult to recruit students to the course. Interviewees identified the following structural barriers to engagement that need to be recognised and dealt with:

- The retail sector has a negative image in terms of viable career paths, and many people do not regard it as an industry of first choice. The industry is highly casualised and part time, with high turnover of staff. Arguably then, those perceptions are not surprising and difficult to overcome without some action from employers.
- Large retailers are increasingly operating their own internal graduate management training. This allows them to up-skill newly graduated business recruits in enterprise-specific practices. Making a commitment to a four year traineeship was seen as a relatively high risk proposition in comparison. As it was, most of the employers that were involved in the demonstration project were SMEs in speciality retail. This presented considerable time and resource challenges for the RTO in terms of managing relationships with one employer for every student. It also raises questions about the range of learning opportunities available at the workplace.

It was the view of some parties (although not all) that with a more intensive scoping phase at the beginning of the project to identify the factors that would be most likely to attract participants, retail employers and prospective students could have been secured and the pilot would have been tested more thoroughly. For example SSA commissioned market research work later in the project that established that young people (and their parents) may have been more attracted had the course been marketed as allowing you to ‘work and earn’ while gaining a business degree. It was also thought that the benefits of the model, with more time and a much longer lead in, could have been sold to major employers to trial alongside their graduate programs for ‘star recruits’ without qualifications. As observed in the WIP final report,

> The pilot experience has highlighted the difficulty in moving employers from a state of thinking it’s a good idea to committing their staff to the program, suggesting that committed employers are needed right from the beginning to champion the initiative.

It was also suggested that RTOs with strong pre-existing industry relationships might have been better placed to get retailers involved.

**Lessons for parties wanting to create and implement an integrated degree**
The final report identifies a series of ‘threshold’ and ‘foundation’ issues that capture key lessons the parties learned over the course of the project. They suggest the following are necessary for any future venture:

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11 SSA have produced a resource document, *Pathways between VET and Higher Education: resource for universities, industry and RTOs*, to support practitioners going through the process. The final WIP report is also a useful resource document.
- A clear vision and a group committed to selling it
- Adequate demand from employers and students
- An incentive for the university
- High-level commitment from the university, RTO and employers
- Alignment with policy and regulatory frameworks
- Funding for development and implementation
- Adequate staff, resourcing and infrastructure
- Leaders to drive and oversee the implementation
- Healthy working relationships

Outcomes
The project produced a well-designed and fully integrated retail management course for undergraduates. All the parties believe that the model they produced is an excellent addition to current training and education offerings, combining HE and VET pedagogy and content to create something quite unique to deliver high quality educational and training outcomes for students and industry.

The proponent has produced a blueprint for other parties who may be interested in developing and implementing an integrated degree. This guide outlines the pre-conditional factors that the authors considered critical to the success of any further application of the model. Areas such as engineering, aged care nursing and early childhood education and care were highlighted by some of the parties as potential sectors where such an offering might be beneficial and where the contextual factors might be more conducive to success.

A survey was conducted of participant attitudes to the course. The six participants rated the course very highly, and gave it feedback scores higher than the UWS average. They were particularly impressed with the quality of lecturers and their calibre of industry knowledge.

Impacts
Most impacts were internal to the project in that they affected project parties. They included:

- Knowledge building across the parties – particularly relating to the processes for constructing an integrated curriculum and how to ‘operationalize’ such a course.
- Cultural and knowledge exchange between the parties, in particular heightened understanding and awareness by university staff of VET practices for skill acquisition.

  ... I now have, from a university’s perspective, a whole new vocabulary, a whole new set of ways of thinking about learning that I didn't have before. That’s me personally. But as an institution, we’re now saying things like, we need to be able to assure skills. How do we assure skills? How do we think about the skills as opposed to this sort of knowledge?

- The project led to a valuable re-assessment of associated policy and procedures in the university.
... we had to confront our policy. That was a big change. We literally - it was one sort of week where as an institution, at the university, the registrar’s office sat down with me and we went through every single policy ... what we had to do was ask questions and it caused us to rethink through a whole range of things ... So I think it was a good process for us as a university.

SSA had plans for further evaluation work to take place had the course continued. Along with the course, they have been suspended. While the ISC is in discussions with another RTO provider about the integrated model, there is no concerted push by the ISC to pursue it further. As they explained, they can promote and provide advice about the model when an opportunity arises but they do not have the internal resources to pursue a structured marketing or dissemination strategy. The staff involved at UWS and UWS College, while clearly impressed with the potential of the model, echoed the dissemination and marketing constraints described by the ISC. They also noted that the failure of the implementation, while not diminishing the viability of the model in their view, makes it somewhat harder to sell - had it been a success that may have been another matter entirely. As a senior UWS manager said at the outset of the demonstration,

It doesn’t matter much to UWS if it fails (no-one will notice), but it will be fantastic if it succeeds as UWS will be able to promote it successfully.

**WIP 166: Social and Community Services Workforce Development Project**

The proponent in this project was a Social and Community Services provider. Other project partners included three similar organisations operating in the same sector. The project’s conduct and management was contracted to a specialist skills and labour market consultancy group. A project steering group was also established which involved individuals from each of the four partner organisations, the WIP, and the contracted consultancy. The project commenced in November 2009 and was finalised in June 2011, when the consultant’s contract was terminated once they advised the WIP that they were unable to meet their contractual obligations within the timeframes of the existing contract.

The intended aims of the project were first, to identify workforce training and development needs in a range of service areas across the four participating organisations. A second aim was to develop and pilot skill set VET training programs, by mapping the identified skill requirements to existing VET sector training packages. The initial project plan involved a three-phase sequence of activities. However due to poor planning, project management, and performance on the part of the consultants, only the first of the three phases was completed before the consultant’s contract was terminated. The design of the project was disproportionately weighted to an initial information-gathering consultation phase and much of the project funds were allocated to this activity. The consultation phase took longer than expected, in part because the consultants had little foundation knowledge of the social and community services sector or of education and training delivery in the sector. Accordingly they were unaware that much of the primary data they were collecting was readily available in the public domain, or was held as tacit knowledge by decision-makers in the four organisations. Due to the time taken to conduct consultations in the four organisations, no remaining funds were available for training delivery and the consultants were reliant on obtaining funding through the VET sector for training development and delivery. Obtaining this funding proved much
more difficult than initially indicated by the consultants, and none was attained prior to the project’s end date.

Consultation phase activities involved consultants conducting structured interviews with staff from each of the four partner organisations, with additional data gathered through observation of service provision and review of documents, staff training schedules and records, and other measures of workplace activity. The aims of this phase were: to identify current workforce practices and determine their effectiveness; to identify gaps and deficiencies in the skills base required to deliver services; and to identify and develop skills-based solutions to bridge any gaps and deficiencies.

Recommendations were then derived from the information gathered during this phase which focused on using a skill set approach in the design of six pilot programs in areas of skill deficiency. The consultants then mapped the training needs identified to VET sector training packages in a review of unit of competency content.

Some of the activities designed as part of the second phase of the project, titled ‘Workforce intervention’ were undertaken. Of the six areas of skill deficiency identified, three were selected as priority areas in consultation with the steering group. The three areas included: first point of contact client relationships; specialist skills in provision of employment relations; and organisational and individual resilience (for management and supervisory staff). For each of these three pilot projects, the existing units of competency that could be utilised for training in a particular ‘skill set’ were identified and mapped to industry training packages. Phase two activities also included negotiations with RTOs around the delivery and funding of the pilots in the three areas of skill delivery. The consultants engaged in initial negotiations with state departments, TAFE peak bodies, and individual RTOs. However this did not yield any concrete commitments on the part of the bodies to fund and deliver training prior to the project’s termination in June 2011.

The activities carried out up to this point in the process constituted the full extent of activity undertaken in the project. In essence, none of the actual training delivery or evaluation elements that were originally planned as part of the project were implemented. It was the original intention that the following activities would be undertaken with WIP funding, but by project’s end, they had not occurred:

- A quantitative survey tool designed to assess current skill levels, competencies, qualifications and utilisation of VET sector options was developed for distribution among employees in the four organisations but was never circulated.
- Consultation with the partner organisations and the design, development and delivery of pilot training projects in the three priority areas identified in consultation with the steering group. The intention was to formalise training solutions for participants, through accreditation or inclusion of competencies in training packages. However no training delivery activity took place prior to the consultants’ contract termination.
- The third phase of the project was intended to comprise an evaluation of outcomes of the training interventions and the development of a strategic plan for broader dissemination of solutions “for further discussion in the sector and with training providers and government departments”. Again, these activities did not take place.
It was the view of an interviewee from the proponent organisation that the project had not met its initial proposed aims. As a consequence of only very few of the planned objectives and project milestones being met, the only output from the project was a report detailing the data collected from interviews with individuals in the four partner organisations. According to an interviewee from the proponent organisation, this data did not contribute any new or previously unknown insights, but served to confirm or reinforce existing tacit knowledge about skill gaps within the four organisations. This interviewee described an outcome as being that the knowledge gleaned during the consultation phase “focused our attention on things we know about”.

**WIP 178: Addressing Skills Needs in the Civil Construction Industry**

This project was undertaken by the Civil Construction Federation (CCF), an employer association representing civil construction enterprises. It was conducted in two parts, the first of which was funded under the National Skills Shortage Strategy from July 2007, and the second under the WIP in the following year. The project was completed in July 2009.

The broad aim of the project was to raise awareness of the need for industry to develop strategies for attraction, recruitment and retention, and improving career pathways for their workforces. This entailed building a better understanding of barriers to workforce development and devising responses for employers to those barriers.

A project manager was engaged to coordinate activities at the state branch level of the association and build the Federation’s focus on apprenticeships. Two employer surveys were conducted out of the WIP funds. The first targeted employers that were not employing apprentices, investigating the reasons why; and the second was for employers who had engaged apprentices to examine their motivations and experiences.

Targets were set for the project to increase the uptake of apprenticeships amongst civil construction employers and improve the retention of apprentices. Each of the CCF state branches implemented a series of strategies to increase employer awareness and improve perceptions of civil construction careers amongst school students and school staff. Those activities included the promotion of careers in civil construction intermediate (trades level) jobs via websites, newsletters, and attendance at summits and expos. Some states were particularly active in creating partnerships with schools to run industry ‘tasters’ and site visits (similar to work experience), and certificate level pre-employment programs.

**Key findings**

- Occupational identity of operational civil construction workers was poor. Neither industry nor the workforce appeared to regard critical roles such as bridge builders and plant operators as ‘trade level’ jobs. This was at odds with the national training framework which required Certificate III level qualifications for these occupations. This was reinforcing the perception that intermediate level jobs in the sector were of a low quality. It also meant that the numbers of trades people working in and required for civil construction was most likely being significantly under-reported in workforce statistics as they were being coded as ‘labourers’ in the occupational categories.
Small to medium sized firms in the civil construction industry had limited understanding of the basic elements of the national training system and many did not know how to engage an apprentice.

Employers regarded key barriers to employing apprentices as: not having adequate staff to train and supervise them; insecure contracts of work; and to a lesser degree, inadequate numbers of suitable candidates.

There was limited understanding of potential careers in the civil construction industry amongst the general population. School counsellors were identified as a critical group who had very little knowledge of the sector and what it offered, and were consequently not in a position to suggest it as a career option to students.

Some states had more conducive policies and regulatory frameworks for school based training efforts than others.

It was confirmed by the project proponent that uptake of apprenticeships in civil construction that could be accredited to the project had overwhelmingly taken place in Queensland. In reflecting on this outcomes the proponent affirmed that no explicit work had been done to understand why this was the case but he assumed it was due to large civil projects taking place in that state, the existence of an industry training levy (no such levy exists in Victoria and NSW) and what he described as a more “progressive approach to training at the government and industry levels”, supported and resourced by the levy.

Outcomes

A series of outcomes were identified by the project final report, as follows:

- CCF identified that as an employer association they needed to focus more on the needs of SMEs to increase their engagement with entry level training and workforce planning.
- The project achieved and exceeded the targets set for increasing the number of Australian Apprentices in civil construction, and for improving retention at the three-month point.
- The CCF state branches became active in promoting, networking and supporting Australian Apprentice engagement.
- The knowledge gained in the conduct of the project enabled CCF to engage better with its members on matters of workforce development and to identify and prioritise critical issues to pursue.
- CCF developed and disseminated an Apprenticeship/Trainee Selection and Performance Review Kit to support employer capacity to employ apprentices.
- CCF created a Civil Construction Careers Website.

Impacts

The final WIP report was completed in 2009 and four years had elapsed by the time an interview was conducted with the project proponent. This allowed for some reflection on the impact these outcomes may have had and how issues had been progressed. Although it is difficult to establish irrefutable causal links between these later initiatives and the WIP funded project, a number of impacts were discernible.

- One of the key on-going impacts of the study was how it contributed to the organisational knowledge of the Federation and assisted in setting priorities. In the view of the proponent
this led to a focal shift toward promotion of workforce development amongst their members. This was manifest in the increase in industry training,

So there was a big education process and I think that we've gone a fair way down the track now. We have got some of the biggest civil companies in Australia who have got really strongly developed workforce development plans that pick up the various stages of the qualifications. We are now seeing more people go through into Certificate IV where back when this project started, even though it was only five or six years ago, we had small numbers of people doing Certificate III.

- The Federation has continued to survey members on issues relating to apprenticeships using the WIP funded surveys as a benchmark, which has given them the capacity to test how practices and attitudes have changed over time.
- A project with Skills Australia and the construction industry ISC was undertaken to investigate the problems the project identified with Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupation (ANZSCO) coding of intermediary civil construction jobs.
- The Federation has undergone a restructure since the project and this had an effect on some of the national activities that were to be undertaken. In most cases these have not been progressed although the state branches continue to be active in the areas of school based VET and celebrating traineeships and apprenticeships with annual training awards. However, the careers website that was built is no longer maintained.
A2.2 Projects relating to Skills for sustainability

WIP 145: Development of Skills for Sustainability in the Transport and Logistics Sector

This project was instigated by the proponent organisation, the Transport and Logistics Industry Skills Council, in response to prospective changes in government policy relating to the inclusion of skills for sustainability in training packages. It was undertaken throughout 2009 when the notion of ‘green skills’ was new to many in this industry sector. The proponent organisation commissioned the National Centre for Sustainability to conduct what was essentially exploratory research into industry awareness of sustainability issues and views on future sustainability-related occupations and training needs. The research data collected informed the development of recommendations relating to how additional environmental and sustainability units of competency might be developed and included in the Transport and Logistics (Road Transport and Warehousing Aspects) training package.

A variety of research methods were used in the course of the project. They included a survey conducted with an achieved sample of 45 participants including transport, logistics and warehousing employers, RTOs, government agencies, unions and environmental/sustainability bodies. The survey data were used as the basis for discussion during four, three-hour workshops which were held as both information sessions and stakeholder focus groups. The workshops were conducted in four capital cities and were attended by a total of 13 participants from transport and logistics companies, training organisations, government departments and industry peak bodies. The focus groups and survey gauged stakeholder views on the need for the ‘greening’ of qualifications and on new and emerging roles and skills needed in the sector. The data collected provided the ISC with information on current practices in the sector and on the experience of organisations that had engaged in the process of up-skilling their workforce in skills for sustainability.

In addition, desktop research was undertaken to provide analysis of where environmental factors are likely to impact on job functions in transport, logistics and warehousing, and an assessment of current best practice with regard to sustainability skills and practices in the sector. Alongside this, the consultants performed an analysis of existing training packages. They used software to conduct a keyword search in relation to sustainability in 236 transport and logistics units of competency and to rank them in terms of frequency of search terms, to ascertain the sustainability content of individual units.

Selected project findings:

- Participants had little knowledge of sustainability issues but nonetheless anticipated that climate change will impact on their industry. There was a desire in industry to improve sustainability and strong support for the wholesale greening of skills in the sector.
- Companies were in favour of the greening of skills on the basis that it results in cost reductions and improved business efficiencies. Some had already up-skilled staff around the compliance and reporting aspects of moving to a low carbon economy.
- There was a view among research participants that the extant units of competency relating to sustainability were deficient.

Selected recommendations stemming from research findings:

- Replacement of existing sustainability units with new units; embedding sustainability curricula in broader units (for example in driving or clean up units); and establishing the capacity for
emerging job roles in eco-management to form a stream/skill set of the logistics management training qualification.

- General sustainability awareness training is required at all levels to ensure the development and implementation of sustainable business practices.
- Target occupations: place primary focus on identified job roles which impact (or have the potential to impact) positively or negatively on the environment and sustainability in the transport and logistics and warehousing sectors.

**Outcomes and longer term impacts**

According to a proponent, the recommendations in the report have largely been implemented following publication of the final report in January 2010. This project led to a follow-on project conducted by the ISC which involved an in-depth audit of sustainability elements in all transport, logistics and warehousing training packages and which resulted in the ISC embedding green skills in all training packages.

As part of this process, the ISC commissioned a training package specialist to conduct subsequent industry stakeholder groups in order to gather further information relating to the issues uncovered in the WIP project. As a result of this consultation new units of competency were developed which have been agreed upon by industry stakeholders and endorsed for the relevant training packages. According to a proponent, the new units met with a favourable response from industry stakeholders.

**Development of new units of competency via an ‘industry-led’ process:** The WIP project acted as a scoping or information gathering exercise that was the precursor to the ISC’s development of new units of competency. The knowledge generated in the project was used by the ISC to review training packages, and information drawn from companies which had engaged in innovative sustainability projects was used in developing new units of competency. The research was considered valuable from the perspective that it enabled the ISC to proactively shape the content of training packages in line with the views and priorities of a broad range of industry stakeholders. The “evidence based approach” taken in the WIP project led them to feel “well informed and fairly well educated around that area when it became one of the government's priorities for training packages.” According to a proponent, the project provided the ISC with “credible, solid research” that informed the new content. This was described as “an all-stakeholder approach with a research base” and was contrasted with the traditional model of practice whereby RTOs shaped training packages according to their priorities, and the ISC’s role was to be “responsive” to their views. The proponent explained how the approach taken in the WIP project differed, noting, “… rather than just people around the table putting up what they believe, this had a research methodology behind it”. This new approach accorded with the government-led shift towards the development of training packages by means of an industry-led process.

**Building industry consensus around a potentially divisive issue:** A proponent described how a secondary aim of the research was to build common agreement in the industry around “what was meant by green skills” and that this had been achieved during the course of the project. Views expressed by participants in the course of the research indicated that stakeholders have “political, economic and emotional views” on the environment and sustainability. Elements of project design - for example, the provision of information to stakeholders during focus group sessions - offered an opportunity for the ISC to “get people thinking on the same page” about what sustainability means.
and how sustainable practice might be operationalized in the sector. The WIP project had alerted the ISC to the strong personal views that stakeholders held about issues of sustainability and the environment, which prepared them for the process of negotiating stakeholder agreement around the implementation of the new units of competency. A proponent explained how these views were made clear during the focus groups:

... normally when you’re doing training packages you don’t really get the personal, emotive, the personal political views that come through. You kind of get what the union stance is on something or an employer’s stance. But we were in one meeting and somebody obviously didn’t like the word ‘environment’, and he said “Oh, all you greenies.” ... People do have their views around environment. And (they think) “Why are we putting that in training packages?”

**Strengthening relationships between the proponent ISC and its stakeholders:** Other impacts related to the ISC having strengthened their relationship with stakeholders and, as a result of the project, being able to understand the issues of importance to stakeholders. This stood in contrast to the ‘bread and butter’ activities of the ISC, such as developing training packages, which offered few opportunities to engage with stakeholders to such a wide degree. A proponent explained, “I think it helped us (the ISC) mature some way in our consultation processes. It helped us understand what’s important to our industry.”

**Building research expertise in the proponent organisation:** Section 4.6 describes how the proponent was disappointed with the low turnout to the focus groups and, in hindsight noted that the ISC could have employed methods to improve stakeholder participation by engaging industry representative bodies to assist with participant recruitment. An interviewee from the ISC described how they had learned from the WIP project in conducting a second round of focus groups in the process of developing units of competency. They had focused efforts on recruiting “targeted concentrations” of stakeholders through established ISC structures such as steering groups, advisory committees, and visits to strategically important companies in the sector. This resulted in significantly greater numbers of focus group participants than were involved in the WIP project.

**WIP 152-154: Up-skilling Existing Workers in Skills for Sustainability Pilot Project (Energy, Construction and Manufacturing Industries)**

This project was initiated by DEEWR to investigate a rapid response model of equipping existing SME workers with green skill sets in three carbon emission intensive industries. It was designed in the immediate context of an impending Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) and the broader context of international commitments by Australia to reduce carbon production.

Three ISCs, representing the energy, construction and manufacturing industries, were recruited to become project proponents to lead their own WIP funded pilots. KPMG were retained to conduct a formative evaluation across the three pilots. The project was undertaken over a two year period from June 2009, and the evaluation was completed in November 2011.

The method employed by ISCs required that they recruit the SMEs and workers by sourcing them through employer associations; develop plans for up-skilling; and identify and broker appropriate RTO services to the SMEs. The evaluation involved the conduct of a series of qualitative interviews and surveys of project parties, supported by desk-based research, to establish the overall success of the project and the validity of the rapid response model.
Key Findings of the Evaluation

A target of 1,200 training places was set across the three industries. At the conclusion of the project 284 training places had been delivered. The evaluation identifies a series of factors that led to the under-subscription of training courses. Two contextual factors had a significant impact on uptake. They were the roll-out of a range of state and commonwealth funded green skill initiatives, including the Enterprise Based Productivity Places Program (EBPPP) which offered training to enterprises with higher subsidies and led to full qualifications. ISCs and the employer associations that were assisting them in the recruitment process believed that this impeded their efforts. In addition the CPRS, which established a business incentive to improve carbon mitigation, was placed on the back burner by the government during the period of the pilots. It is also likely that the global financial crisis was impacting on some businesses across the industry groups. Other factors internal to projects were also identified by KPMG and in ISC reports as inhibiting SME involvement. They included:

- The requirement for training participants to have an existing VET qualification meant that employers were constrained in nominating employees who they believed would benefit.
- Mass marketing to secure SME involvement was ineffective and did not provide a compelling case for SMEs to take up the training.
- Not enough time was dedicated to recruiting SMEs and making a suitable argument.
- Training was offered during peak periods in the business cycle.
- Employers were concerned about costs – the contribution they had to make, as well as the loss of productive time for employees released for training.
- Employers, in many cases, did not regard sustainability skills as a key priority for their businesses.

It was noted by a WIP project manager that recruitment of the SMEs was complicated and made more time consuming by the “layers of intermediaries” that were involved. This meant that ‘conversations’ between the project proponent and the recruitment targets were not direct and that changes to the recruitment strategy had to pass through several hands before they could be implemented. It was therefore felt that the use of RTOs to recruit from their own networks was useful. This was particularly powerful in manufacturing amongst enterprises which already practiced lean manufacturing principles, which aligned with concepts in sustainability. RTOs with pre-existing relationships with those enterprises were in a position to encourage their involvement and the senior managers within them were better equipped to recognise the potential benefits.

Impacts

The evaluators and DEEWR believe that the model of rapid response via skill sets was successful in that the training quality was high and that there were early indications of eco-efficiency improvements at some workplaces. The numbers of participants who completed the training were 111 in the energy industry, 134 from manufacturing, and 40 in the construction industry.

The training in manufacturing was facilitated through five enterprises and it appears from the feedback from four of the five companies that the implementation of sustainability practices led to reductions in waste and costs to the enterprises. This differs for the other two industries where the training generally only went to one person in each enterprise and it was harder for them to reflect on savings that may have ensued.
The KPMG evaluation noted that a short time elapsed between completion of the training and the investigations they conducted relating to impacts. They were able to report that most enterprises were anticipating some benefits as the skills gained in the training would be ‘used frequently’. On the other hand some employers indicated that they were unlikely to utilise the sustainability skills if additional costs were incurred as a result. On the whole, the timing and design of the evaluation did not allow for an examination of impact on business operations or carbon abatement across each of the industries.

**Lessons for similar initiatives**

While the projects did not have the broad impact that was anticipated (training 1,200 workers) the KPMG evaluation and ISC reports identified lessons that were generated by the experience of implementing the model and would assist in a roll-out of a similar initiative. They included:

- Loosening the criteria for access to training to enable employers more freedom to identify appropriate candidates.
- Spending adequate time on recruiting participants and tailor approaches to suit their need. In particular SMEs require some convincing that their involvement has a business case.
- The point was also made that convincing employers of the benefits of sustainability practices takes a considerable lead-in time; and sustainability skills are more likely to be deployed in enterprises that have been prepared structurally as well as culturally.
- The manufacturing ISC noted feedback from employers that there were benefits for enterprises in a model that provided a combination of training and coaching, and that this was likely to maximise the use of skills gained in the training by being accompanied by systems advice.
- A need to scope the project activities more thoroughly, including the investigation of appropriate timing in the business cycle; mapping other training offerings; and determining an appropriate subsidy level.
- Consider the use of RTOs to source SMEs - although it should be noted that while this is expeditious it is not necessarily inclusive and limits recruitment to those already in RTO networks.
- Link the skill sets to formal qualifications to provide that potential for those who want it.
- Consider the use of flexible delivery models to limit the periods workers are absent from work.

We would add the following:

- Identification of the appropriate skill intervention and method needs to be at the sub-industry level (and not just based on size of employer or general industry) to ensure that the best approach is taken to encourage involvement and to maximise the utilisation of skills gained.

**WIP 174: Business Sustainability Assessors Course Demonstration Project**

This project was conducted by Environment Australia, an RTO which provides training in green skills and sustainability. It took place over a 20-month period from late 2009 to early 2011, with the aim of developing and delivering a nationally accredited course to train business sustainability assessors for the commercial and industrial sector. Environment Australia undertook a gap analysis of existing offerings in sustainability assessment training and found that while sustainability is well-addressed at
a tertiary level and there are individual units that address topics such as waste management, there was a gap in sustainability training packages and qualifications at Certificate IV-level, or below. The WIP-funded course thus filled a specific, untapped niche in accredited sustainability training. However its genesis also lay in the ideological commitment of the proponents to building sustainability in the business sector. As one noted:

We have to help businesses meet their obligations. But there's a couple of reasons... we believe in sustainability. ... Small businesses are 95 per cent of our economy. If all of them reduced their waste and energy consumption, not only are they going to save money, but it would make a very, very large impact on the carbon footprint. That's why it's important.

Activities included the content development and piloting of a Certificate IV course. Eight mandatory units were developed. These include five assessment units which develop participants’ skills and knowledge in sustainability policy, as well as undertaking sustainability assessments in relation to energy, waste, water and thermal performance. All units contain a theoretical component and a practical exercise. The three support units focus on occupational health and safety, broader issues of sustainability, and client relations skills.

The course was tailored to both managers and owners in existing SMEs, and those who wished to develop a business around sustainability assessment. The training approach adopted sought to ensure that students had a practical understanding of eco-efficiency and practical skills, but could place them in the larger context of environmental sustainability and business operations. The objective of the course was, in the view of the proponent responsible for developing the course content, to “change behaviour” rather than simply focusing on “changing lightbulbs”.

The course was aligned with the Certificate IV in Home Sustainability Assessment which was part of the Property Services Training Package, to allow participants accredited in the Business Sustainability Assessors Course to complete extra units and receive accreditation for the Home Sustainability Assessment Certificate, and vice versa. The Business Sustainability Assessors Course remains the only course of its type at Certificate IV level, aside from the Home Sustainability Assessment course. The project manager described how the Business Sustainability Assessors Course was innovative, and represented a new offering, from the perspective that it introduced a new “level of quality flexible learning material in the market for small business”.

The proponents initially conceived of the course as short and non-accredited, but soon realised that it would be more effectively delivered as a Certificate IV offering. Environment Australia received extra funding from the WIP to pilot the Certificate IV course but was not provided with WIP funding for marketing once it was accredited. The course is in the public domain, so it is free of charge to RTOs who wish to add it to their scope of registration and deliver the training. However, according to proponents, the course has not been publicised to its full potential and there is relatively little knowledge of it among registered training providers and potential participants. The fact that it had not been take up by many training providers was described as a source of disappointment by the principal proponent. Environment Australia did not have sufficient funds to publicise it so it was little known within government departments and more broadly in sustainability circles, outside of word of mouth recommendations provided by students who had completed the course. As one interviewee noted,
I quite often will be sitting in a state government meeting somewhere and hear someone say something about how there’s no training for energy assessors. I say, yes there is. I know there is because I participated in writing that course.

**Immediate outcomes**

Course content was developed with the assistance of a curriculum development committee and once it was nationally accredited, Environment Australia ran a pilot program. The course was trialled with 60 students across five RTOs in three regional areas. This included the conduct of one pilot program as well as one professional development course and three demonstration courses. Training participants included small business owners, individuals who intended to set up as consultants and undertake assessments for small businesses, others who had existing businesses in the sustainability sector (for example solar panel installation) who wanted to offer sustainability assessments to business clients as well, and sustainability officers working in private sector organisations. A diverse range of students completed the course, ranging “from high level PhD students to tradesmen”. Evaluation of the pilot course indicated that the course met student expectations, attendance was high and more than 80 per cent of the students attained competency and received their Certificates.

Those involved in implementing the project were very happy with the number of participants involved in the pilot and their positive evaluations of the course. Key outcomes, according to the project manager, included “the breadth, diversity and amount of people the course reached”, and their enthusiasm towards the course content, with a number of participants becoming steadfast sustainability ‘champions’. She noted:

> I think it's had a big impact on making people who are going to be working in the area of sustainability and business realise that it’s not simply about energy efficiency - the way to make change is multi-pronged, or multi-faceted, there are other things to consider.

Proponents described how it was difficult for some participants with businesses or jobs to take two weeks out to undertake the intensive course. This led Environment Australia to consider means of making the course more flexible and less intensive. The course is now delivered as a one week block, with a three week gap, followed by another week of training. This has made delivery of the course more manageable for participants. In addition, several of the course’s modules have been converted to an online platform and are available on the Environment Australia website. However a proponent noted that this was “very expensive” and the cost involved acted as a barrier to further conversion to an online platform, as Environment Australia was funding this initiative.

**Impact beyond the pilot phase**

**Career pathways for pilot participants:** Proponents described the project as “hugely successful” from the perspective that the majority of participants in the pilot program have established enterprises as business sustainability consultants, providing assessments for organisations including registered clubs, bowling clubs, child care centres, and commercial property companies. There is high demand from organisations for the services the program graduates provide as their assessments enable client organisations to make significant and sustained savings in operating costs. Others have become employed in the Australian Government’s Solar Cities program.

**Communities of practice** have been established among course graduates. Many have continued to network beyond completion of the course and have set up businesses together. The project manager
explained: “The networking side of it, I’ve seen, from classes, four or five people working together because they all have different skills, and pooling them. The course brought those people together.”

**The spread of training delivery to other RTOs:** Following the pilot phase, several TAFEs and Universities in NSW sought to offer the course, and Environment Australia trained the staff of these organisations in ‘train the trainer’ workshops (a professional development program). A number of other training organisations had also expressed interest in delivering the Certificate IV, however the proponents did not know whether this had eventuated in them adding it to their scope of registration or delivering the training. One organisation (Green Audit and Training Services in SA) was known to have registered to offer the course, and had gone on to deliver training which was funded by the SA Government. While Environment Australia organised an official launch of the course, attended by the Federal Treasurer Wayne Swan, a concerted promotional campaign among RTOs had not taken place and, as noted above, there was limited awareness of the course among training providers. This was considered by a proponent to be a barrier to future demand for the course. Where RTOs such as Green Audit and Training Services had heard about the course, it was often through serendipitous means, for example via word of mouth from existing students who had heard about the course. Proponents noted that graduates of the course have been sufficiently satisfied with the training to recommend it to new intakes of participants. Environment Australia also advertises for enrolments prior to the scheduled delivery dates and the course is promoted to members on the website of the newly-established Queensland Energy Assessors Association. However these efforts constitute the full extent of promotion of the course to potential participants.

**Ongoing delivery of the training under the Critical Skills Investment fund:** Environment Australia has received subsequent funding from the Critical Skills Investment Fund (now merged with the National Workforce Development Fund) to deliver the course. This has been conducted with the support of the Queensland Chamber of Commerce, which has actively promoted the offering to its members (small businesses), with many members completing the training. Participants pay 10 per cent of the costs of training delivery (around $500) with the remainder funded by the Critical Skills fund. Take-up of the course was said to be significantly lower (and class sizes were not viable) when government funding was not available. Environment Australia and the Chamber of Commerce have subsequently jointly conducted seminars on business sustainability and the carbon tax in most areas of the Queensland Coast. It is expected that this initiative will lead to further training registrations given the high level of interest in the course among Chamber of Commerce members.

**WIP 191: Carbonproof - Sustaining the Food Processing Chain and WIP 256: Sustainability Essentials for Executives (SEE)**

The participants in each of these projects were owners and senior managers of SMEs in the food processing sector. Both projects aimed to bring about a ‘culture change’ towards embedding site-level workforce development practices by assisting senior managers to develop skills for improving sustainability. Project partners described this as “solving sustainability challenges through a skills solution ... it’s solving a concrete business need and at the same time, by doing that, getting workforce development on the agenda”.

The projects sought to equip senior managers with the skills to enhance their employees’ capacity to apply sustainable practice in their every-day work activities, for example by designing and executing sustainability initiatives in their immediate work areas in relation to carbon, water management and
energy efficiency. The training approach focused on the integration of sustainability practices with business management and business planning systems, and building workplace cultures that support sustainability integration. The aim of the projects was to build management capacity by providing managers with the skills, tools, material, information and opportunity to discuss issues, which would enable them to make decisions about key actions and develop a course of activity to achieve sustainability outcomes.

The partners in both projects were AgriFood Skills Australia (the ISC for the Agrifood sector) and Energetics Pty Ltd (a specialist sustainability consultancy). The University of Western Sydney (UWS) contributed as a third partner in the SEE program. The impetus for developing Carbonproof came in the first instance from Energetics, who approached DEEWR with the idea for the program. DEEWR then suggested that Energetics approach AgriFood to work together with them on seeking funding for the program.

The programs were said by partners to have filled a unique gap in the market for this type of training. Reviews of current offerings indicated that most available sustainability training was targeted at employees at operator and supervisory level, with very little training targeted at senior management level; and most took the form of more theoretical, off-the-job training. Such training did not involve the integration of data from participants' organisations, as the Carbonproof and SEE programs did.

The Carbonproof and SEE projects addressed these gaps in that, first, project participants were site leadership teams, and program materials were focused around the needs of senior managers. Research indicates that key barriers to sustainability and energy efficiency uptake in organisations relate to a lack of management buy-in from across all management disciplines. For this reason it was felt important to target the training at multidisciplinary management teams, but also because these senior management teams had the most decision-making influence within organisations. Participants in the Carbonproof program typically included the CEO/owner, site engineer, chief financial officer and other senior managers. In the SEE program, two participants (owners and managers) attended from each pilot organisation. Both programs involved the participants undertaking site-based projects to solve particular sustainability problems identified at their companies.

Each of the programs also included a series of sustainability awareness seminars conducted by the project partners at key locations around Australia where a critical mass of food processing businesses were located. These were attended by small to medium food manufacturers, RTOs, representatives of state government agencies and food industry stakeholders. They were held in advance of the training elements of the projects being conducted as a means of advertising the pilot training program to potential participants. Seminars conducted following the completion of the Carbonproof training program involved presentations by managers who had completed the program and who described the positive impacts of having participated in the training. These individuals were described by a proponent as “people who are in a position to act as a catalyst to disseminate the learnings through their industry sector”.

**The Carbonproof Program**

The Carbonproof program ran for 18 months throughout 2010-11. It involved the development of course content which was piloted with site leadership teams from four demonstration sites. An action learning approach was used whereby participants designed site-level projects to improve business
outcomes and debriefed the course facilitators on their progress, reflected upon the process, and documented their outcomes using action learning tools.

Along with action learning, the program combined the disciplines of change management, strategic planning, project development, sustainability and engineering to develop the skills of leadership teams and produce “whole of business sustainability outcomes” for participating organisations. While the focus of many sustainability skills offerings is on technical solutions relating to cost savings from more efficient usage of plant, Carbonproof focused on the “people” element, in terms of how site leaders can tap into workers’ knowledge and engage with them to identify process improvements.

The aim of the project was to create a set of workforce development sustainability tools specifically for small food manufacturers which they could use independently, at low cost, and without having to commit to time-intensive courses and seminars, in order to prepare for increasing energy prices and the demands of the low carbon economy. The project proponent felt that the project met this aim, stating a key outcome of the project as that of having produced “an accessible, usable set of tools that demonstrates that it delivers cost savings to industry, using a skills and workforce development approach.”

**Immediate outputs/outcomes**

**Outcomes at pilot sites:** Evaluation of the program’s impact at the pilot sites indicated that as a result of the project, three of the four participating sites now exceed the industry average benchmark in the performance of their energy management systems. Most sites also reported making cost savings beyond the subsidised fee for participation as a result of the program. According to participants, these cost savings came as a result of employees becoming more engaged in improving processes and finding solutions at the workplace. Partners also described how a whole of enterprise workforce development approach was evident at pilot sites. On the job training was conducted at several of the sites, including small shopfloor ‘toolbox talk’ training sessions. Other structures for communicating and engaging with staff around sustainability issues were also developed in enterprises. These provided employees with the tools to identify where sustainable practices could be implemented and to replicate the planning processes senior managers had learnt during training sessions. Several sites developed cost-neutral programs whereby the workforce as a whole assessed current practices and identified improvements in resource use, which resulted in substantial cost savings.

**Workforce development training kit:** Outputs included a workforce development kit comprising practice guides, training modules and tools. This is an open access resource available online, located on the Agrifood website. It includes detailed instructions on how to apply the tools in the context of regular business planning forums at a food processing site. The key target audience for the kit is Tier-2 food processing companies (largely single site SMEs), located mainly but not exclusively in regional Australia. The materials can be used by universities, vocational trainers and industry and enterprise-based trainers.

**Resources developed in the kit include:** a mapping report that explains the links between the Carbonproof skill sets learning outcomes and formal VET qualifications; results of sustainability and green skills surveys conducted with industry and demonstration sites; and a case study of the training approach used in the Carbonproof program. The proponent described the kit as a workforce development tool that would help small companies “use a skills approach” to stay more competitive.
and respond to the carbon tax, which was implemented at the same time as the Carbonproof kit was made publicly available.

**Longer term impacts**

**Case studies**: Key learnings from the project were distilled in case studies of the pilot sites which were included in the practice guides within the kit and presented at regional sustainability seminars held after the Carbonproof program. The case studies include samples of pilot sites’ Carbonproof management plans and analysis of the skills needed to implement plans. The central theme that emerged from case studies was that companies need a range of advice and support in preparing for sustainability challenges. Diagnostics and technical “fixes” alone are not enough: cases demonstrated how ‘exemplar’ companies focus on the needs of senior management and engage their workforce with a view to securing cultural change.

**Sustainability seminars**: A further outcome was the conduct of national sustainability awareness seminars attended by 150 food companies. These included case studies and presentations by senior managers who had completed the Carbonproof program and who shared their ‘best practice learnings’ with other managers and company owners in attendance.

**Dissemination of resources to training providers and ‘training the trainers’**: Project partners described the extensive impact of the project as a result of dissemination of the tools among training providers. The project partners had undertaken efforts to inform a significant number of RTOs about the availability of the kit and a recent survey indicated that TAFE practitioners have been accessing, and using material from, the Carbonproof tools. The project partners also reported widespread contact with private consultants, TAFEs, private RTOs, the NSW Government, and individual sites which had used the tools and templates to deliver training. In addition, the governments of Queensland, Tasmania and News South Wales had funded the partners to conduct diagnostic workshops which explained the use of the toolkit to RTOs and managers from food manufacturing sites and provided training in how to use the materials. The project proponent felt the high level of use of the Carbonproof tools within the food processing industry was largely due to these workshops, which were well-attended. AgriFood and Energetics are continuing to hold these workshops on an ongoing, fee-for-service basis for organisations, such as Chambers of Commerce, who request their assistance. The tools are also publicised by means of the AgriFood website and by AgriFood staff building stakeholder awareness of them in the course of daily networking and communication activities.

**Use of the tools by NSW Government**: The New South Wales Government has used the tools in three programs running at the time of research interviews. This included use by the NSW Government State Training Services, which has endorsed the Carbonproof program, put it on their website, and used the program materials as the basis of a series of energy efficiency VET training and practitioner initiatives. The NSW Government had also used the tools as the basis for a small business basic energy efficiency training program they have recently funded and developed. And the NSW Department of Education and Training has funded a series of “train the trainer” style programs conducted by Energetics for the training sector, to promote use of the kit as one component of their sustainability training for the manufacturing sector in NSW. The project proponent, AgriFood, intends to continue promoting the program to other State governments, and to training providers in the sector.
Use of the tools in other industry sectors: The manufacturing sector ISC (Manufacturing Skills Australia) has used the tools as the basis for a foundry program that they are currently conducting (also funded under the WIP). In addition, AgriFood has received government funding from another source to modify the tools to contextualise them to other agrifoods sectors (dairy, winemaking and meat processing) and to brief training providers in these sectors on the use of the tools.

Use of the material in other manufacturing sector training packages: Manufacturing Skills Australia has examined the content of the Carbonproof tools in reviewing and revising the Manufacturing Training Package and Sustainability Training packages. As a consequence the ISC has added to the packages, or recommended adding, Carbonproof material on ‘soft skills’, culture change, and energy procurement.

Building new networks and collaborative relationships: A key outcome identified by the proponent was the networks and relationships that they as an ISC were able to build with a “particularly vulnerable industry cohort” of food processing SMEs by means of the pilots and seminars. The seminars acted as the gateway for AgriFood to establish relationships with a wholly new constituency of around 150 food processing employers. They have subsequently been able to help some of these employers to build their workforce capacity by performing training needs analyses or assisting their applications for funding for skill development through government funds such as the NWDF. In addition, sustainability working groups of food processing employers have been initiated in four regions around Australia and regional seminars have opened dialogue around regional and sectoral eco-efficiency initiatives between organisations such as the NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, regional development agencies, the Australian Food and Grocery Council and AgriFood.

The SEE program
The idea for the SEE project emerged following an analysis of workforce development offerings (courses and workshops) relating to sustainability and green skills which was conducted as part of the Carbonproof project. This analysis demonstrated that there were no courses available that focused exclusively on senior managers and owners of SME food processors which were tailored to their specific needs and characteristics: namely, the ‘vulnerable’ nature of the food manufacturing sector and courses of a short length, given time and workload constraints faced by SME senior managers. SEE was developed to fill this gap.

An additional evaluation of the experiences of training and seminar participants in the Carbonproof program highlighted a range of unmet needs with regard to sustainability skills. These included a need for: one-on-one mentoring at the workplace; for expert workplace diagnostics to identify technical improvements and solutions; and a need for heightened awareness of future regulatory trends and skill needs pertaining to sustainability. As a consequence, Agrifood decided to run the SEE pilot program, which would combine mentoring with university-level strategic management curricula and “nuts and bolts solutions, diagnostics”. The style of program delivery was considered innovative and unique by project partners in terms of its combination of theoretical and practical program elements.

The SEE program ran from February to December 2012. It involved the development of five modules of a postgraduate-level program for senior executives, to “build a culture of capability for sustainability”. Project partners from UWS developed presentation materials and conducted a review of existing postgraduate programs focused on sustainability which were offered around Australia. The
review found that only a few generic programs relating to sustainability existed, and none addressed food processing as a sector.

As in the Carbonproof program, SEE began with a round of sustainability forums held in key regional locations throughout states, again targeting owners and senior managers of small to medium food processing businesses, training providers and other food industry stakeholders. Issues covered during the forums included global trends and business drivers, promotion of the Carbonproof program and the outcomes from the program, diagnostics and examples of ‘quick-wins’ for energy and carbon management. Presenters included experts from Energetics, and a highly regarded recently retired senior executive from a leading food processing company who participated in the Carbonproof program and who provided a case study of the benefits gained from introducing a culture of sustainability to the enterprise’s workforce and operations.

The SEE training program involved 25 senior managers from 12 companies with training conducted off-site at venues in Gippsland and Southern Queensland. The short training course was a blend of postgraduate level curricula (‘lecturing’) and Carbonproof workforce development kit material (‘training’). Lecturers from UWS delivered content relating to theoretical frameworks and a trainer and a food engineer from Energetics delivered the practical Carbonproof element in demonstration sessions focused on business planning using company-level data. This was described by the proponent as successfully fusing university-level learning with a VET competencies approach, which was in many ways a demanding process.

Participants also conducted an in-company project focused on an element of sustainability, and were assisted in this by mentors and skills coaches. Mentoring was provided by experienced CEOs of other companies, some of whom were involved in Carbonproof. These individuals profiled case studies of initiatives in their organisations or provided support to participants in the completion of course elements. The UWS and Energetics staff who delivered the training also provided ongoing help to participants with assignments and projects.

The course content encouraged the involvement of all employees at a site in that managers were assisted to develop a decision-making matrix to establish the key priorities that needed to be addressed in their organisation. They would then take the matrix to the workforce to ‘workshop’ it and establish the three key areas in need of instant attention. Participants were then provided with practical training on how they could work with their employees to find solutions to problems.

Project partners reported that participants in the program were consistently enthusiastic and highly participative throughout the program, but began the program at different points on the learning ‘journey’ towards sustainable practice. One noted “One of the problems here was you had people with a lot of experience who are already on the sustainability journey, quite sophisticated. You had others who were starting from scratch and had no idea at all.” Participants themselves reported high satisfaction with the training program, according to the proponent, who also believed that development of the program had “raised the bar” for sustainability training targeted at managers.

**Immediate outcomes/outputs**

**The creation of communities of practice:** Opportunities were built into the SEE program for CEOs to have discussions with their peers about “business opportunities that were framed in sustainability terms”. Owner-managers and CEOs of companies who participated in the program have formed...
communities of practice, where they network and communicate with each other on an ongoing basis. A proponent described how AgriFood facilitated the creation of these informal networks, stating, “for this work, you need to have a lot of trust. We spent a lot of time developing the network and I would say half the value here was creating a dialogue of equals between companies in the sector”. However it was suggested that the longer term continuation of these networks may be reliant on the support of a coordinating body such as AgriFood.

**Supply chain collaboration:** Involvement in the SEE program provided participants with the opportunity to explore innovative ways of collaborating with other companies in their supply chain on a range of sustainability initiatives. There was also collaboration between companies involved in the program who discovered they were part of the same supply chains, and knowledge-sharing about sustainability initiatives (for example recycling programs) between participants in the program. Other examples of innovation included the development of a product that used less water by one company, and two participant companies in the same supply chain conducting a feasibility process to explore consolidating their operations on one site. The key drivers for these innovations were rising energy and distribution costs.

**Longer term impacts**
AgriFood made an application to Enterprise Connect to request that they implement the SEE program around Australia. However Enterprise Connect were unable to take on this dissemination role on the basis that the project had already received federal government funding. Other longer term impacts of the project were however discernible, and include the following:

**Dissemination sustainability seminars:** Once the SEE training course is completed, the project proponent intends to run another series of sustainability seminars to publicise the program, which effectively also involves publicity of the Carbonproof tools. These workshops will allow the proponent to gain further feedback from RTOs on the extent of their use of the Carbonproof tools to date.

**Potential development of a postgraduate program:** An aim of the SEE project was for the UWS partner to explore ways of linking it to postgraduate university programs. To that extent, UWS is in the planning stages of designing a postgraduate program in its Masters of Business program of a similar nature (focused on the cultural aspects of sustainability in business) which will use the content of the SEE course as a basis, but will be aimed at the broader manufacturing sector.

**Raising capacity in the sector:** As a result of both programs AgriFoods recognised a need to “raise best practice” in training needs analysis around sustainability. They have developed a specific set of questions that a skills needs analyst can use to assess a company’s sustainability and energy skills workforce development practices and have applied this in a number of sites at the request of managers.

**Potential case studies of site-level impacts:** There is potential for a series of case studies to be produced from the program which will profile impacts at the workplace level and allow for continued publicity of the program. The proponent planned to conduct site-level impact evaluations at specified intervals after participants had completed the course, which will provide the content for case studies.
A2.3 Projects relating to Apprenticeship support

WIP 185: Australian Apprenticeships Retention Project

This project assessed the impact of mentoring on apprenticeship retention rates. The proponent was MEGT, a large not for profit organisation in Australia and the UK offering various means of support to apprenticeships. The WIP funded a study that compared 710 apprentices who received mentoring in the first six months of their apprenticeship with 675 apprentices with similar characteristics who received no mentoring. While there have been several studies on apprentice mentoring, the proponent could find none that undertook such a study with a control group.

The project was delivered in 2010 across three regions identified as priority employment areas under the Keep Australia Working Program: South East Melbourne in Victoria, Western Sydney in New South Wales and the Ipswich Logan region in Queensland. The apprentices were employed in the Services and Hospitality, Building and construction, and Manufacturing and Automotive industries.

The mentoring activity entailed predominantly face-to-face visits from a mentor in each state over the first six months of the apprenticeship, with some follow-up social media contact via Facebook and Twitter. One of the mentors was seconded to perform the role from within the proponent organisation while the other two were recruited specifically for the project.

The research component of the study was designed by a consultancy group experienced in education surveys. They ensured robust population sampling of the study participants and relevant control groups, as well as designing and conducting a survey of participants which captured their perceptions and experiences of the mentoring program.

Key findings

While the survey provided important information about the mentoring process from the perspective of the apprentices, such as their reluctance to use Facebook and Twitter and the overall high satisfaction rating for the mentoring program, there were also critical insights about the project that did not appear in any of the written reports. The following key issues were gleaned from an interview with the project proponent.

- The project proponent believed that the mentoring was most effective for people that fell into particular risk categories, such as: very young people, people living away from home, people with low literacy and numeracy skills, and people apprenticed to small employers. These factors were not examined in the quantitative research; rather they were discerned from reflection on the mentoring activity by the mentors and the project proponent.
- Mentors were called upon to assist apprentices in a range of ways. They included providing information, advocacy and personal support, and advising them on other sources of support and information. The proponent gave examples of apprentices being fearful of returning to work because they had got lost on the way to TAFE, or had failed to get a medical certificate when ill. These were the types of simple dilemmas that could result in an apprentice contemplating resignation.
- In a small number of cases mentors were called upon to support apprentices in moments of critical personal need.
- Mentoring continued to have a positive effect on retention rates at the 12 month mark. In the two states where contact with mentors ceased, the retention gap between participants and
the control group closed. In the state where informal mentoring continued, the retention gap remained. This suggests that on-going mentoring across at least the first year of an apprenticeship was important.

- The proponent intentionally chose mentors that had skills and experience in social welfare rather than trades qualifications and trades experience. This was based on the belief that the social support skills were more critical and would service the needs of most apprentices. Recruiting mentors with trade skills would have been unviable, as the proponent said, “Which trade skills? The project didn’t allow 25 mentors, one for each trade.”
- It is likely that mentors well versed in the apprenticeship system are particularly suited to this form of mentoring as they are able to provide detailed advice on procedures that can be difficult to navigate. The project proponent qualified this by saying that skills in social welfare were essential, while knowledge of the training and apprenticeship system were desirable.
- Mentors have to do a lot of out-of-hours telephone work to communicate with apprentices, when it best suits the apprentice and when the need arises.
- Most apprentices did not take up the option of keeping in contact with mentors via Facebook or Twitter. It was thought by the proponent that this was because people are likely to separate social spaces from work.
- Twitter went almost entirely unused by the apprentice demographic.

Outcomes
According to the quantitative data, mentoring did have a slight positive effect on apprentice retention rates across the project. Six months after start up, retention rates across the project were 3.4 percentage points higher amongst apprentices who received mentoring compared with those who did not.

However, there were reportable groups that did significantly better out of the mentoring than their counterparts in the control group. They were female apprentices (11.4 percentage points difference), and those in services and hospitality apprenticeships (9.4 per cent), and building and construction apprenticeships (9 per cent).

Impacts
Since the completion of the project the proponent has been awarded a large government contract to deliver mentoring to apprentices, applying the model developed from their experience of the WIP project. This included contacting all apprentices, screening them for risk factors, and then providing high level support to those that are categorised as high risk.

They are also investigating the viability of an online forum to fill in the trade expertise gap in the knowledge of the social welfare mentors. A peer support website in the United Kingdom, The Horse’s Mouth, is an example identified by the proponent of such a site.
WIP 186: Apprenticeship Framework - Catalysing Change in the Resources Sector

The aim of this project was to produce a web-based workforce development and planning resource, aimed at mining industry employers, to provide them with the information needed “to take a coordinated approach to the lifecycle of onsite apprentices (apprenticeship recruitment, management, and development) by addressing workplace systems and practices”. The ultimate aim of the project was to improve the recruitment, retention and management of apprentices in mining in the context of impending shortages of trade-qualified staff, low ratios of apprentices to tradespeople, and high apprentice attrition rates.

The project proponent was the Mining Industry Skills Centre, subsequently re-named Kinetic Group (a not-for-profit skills consultancy offering advisory services to the resources sector). The project ran for an 18 month period from mid-2010 to early 2012. The website was launched in September 2011 at the proponent’s annual conference, which was attended mainly by Queensland-based RTOs and resources sector companies.

Project activities and outputs comprised first, an online survey of resource sector companies, contractors, group training organisations (GTOs) and training providers, which was issued via email, industry networks and forums. The survey was conducted to determine the level of assistance the industry required in the next five to ten years to increase apprentice numbers, and to assess apprentice recruitment and attrition rates and the types of apprenticeship programs organisations had in place or were planning to implement. Second, an analysis of literature pertaining to apprenticeships was undertaken to derive website content. Third, four case studies were conducted to showcase examples of good practice apprenticeship program management in mining companies, and these were profiled on the web resource. Fourth, the web-based tool was created, labelled The Apprenticeship Framework, and was located on Kinetic’s website. The website provides guidance and examples of best practice approaches to the recruitment, retention and development of apprentices. It provides tools, information and advice relating to: the effective recruitment of apprentices; how to choose between employing an apprentice, hiring through a GTO, or a combination of both; understanding the rights and responsibilities of both parties; developing appropriate workplace environments; and choosing an RTO that suits enterprise requirements.

Internal groupings within the proponent organisation played a role in reviewing and critiquing project materials throughout the framework’s development. They included Kinetic’s Strategic Leaders Group (comprising representatives from resource and contracting companies, regulatory bodies, government authorities and ISCs across Queensland, New South Wales and New Zealand); its Apprenticeship Taskforce (consisting of mining and support companies, unions, RTOs and training industry stakeholders) and industry training networks (located throughout Queensland, comprising training and safety professionals).

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12 Minimal information on the usage or impact of the tool developed was collected as the final report submitted to the WIP fund appeared to be written prior to the website’s launch, and all individuals from Kinetic who were involved in the WIP project had left the organisation prior to research interviews. The interviewee from the proponent organisation had been employed following the project’s completion and was unable to report on its impact.

13 The achieved sample size was not reported by the proponent organisation in the final report or known by the proponent interviewee.
Impact beyond the project completion date

Relatively little promotion of the resource had been undertaken by the proponent or other organisations. The proponents had publicised the development of the resource to member organisations in newsletters during the project timespan and had launched the resource at its annual conference. The final report submitted to the WIP fund stated that a meeting was held of Kinetic’s Strategic Leaders’ Group in June 2011 to discuss the possibility of obtaining funding “to take the Framework to the next level”. However the proponent interviewee was unable to recount any strategies of this nature that had been put in place to publicise, extend or sustain the resource’s use beyond the website’s launch in September 2011.

The proponent organisation had experienced high staff turnover in recent years. All staff involved in the development of the Framework had now left the organisation. A proponent interviewee described how staff new to the organisation had little knowledge of available resources that were developed prior to their arrival at Kinetic, including the Apprenticeship Framework. There was a lack of awareness relating to the resource’s background, its history of development, or its use. The proponent stressed the need for the organisation to develop strategies to ensure that resources such as the Framework appeared on the radar of internal and external stakeholders, in a context of considerable fluidity in the proponent and stakeholder organisations:

Knowledge Management strategies post development phase would be beneficial for all products that are developed. Otherwise there is a risk of key people leaving, and that’s it for the product (the Framework). There’s no sustainability for it. This is something that we’ve identified for this organisation, that there needs to be, for every product that we develop, a plan of how you’re going to get it out there - a marketing plan. ... because for the RTOs who use our resources, they’re turning over out there as well.

The proponent agreed that strategies for the promotion of resources should be built into initial project plans, noting that promotions needed to be targeted to organisations which explicitly identified how those organisations would benefit from using the resource. They felt that the resource, if publicised appropriately, would be valuable to employers in a range of industries and states outside of the Queensland mining sector, adding “it’s certainly something that a lot of people have been asking for and would find useful.” However, the proponent interviewee did not see a role for Kinetic in publicising the resource beyond hosting it on their website, and noted that there were no plans for promotion of the tool in the future. Neither had the relevant industry skills council (SkillsDMC) and other organisations publicised the resource among industry stakeholders.

Given the lack of promotion, the proponent was concerned that interest in the resource would wane over time, with usage dwindling. They suggested that usage might increase if the resource was accessible on a central repository website which consolidated or listed all workforce development resources. An example of such a site is the Service Skills Australia’s Taking the Lead website, which is the one-stop shop for information and advice on developing core language, literacy and numeracy skills in the service industries. This site provides information to help RTOs and employers, including a searchable resource directory of Language, Literacy and Numeracy resources that have been developed.

At the time of research interviews, website traffic stood at around 150 unique visitors over the most recent three month period. The proponent was unable to identify whether the number of visitors was
higher or lower than the organisation had anticipated or had aimed for. They assumed that most traffic to the Framework website was via Kinetic’s website or through visitors typing keywords such as ‘apprentices’ into search engines. Kinetic had received a small number of telephone calls from organisations in sectors other than mining who had accessed the website and subsequently sought information or permission to use the Framework’s content.

The proponent organisation had not sought feedback or evaluation data from users of the resource on its effectiveness, usability, content or potential improvements. However the interviewee reported that they had received positive feedback on the resource from users (Human Resources and training managers) in the larger Queensland-based mining companies on Kinetic’s Strategic Leaders Group. While the ultimate aim of the project was to improve the retention, recruitment and management of apprentices in the sector, no evidence had been sought as to whether this aim had been achieved as a result of usage of the tool.

**WIP 229: Illawarra Business Chamber Industry Apprenticeships Project**

The Illawarra region, with its high youth unemployment rate, has over the last decade experienced structural change leading to a decline in large employers taking on apprentices and an increase in the proportion of SMEs in the local economy. It is estimated that four out of every five new jobs in the region are in SMEs. The drop in apprenticeship numbers has coincided with a growing scarcity of skilled tradespeople. In response to these factors a coalition of community, industry and government parties formed a committee which is focussed on increasing the uptake and retention of Australian Apprenticeships in the Illawarra. The WIP project follows a series of other commonwealth funded initiatives generated by this committee.¹⁴

The WIP project provided a catalyst for engaging, or re-engaging SMEs into trades training and creating pathways to apprenticeships for youth, mature aged and Indigenous people in the Illawarra region. It was run out of the Illawarra Business Chamber and was staffed by a fulltime project officer.

The project activities included providing SMEs with information and advice on training options for apprenticeships and available incentives and referring SMEs to other agencies providing assistance. SMEs were offered a full recruitment service including sourcing, profiling and assessing candidates, arranging interviews, and advising candidates of outcomes.

The project officer also provided advice and assistance to prospective apprentices by supporting them to choose pathways and careers, helping them to navigate the apprenticeship system, referring them to other agencies that might provide support, and assisting them with the transition to a workplace. This included teaching interview skills and presentation techniques, assisting in the drafting of resumes and application forms and letters, and directing candidates to helpful sites for information and tools. The project officer also maintained a Facebook page that advertised vacancies and events useful to candidates.

¹⁴ The committee was formed in 2000 and it appears that the Illawarra Industry Apprenticeships Project received the following estimated funding prior to the WIP: 2004 - $108,000; 2005 – $125, 200; 2007 - $894,300 (over three years).

Key features of the project

Issues associated with placing job seekers in apprenticeships

- The project officer observed that some very good candidates for apprenticeships presented poorly at interview and missed opportunities as a result. The project officer was able to call on many years of experience as a recruiter to advise candidates to good effect.
- They stressed the importance of listening to what the candidate wanted to do, what they were good at, and the type of career that might suit them best and cautioned against sending candidates to courses and interviews for jobs that they did not want. This disillusioned employers as well as job seekers and could lead to withdrawal from the apprentice system.
- Pre-vocational courses were particularly useful in exposing candidates to industry realities as well as improving job-readiness and making them more attractive to prospective employers. There was greater and more durable success for these candidates.
- Job seekers appeared to be frequently unaware of the services that were available to them and how best to access them. The project officer felt the ‘one stop shop’ provided by the project was critical for improving both the engagement of employers and employees. The linking up of all available services and advice at the local level made seeking advice and support much more attractive and beneficial.
- It was the observation of the project officer that young people and their families can be reluctant to use employment services due to negative experiences. The project officer received several reports that young people had been “sent away and told to come back in three to six months”, and that others had high turnover amongst their case officers which had precluded “getting to know” the candidate, which she regarded as critical for those who found the apprentice seeking process difficult.
- The use of technology was of critical importance for the project. It created efficiencies that allowed them to expand and maximise the reach and impact of the project. One example was the use of peer-to-peer referrals for jobs that took place via the project Facebook page.

Issues associated with bringing SMEs into the apprenticeship system

- The brokerage service provided to SMEs was critical for bringing them into apprenticeships. They generally did not have the resources and capacity to easily navigate the system. Providing them with ‘prepared candidates’ and dealing with the administrative processes associated with employing apprentices, led to increased SME engagement.
- However there were other structural problems that kept SMEs out of the apprenticeship system. The downturn experienced by large employers remaining in the Illawarra and medium sized manufacturing was flowing on to reduced orders for SMEs in their supply chains. And SMEs were reluctant to take on apprentices that they may not be able to keep in work.
- Involving SMEs in apprenticeships has been come increasingly difficult over the last couple of years as growing numbers of apprentices leave for the mining industry in their third and fourth years. This is creating further reluctance amongst SMEs as the investments made in the early years of supporting apprenticeships are being lost to the mining sector. Conversely employers recruiting third or fourth year apprentices are very happy for the cost savings this allows them.
Benefits associated with the structure and governance of the project

- The broad (and politically bi-partisan) membership of the local committee was powerful in creating a range of funding opportunities for the project. It was felt by projects parties that this has played a part in the on-going funding of apprenticeship initiatives since 2004.
- The regional nature of the project brought the committee together for a common purpose. As they were all dedicated to the improvement of apprenticeship prospects to sustain the local area, there were no ‘turf wars’ and people, organisations and agencies worked collaboratively to find solutions. The project officer wondered whether the same degree of cohesion was possible in all locations.
- The brokerage being run out of a local employer association gave the project kudos and credibility amongst employers as well as providing the project with direct access to SMEs. It also engendered cross-referrals, and the employer association could provide ongoing advice and support to low capacity SMEs taking on apprentices.

Outcomes

In the final 12 months of the project the project officer: assisted 130 job candidates into apprenticeships with over a 70 per cent retention rate; assisted and interviewed 220 job seekers; and gave presentations to more than 200 pre-vocational TAFE students.

Impacts

Beyond the statistics, the project officer identified a series of impacts that suggests that work on increasing apprentice uptake is poised to continue in the Illawarra in some form. The WiP project successfully:

- Built links between relevant stakeholders including TAFEs, local job service providers, group training companies and other government funded agencies, enabling collaboration on creating viable apprenticeships.
- Consolidated and continued the work of the local committee which has been powerful in focussing effort on the issues of apprentices in the region.
- Created mechanisms and resources that continue to be used to promote apprenticeships in the region, including the project’s Facebook page and fact sheets.
- The project officer continues to work in the apprenticeship ‘project’ in the region, now providing mentoring services to Illawarra apprentices. They have continued to use the knowledge and experienced gained in the WIP project to perform that role.
- Hundreds of employers have been educated in the benefits of apprenticeships for their businesses, their industries and the region.

The Illawarra Industry Apprenticeships Project continues through the auspices of the committee and out of the offices of the local Chamber. While the brokerage and recruitment services that were offered through the WIP project are no longer provided, mentoring services continue to be delivered to young apprentices in the region and school advisory services to school leavers, under separate DIISRTE funding. It should be noted that the support provided by the WIP project to mature aged and some Indigenous apprentices has not been sustained.
A2.4 Projects relating to Innovation

WIP 163: Online Workforce Innovation Survey Tool Project

This project involved the development and testing of an online diagnostic tool to help organisations assess and develop the innovative capacity of their workforce. The project proponent was Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA), an ISC for the business services, education, IT, cultural industries, financial services and printing and graphic arts industries. IBSA contracted the project management function to the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI), as AHRI’s members (HR professionals) were the target audience for the tool. A software development company (iedex) was subcontracted by AHRI to develop the online tool and resources and the project was guided by a steering committee of industry stakeholders. It ran from early 2010 until early 2011.

The genesis of the project lay in research commissioned by IBSA, which was conducted by the Society for Knowledge Economics (SKE) to investigate the availability of diagnostic tools that allowed organisations to assess the scope for workplace innovation. The SKE research included a literature review and feedback from stakeholders. It uncovered a paper-based innovation tool developed by the Conference Board of Canada in 2002, which SKE then modified for Australian use, subsequently recommending that this be converted into a more flexible online tool in order to encourage wider usage. IBSA then obtained funding from WIP to adapt this tool to an online platform and to commission the development of an online training program for potential users of the tool.

AHRI was responsible for recruiting member organisations to pilot the tool to assess its effectiveness and provide feedback to the project partners. Four pilot organisations were involved, a much lower number than the 10 to 12 pilot organisations the partners had planned for, despite considerable efforts to recruit participants from within IBSA and AHRI databases. A partner explained, “It simply was difficult to get people involved in the project … there just wasn't a lot of interest in the tools”. Modifications were made to the tool as a result of feedback from users during the pilot phase. Project partners also reflected that insufficient time was allotted in the project timeframe to recruit the required number of participants, adding that in hindsight, low interest in the tool at this stage in the project suggested a need for the re-scoping, re-design, or re-consideration of the viability of the project.

Immediate outcomes: development of the tool and extent of usage

The tool, as developed, breaks innovation up into four domains or pillars relating to generating ideas, risk-taking, workplace relationship effectiveness, and turning ideas into products, processes and services. The level of innovation in relation to each is assessed by means of a gap analysis. This is done by comparing two subjective measures: first, the extent to which an individual perceives that they demonstrate a desired innovation skill; and second, the perceived importance of an innovation skill to a particular job or job function. In doing so, the tool allows the calculation of the innovation skills gap between the individual and their job function.

Project partners reflected that the project was successful in terms of achieving the proposed aims of developing and delivering the tool, but was less successful in terms of achieving wide usage of the tool or building innovative capacity in workplaces. In the 14-month period between June 2011 and August 2012, there were 950 visits to the website hosting the tool. This was considered by the software developer to be a low level of traffic. Of those who registered to use the product, the largest
groups tended to be professionals in HR, accounting and administration, as well as some users from a particular TAFE which had a relationship with the proponent organisation. Partners noted that outside of visitors to the website, an organisation called the Hargraves Institute (a member-based, consultancy organisation with a mission to “improve innovation performance”) had used the tool in workshops with client organisations. However they had opted to use the paper-based version of the tool as this was easier to use in workshop settings, and because of concerns regarding the online version’s security and access.

The low usage of the tool meant that the project’s impact has been muted. As one interviewee reflected, “Unfortunately I don’t think there have been significant impacts as yet. I’d like to think they will still come and that we will still be able to get some greater usage of the tool and the resources.” All project partners stated that usage of the tool was lower than they had expected and that they were surprised by this. This was in spite of ongoing efforts from the partner organisations to promote the product. The software developer stated, “The lack of response and the lack of usage of the tool, despite talking to many people in many different ways, has been a surprise to me … the disinterest is surprising to me”. Similarly, another partner noted, “A lot of HR resources are very expensive and costly to use, so I was somewhat surprised at the lack of interest from the HR profession in using this tool.” The concept of innovation as the key to productivity and business improvements was central to government thinking and HR managers were believed to be the natural target audience and proponents for implementation. However Section 4.1 indicates that that early market testing might have detected and/or addressed the potential for low uptake of the product.

Despite low usage of the tool and training resources, the partners were favourable in their appraisal of the project’s outputs, describing the tool as a “terrific, quality tool”, and the training and tool together as “robust resources”. One partner added that “Everyone who’s used it has liked it very much”. Several project partners intuited that usage was low because potential users did not value, or were cynical about, free resources as they held the view that a product “can’t be good if it’s free”. However the partners had not conducted research among stakeholders to establish whether such views were widespread, and if so, whether this presented a barrier to usage. As noted in section 4.1, there was a view among some project partners that developing innovative capacity was not a first-order priority for organisations. The software developer recounted how, when informing clients that their organisation could customise the tool to meet their needs, a common response remained, “Oh gee, you know, we've got so many other priorities, it’s on the back burner and it's probably going to stay there for a while. Business is tough, money is short, so thanks but no thanks.” The software developer suggested that uptake may be low due to the fact that generic ‘public program’ training had waned in popularity with organisations now preferring customised, in house training tailored to the specific needs of the client organisation.

The web-based tool allows for organisations and individuals to benchmark their innovative capacity against that of other tool users and enables collation of data for groups and sub groups within organisations. The software developer considered that the tool was innovative in terms of its capacity to allow organisations to benchmark their results against those of similar organisations, and for individuals to benchmark their results against others with similar demographic profiles. However, the lack of use of the tool meant that there was an insufficient ‘base’ of demographics or results for users to benchmark against. In addition, an evaluation of the tool’s usage following the pilot period found that the registration process was quite complex, as it required significant demographic data from
users to build a base of data for benchmarking against other users, and against individual users’ previous results. Because of difficulties registering, users were leaving the website prior to registering their details. One partner noted “... we were finding that people were going in, starting the process and deciding it was just too hard and dropping off.” Feedback indicated that users preferred to access the tool without first registering. Accordingly the software developers removed the upfront registration requirement and instead gave users the option to register having completed the survey. This change, according to the software developer, had “made a bit of a difference to the usage rate” since it was implemented in May 2012.

A second feature of the tool is that it allows for consultant organisations to advertise their offerings. Where completion of the survey indicates that an individual or organisation has a gap in innovative capacity in some respect, tool users may then access the details of consultants, trainers or coaches who may assist them in developing the workforce to address diagnosed gaps in workforce capability (on a user-pays, fee for work basis). This was considered a highly innovative aspect of the tool by the software developer. However no HR providers or consultants had registered their companies on the site despite AHRI repeatedly publicising, among member organisations on their corporate sales database, the opportunity for providers to the HR profession to register their products and services on the site, free of charge. A partner felt that this was not considered an attractive proposition among vendors, due to low usage of the site.

**Longer term impacts**

IBSA continues to resource the website’s hosting and ongoing maintenance costs and expects to fund the site until usage is deemed too low to justify continued resourcing.

**Attempts to market and promote use of the tool:** Section 4.1 notes suggestions by a project partner that a marketing plan, developed at the project inception phase, would have provided a roadmap for strategies to ensure higher uptake of the product. IBSA convened a meeting of the proponent and partners in March 2012 to consider strategies that could be implemented to further promote and market the tool. The partner organisations (IBSA, AHRI and the software developers) have recognised the need to market the website more extensively and all three have endeavoured to do so via their member organisations, networks and websites. They have held successive informal meetings to develop strategies to drive more traffic towards the site. IBSA and AHRI have made the tool available through their websites, which link to the source website. The software developer believed that most traffic to the site was coming via the IBSA and AHRI sites as a result of these organisations publicising the tools within their networks. At the time of research interviews, the AHRI site was undergoing redevelopment and it was expected that links to the tool would be positioned more prominently on the re-designed site. AHRI also intended to, once again, publicise the opportunity for HR consultants to register as vendors once the tool was positioned more prominently on the AHRI site and the project partners had developed a plan for promoting the tool.

AHRI publicised public workshops on use of the tool to their stakeholder base of 50,000 HR practitioners, however these did not attract interest. It then offered training consultancy services to companies (where AHRI administers in-house training programs for companies on use of the tool) but again, these attracted no interest. An AHRI partner felt that interest was low because organisations tended to resource training and skills development that was essential to employees’ role rather than funding training in less critical areas of development such as innovative capacity.
Evaluation of impact at the workplace level: No evaluation had been undertaken within organisations that had used the tool to assess whether innovative capacity had been raised, although the proponent stated that there was “anecdotal evidence that people have found it very useful.”

**WIP 217: Interactive Skills Integration Scheme (ISIS)**

At the inception of the Interactive Skills Integration Scheme (ISIS) project in 2010 the Australian interactive media (IM) and games industry\(^{15}\) was experiencing a downturn which was contributing to business failures. Games development enterprises, in particular, were finding it increasingly difficult to secure contracts to sustain their operations due to the high Australian dollar, increasing competition from overseas, and the general volatility of such high tech evolving industries. Paradoxically enrolments in interactive media and gaming training courses were growing while jobs were drying up and industry complained of skill shortages. ISIS grew out of that context, with the soon-to-be project director proposing a strategy to investigate how to reverse those trends. The stated aims of ISIS were to establish ways to:

- Improve career outcomes for gaming graduates;
- Better equip graduates to meet the needs of industry, and;
- Increase take-up of interactive media services by firms in other sectors.

The project had three specific streams of activity reflecting those inter-connected aims: the analysis of education and training offerings for interactive media and gaming qualifications; three demonstration partnerships of interactive media companies with non-interactive media (mainstream) companies; and the placement of student interns in each of the case studies.

The project was funded by the WIP to undertake the project with case studies in NSW and Queensland. The third case study, based in Victoria, was funded by the Victoria Department of Business and Innovation.

**Key feature of the ISIS project**

An important feature of the ISIS project is the degree of expertise and experience that resided in the group that oversaw, managed and conducted the project. The team was made up of personnel from the Creative Industries Innovation Centre (CIIC) at the University of Technology, Sydney, the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI), and Creative Enterprise Australia (CEA) at Queensland University of Technology, the key Australian centres for research in creative industries and their business development. These parties to the project brought with them a deep understanding of the industries of interest, strong networks in the sector, and high level academic and research skills, particularly in the area of innovation.

This project appears to have benefitted significantly from the collaboration of industry with academia. The scope for innovative activity for both interactive media and non-interactive media industries has increased as a consequence, guided by the knowledge and experience of academic researchers and

\(^{15}\) The ‘interactive media and games industry’ relates to enterprises that are engaged in the development and design of digital processes, products and services that allow for user interaction. The games industry, a sub-sector within the interactive media industry, is involved in building increasingly interactive computer generated games. This involves the use of high-end technical and creative skills. There is a growing demand for interactive media skills across the economy, including the use of ‘gamification’ of products and services, as well as other creative and technical means of digitising aspects of mainstream businesses.
industry practitioners. This in turn has furthered the academic and practitioner understanding of innovation in practice.

**The education and training stream - building knowledge of interactive media and gaming**

This part of the project investigated the state of education and training for the development of interactive media and gaming skills. Initially a desk-based analysis of previous work in the area was conducted. This confirmed that there is a widely held perception amongst employers in the digital gaming industry that students were graduating without the skills industry required. The ISIS education team then gathered intelligence from educators in the university and VET sectors to enable a review of courses that were on offer. This required a painstaking process of identifying institutions offering relevant courses; finding the relevant personnel involved in course design, delivery and administration; and then conducting three stages of surveys amongst that population. The questionnaires covered issues relating to course content, articulation between VET and university, and engagement with industry.

**Key findings from the education stream:**

The Education report provides a comprehensive list of key findings and related recommendations. The following extract from the report is a summary of the key findings:

- significant growth in courses offered and overall enrolments;
- potential oversupply of graduates in coming years;
- little provision for, and use of, advanced standing or articulation between courses;
- significant variability in specific interactive media and/or gaming content within each course;
- the high presence of a range of professional experience and professional learning options focused on interactive media/gaming;
- variability in the frequency and method of industry engagement in formal curriculum reviews;
- a need for more information about graduate outcomes; and
- an indication that graduates are experiencing difficulty entering and working in the industry.

(Education Report, p9)

**Impact of the education stream**

The ISIS team has a plan to disseminate findings and recommendations back to educators. At the time of this study this had not yet happened. Consequently it is difficult to discern an impact from the education activities beyond increasing knowledge within the project itself, which by all accounts appears to have been considerable in terms of understanding the education system better. As one project member noted,

> So the fragmentation, the difficulty of aggregating the areas and the fact that there was courses occurring in at least three different locations within a university, the way that that sector operates, the lack of engagement between VET and higher education, all of those context things, have been able to be explored really in the education report and to give us a stronger understanding of how it’s playing out.

The report has the potential to trigger and guide an important debate around the quality of interactive media and gaming education. As described, due to the structure of the interactive media education sector there are no mechanisms or platforms currently in place for that discussion to take place. The ISIS team has committed to running forums of relevant educators to enable that debate. In
effect the research process has operated to identify the stakeholders in the sector, which was information that did not exist previously.

The integration stream - modelling partnerships in three case studies

The integration case studies were designed to model a means of creating partnerships for innovation between SME interactive media companies and non-interactive media companies. The motivation for this activity came out of interactive media and gaming companies in Australia needing new revenue streams. The original plan had been to mentor senior managers in interactive media and gaming companies in business resilience strategies, including how to pursue new work. Upon reflection, and with the realisation that there was limited extant research on what they were proposing, the ISIS team recognised that they needed a different approach.

Early on in the scoping process it was concluded that a form of action research based on case studies of ‘real life’ partnerships would generate the data required to understand how to build and conduct such collaborations. In effect, the team determined that they could learn how to create partnerships for innovation by seeing the process in action. By codifying their findings those lessons could be fed back to the interactive media industry via a ‘how to guide’, in the form of a document now known as the Integration Framework: Collaborative Innovation for Business Growth.

Comprehensive desk-based research was conducted to develop a framework for how the partnerships might work. A group from within the ISIS team studied the case studies as they evolved, feeding back to the full ISIS team to tweak the model and codify the process to enable effective evaluation and development of the ‘how to’ guide for the interactive media industry.

The aim of each of the integrations was to bring together the interactive media company with the mainstream company so they could collaboratively: identify an aspect of the mainstream business that could be enhanced by the application of interactive media skills; design a solution through to the stage of ‘prototyping’; and share in the benefits of what emerged. What took place in each of those case studies, manifest in the high degree of internal success, surprised the team,

If you look at what each of the companies in the case studies has achieved, it is holistic transformation. They're thinking about their business and their business model and what they can do in completely different ways now. The transformation of those businesses has been beyond what any of us expected when we started.

Key features of the integration stream

Recruitment, selection and brokerage of the case study partnerships

The ISIS team recruited companies through existing networks and advertising on the ISIS website. Companies were required to submit applications responding to a set of criteria assessing their capacity to support the project and their commitment to innovation. The mainstream businesses were required to make a financial contribution while the interactive media and gaming SMEs were paid out of pooled ISIS and mainstream company funds. It should be noted that the money paid to the interactive media firms was a relatively small amount when set against the resources and time put into the integrations, the risks for SMEs with low reserves of cash, and their need for a consistent stream of paying work.
Considerable effort went into the selection of companies to ensure that the case study enterprises were ready and able to be fully involved in the ISIS partnership, as well as demonstrating they possessed the appropriate skills and expertise. The ISIS team and mentors shortlisted the enterprises believed to be in the best position to undertake the integration and carefully matched the mainstream and interactive media companies for maximum compatibility. Some team members regarded this process as particularly important given the potential cultural, business and knowledge differences that had to be bridged between the partners. Having good ‘chemistry’ and sharing complementary values between the partners was regarded as critical for the growth of the high-trust relationship needed for the partnership to flourish. This was partly factored into the selection process by allowing the mainstream company to have a final say on the interactive media team with which they were to be partnered, although it is apparent that the early facilitation processes undertaken by the ISIS project director and mentors was also an important foundation for the relationship.

The ISIS brokerage introduced partners unlikely to have found each other serendipitously. The NSW integration brought together a university and micro interactive media firm to digitise an adult numeracy tool. Had the ISIS intervention not ‘married them up’ it seems most likely that a larger, less ‘agile and nimble’ technology provider would have been retained via traditional tender processes, which tend to lock out SMEs. In the view of one of the project parties this would have limited the outcomes achieved by both businesses,

In this case we have a very small company that was really able to draw upon some quite specific domain expertise in learning environments using online technologies to be applied to this project ... So we wouldn't have seen the opportunity of a very small company to use the breadth of their experience to deliver this wonderful product.

Use of the ISIS personnel for facilitation and mentoring

Another feature of the project that was considered to be a factor in the success of the integrations was the involvement of independent ISIS personnel as facilitators and mentors. The project director and mentors were very involved in the initial stages of the ‘relationship building’ between the partnered companies. The ‘getting to know each other’ phase was noted by several ISIS team members as a critical period for building trust upon which to base the collaboration. In the first instance the project director and mentors acted as ‘translators’ in bridging two very different professional groups, a cultural divide symbolised by “... blokes in suits and ties meeting with dudes in jeans and t-shirts”. Company representatives found mentors very useful in the initial stages of the project. According to a project team member,

... in particular the host (mainstream) businesses felt daunted - that they weren't equipped with the right tools or the language or the jargon to really engage with an interactive media team, and a lot of that has been facilitated, that is, having that common language, having the confidence to speak in those terms - the mentors have definitely been seen to play a substantial role in that, in the beginning stages, which is often about defining what the problem is and then scoping it and then coming up with a solution.

The ISIS business mentors were already well known to the project director and were invited to be involved based on their depth of experience and expertise in areas that were important to each of the integrations. Their role was ostensibly to provide expert advice and guidance to the integration
companies and “keep the relationship on track in whatever way was needed”. In addition it is clear that mentors worked with individual companies to achieve their own aims and build their internal capacity. While this assisted in the integration it also appeared to benefit the ongoing business resilience of those companies. According to the project parties interviewed, key elements of mentor assistance included:

- managing the expectations of the parties
- averting conflict between the parties
- providing crucial advice at critical times to one or both companies
- managing risk, in particular assisting with ‘scope creep’
- pushing the participants to meet deadlines

While general principles about mentoring were established and are included in the ISIS Framework document, it was recognised that the area in which the business mentors added most value varied between the pilots and depended upon the circumstances of the partnership. For example, in one case, advice on particular business systems was particularly useful. In another, guidance to better manage cash flow for SMEs was most important. The capacity of the mentors to “apply themselves to the particular areas that mattered” was regarded as highly beneficial.

**Committing to a partnership and sharing the benefits**

The ISIS application process required that the partners be willing to share intellectual property. This was included in the specifications as a means of ‘evening out’ the relationship between the parties, but equally, to enable small interactive media companies a share in any generative outcomes the partnership might produce. As is stated in the preface of the Integration Framework document,

> The key thing to understand is that ISIS is not about ‘I pay you, you do this’, it is about ‘I have these skills and areas of knowledge, let us partner and explore how we can work together to help both our businesses benefit’.

This is not the traditional business model for inter-sectoral work. More often than not a fee-for-service contract is used. However, aside from the potential financial benefits to interactive media companies in sharing intellectual property rights, the arrangement appears to have contributed to a more ‘open’ dialogue for defining issues and developing solutions. In short, it seems to have rendered the environment more conducive to co-creation and innovation. This was expressed by a party to the project in the following terms:

> They didn’t fixate on the technology, the website or the phone app or the platform … they talked about what the problem was. And then together they worked out what needed to be done … I think fee-for-service model tends to cut that out. And it might not be the best way because that really open discussion, using all the knowledge in the room, might never happen.

**Identifying and defining the project**

As alluded to in the previous quote, the discovery phase was based on a thorough and facilitated discussion between the parties to establish the issue the project was to work on. The project director outlined a process he called ‘Imagineering’. This involved an intensive workshop to establish where
the innovative capacity lay in the mainstream business. It required an examination of every area of the business,

... it’s like breaking down every tiny component of what that company does. From how they engage with their sales staff, how they engage with their clients, how they engage with their suppliers, what design processes they do internally, what communication channels, what strategies do they have, how do they retain their clients ... and this is all moderated and with the mentor support we look at each finite or discrete area and we’re going to workshop the hell out of that and squeeze this stuff...

The biggest opportunities for digital transformation were ultimately shortlisted to a handful of potential projects and shortly after, a collective agreement was reached on “… the one we’re going to now devote months of our lives into prototyping.” A critical component in this process was that the partners were not typecast as possessing a particular parcel of skills. Consequently whatever knowledge the different people had was ‘brought to the table’, including the business skills of the interactive media companies, or the creative intuition of the mainstream members.

**Embedded research and evaluation process**

An embedded research and evaluation process was a critical component of the integration stream of the ISIS project. Academics, including a PhD candidate with special interest in the topic, formed a part of the ISIS team. Their role was to study the ISIS integration and reflect their findings back to the broader group. The method included the use of a control group (nascent partnerships between interactive media companies and host companies that were introduced through ISIS but operated outside the framework) as a comparator to the case study companies, and interviews with all parties to the integration at different times across the project. This process enabled rich reflection on the processes and immediate impacts of the case study integrations which are outlined in an evaluation report.

Having them embedded (evaluators) was a bit of a luxury, really, because it meant we were able to dedicate people who can solely focus on that in real time. The important thing is this also allowed an independent view on how well or not the program worked out, separate from us, busy with delivery and management ... to take an evidence based perspective on how well it met its objective.

**Impacts of the integration stream**

The evaluation report concludes that the ISIS integrations were instrumental in the positive transformation of the interactive media companies and the host companies involved. Of the three partnerships brought together through ISIS, two have formed joint ventures and the third has secured further government funding to continue to build on their collaborations. All three have plans in place to take their new product/service to market. However, the economic impacts of the new partnerships, and whether prototypes become products, cannot be assessed for some time to come.

The framework document provides an accessible guide for interactive media companies interested in pursuing work in other sectors and the ISIS team has committed to disseminate the guide through their extensive networks. It is a blueprint for open innovation, across industries, via collaborative
partnerships. Several interviewees felt that the framework had relevance beyond the interactive media and gaming sector and had elements that could be applied in other environments.

**Durability of the integration stream**

The exact way forward for ISIS is still being determined given that the project has only just ended. There was significant belief in the transferability of the ISIS model itself, and strongly supportive contextual conditions for scalability due to the “ubiquitous and convergent” nature of interactive media and increasing capacity due to the roll out of National Broadband Network. For example several interviewees were encouraged at the high number of enterprises that expressed interest in involvement in the project, from a broad range of industries, affirming their belief that ‘... there is a latent understanding in the economy that interactive media has a role in business innovation’.

Two potential futures of the integrations were discussed by project partners: the dissemination of the framework to support uptake of cross-industry collaboration; and perpetuating the full service provided by ISIS via some form of intermediary. There is considerable support for both approaches which, as it was pointed out, are compatible.

The project team will be disseminating the framework document through their networks. It is hoped that this will enable those interactive media companies interested in seeking work beyond the gaming and entertainment sector to do so. The framework outlines the benefits of independent mentoring but does not rely on the existence of the ISIS intermediary model *per se*. This was seen by some in the team as falling short of utilising the potential of ISIS.

... if you look at the core value and skill ISIS delivered, it was around the facilitation. I think this was actually the key to success. We applied resources that normally wouldn’t, couldn’t, be applied by SMEs in such a collaboration. We helped match them, we helped facilitate the collaborative ‘innovation’ process, and we helped mentor the businesses to put it in place.

Consequently there is a strong hope across the ISIS team to see the ISIS model go further given the successes demonstrated in each of the case studies. The transferability of the model to other partnerships, using some combination of the selection, brokerage and mentoring support for firms, is yet to be tested. However there was a view that there is demand for such a service, that the model has been proven to work, and that further intervention would be valuable for enhancing the generative impact amongst interactive media companies by building a bigger evidence base. As two members of the ISIS team reflected,

I think as a pilot program I’d seen enough evidence that there’s a role for an ISIS-like activity ... I don’t think it needs to be a permanent activity. It could be something that over a couple of cycles ... you build up this evidence that could be used to really change the behaviour of the interactive media sector in Australia. I don’t know how long that should take or what sort of scope it should be.

... the demand for programs such as ISIS out there would be very strong because they are up against the wall on one side. In fact, on both, the interactive media and the games development companies are struggling, but they’ve got the high-end skills. And then you’ve got your mum and dad SMEs, who are 98 per cent of the companies in the country, are going, ‘we really need to engage the digital economy sector, but I’ve got no idea how to do it’.
The potential employment impacts arising from the digital innovation of Australian businesses, according to the evaluators, is considerable. They describe the potential for a kind of multiplier effect resulting from innovation generated out of collaboration with the interactive media industry leading to greater numbers of increased employment in the partner industries. In effect they see high level interactive media skills providing a flywheel for bursts of innovation across all other industries.

**The intern stream: placing student interns in the integration case studies**

The third activity conducted in the ISIS project was to trial and learn from internships operating in the interactive media pilot companies. The internships formed part of the embedded research and evaluation process.

Four interns were recruited to work in the three interactive media companies. Three were drawing to the end of university gaming degrees and a fourth, an international student, was coming to the conclusion of a postgraduate degree. The duration of internships was a university semester, or a two month block. Each of the students was recommended for the internships by lecturers. They applied for the positions, and underwent a formal interview. The undergraduate students were offered a choice of projects to work on at commencement with each interactive media company.

Employer feedback was that the interns added value to each of the projects that they worked on and they had been impressed with the high level of commitment shown by the students. They expressed a preference for the interns working on projects from inception but understood the difficulties associated with aligning timeframes between enterprises and academic calendars. An ISIS team member noted that there were considerable difficulties in working through timetabling issues and the internships started later than they had hoped. They also outlined the difficulties in recruiting games development students to non-games development internships, all of which led to blow outs in the timeframe.

Several observations were made in the evaluation about the experience of the internships. They included the following:

**Limited understanding of the structure of the games and interactive media industry:** Each of the undergraduate students expressed disappointment that they had not been more involved in games development, and this was the expectation they had of the internship. They each wanted to pursue a career in games development. However once they joined the companies they recognised that their expectations were unrealistic – and that IM enterprises operate across a range of service, development and skills areas, of which gaming is just one.

**Good technical skills but absence of business, client and project management skills:** It became clear to the interns that while they possessed strong core games and interactive media skills, they did not have the skills that were required to operate across a job role in the companies they were at. In particular they explained how they learned to better engage with clients and that they did not have the requisite skills or confidence to deal with general business issues.

**Understandings about the structure of the sector and the broader skills required needs to be provided to students at the beginning of their degrees:** The evaluator noted that the new knowledge gained by students could be regarded as coming too late. Understanding these matters earlier would have given students the opportunity to choose relevant elective courses, such as those
imparting business skills, or other technical skills used in interactive media companies. It is not optimal for those issues to first be encountered at the conclusion of their degrees.

Outcomes
Two of the interns were employed by the host interactive media company after the completion of their internship to do further work on the ISIS projects. One of those students also arranged a second internship at the company on a project that was more in line with their career aspirations. This was arranged after the intern had approached an internal specialist for informal mentoring. The impacts of the internships on the students were outlined in the evaluation as follows:

Interns were better equipped and informed to deal with the realities of the industry: As a result of working in the companies students claimed that they had learned that they would be better able to secure employment in the sector if they had skills that went beyond those of gaming development. Gaming work was only one facet of what interactive media companies did, and employees in SMEs needed to be skilled across the range of services they offered. They better understood the importance of business, client and project management skills.

Increased student confidence in their own abilities: The experience provided an opportunity for interns to test their technical skills. While the full range of their technical skills was not called upon, it did establish for them that their core technical skills (for example, web design) were of industry standard.

Improved students’ likelihood of securing employment: Each of the undergraduate interns was more confident of building a career in the industry as a result of their experience. They felt they were more employable due to their ability to deploy their skills in an authentic setting. They reported the importance of showing initiative, being self-motivated and thinking laterally to solve problems. They also felt that they had built good relationships and that, given the power of ‘networks’ in the industry, this would stand them in good stead.
A2.5 Projects relating to Place-based workforce development

WIP 156: Crop Production Course Demonstration Project

The genesis of this project came from a self-employed research scientist operating in the agribusiness sector. The proponent, the owner of consultancy Ausknowledge Network, had worked for a major rural merchant. During that time he identified a shortfall in the skills of new agronomists whose role it was to advise farmers on commercial production methods. He had noticed that graduates tended to be under-skilled in the commercial aspects of farming and that the turnover of agronomy advisers in the major companies was very high, yet there was a lack of structured professional development made available to those individuals. The proponent posited that a high quality bridging training course, deliverable in a thin market to existing employees at their workplaces, which provided collaborative learning experiences, was likely to improve the skills and productivity of existing and new agronomists. This in turn would militate against staff turnover and ultimately had the potential to provide superior extension and advisory services to Australian farmers.

The proponent designed a course that was deliverable over a 12 month period and was conducted remotely but collaboratively using phone and computer technology. There are two factors that “thin out” this training market. The first is the disparate location of participants, who are located in regional and rural locations across Australia. Second, employers are protective of their ‘competitive edge’ and are reluctant to have their employees share commercial information with employees from competitors. There is a large amount of movement of employees between organisations, which creates apprehension about poaching between employers. Consequently, filling a course at a single geographic location has both cost and commercial barriers. Delivering remotely had the benefit of being much more cost effective, employees could remain in workplaces, and there were no overheads associated with travel and accommodation. In addition, online forums were made enterprise-specific to allow for real work issues to be discussed openly without fear of compromising commercial interests.

Key features of the project

- Using his extensive networks and extant relationships with major employers the proponent was able to recruit three of the largest agribusinesses to the pilot, despite their initial reservations about the project.
- The pedagogical method developed in the course was important to the success and it evolved over the first few weeks of the pilot. Learning was based on introducing topics, asking what participants already knew and then assisting them to fill the gaps in their knowledge. In this way it was believed that the participants were ‘learning how to learn’, but also how to build knowledge specific to their own geographical locations, which is critical in agriculture where solutions vary according to local conditions.
- The pedagogical method worked best with two deliverers in the ‘live’ class/forum, which enabled different points of view. It is also important for deliverers to be skilled in remote delivery, and able to adopt voice and organisational methods conducive to effective remote delivery. Done well, the project established that rapport can be built successfully.
- The model worked for a range of participants. Some were graduates and others had no tertiary qualifications and had worked their way up through the business. This shows that the course was bridging in both directions – for those with no tertiary qualifications and for those with tertiary qualifications.
Outcomes
The 16 enrolled participants completed the course successfully, 10 of them achieving a higher award than originally anticipated due to the quality of their engagement and assessments. Enrolments for the course continued strongly beyond the pilot. More than 100 additional participants have taken part in the agronomy diploma or other agriculture courses in horticulture, livestock, branch management and a course for new entrants to the agriculture sector.

Impacts
- The project successfully designed and delivered a model of training that could operate in a thin market. The model has removed barriers to training associated with poaching and enabled major employers to act as the flywheel for up-skilling agronomists across the sector.
- The success of the model provided the basis for ongoing enrolments and a much greater commitment from major rural merchant employers to training their staff.
- The project reduced the period required to get new agronomists operating productively from three to four years on-the-job, to 12 months.
- Anecdotal reports to the proponent suggest that strategies learned in the course were being shared by some participants with other employees and managers at the workplaces.
- The project provided a career pathway for previously unqualified employees into advisory positions in large agricultural merchandisers.
- The initiative led to the up-skilling of a critical occupational group which has the potential to improve extension and advisory services to Australian farmers.
- Relationships are being built by the proponent with other experts in agribusiness training and education. In particular he sees a need for higher education systems to be established using a similar model, to enable further skill development and specialisation which will deepen career paths.
- The proponent organisation has grown significantly and now employs more staff.
- The proponent believes the model has integrity in other settings. It is his intention, when he has time, to pursue the possibility of using the bridging and active remote learning model in sectors with an identifiable need.

WIP 180: “Regional Australian Workforce Development: Driven by local industry and community” Project
This project was undertaken by Regional Skills Training Pty Ltd (RST), an RTO based in South Australia which offers accredited training in agriculture and business management. It ran over a two-year period during 2010 and 2011. Support was provided to the project from a range of organisations including Rural Skills Australia, Agrifood Skills Australia, and the (SA) Primary Industries Skills Council.

The project’s aim was to make the delivery of training in “thin” regional and remote community training markets more financially viable for public and private RTOs seeking to service this market, by producing and trialling interactive training resources that could be used by training participants located across a wide geographic area. According to the proponent, the genesis of the project lay in unmet demand for local training from parents and students in remote and regional areas who experienced difficulties travelling to other centres to participate in training. The resources cover generic (transferrable) skills and can be used with trainees from a range of industry sectors common within regional and remote communities.
RST consulted with community members and 92 students across regional areas in SA and Victoria to gain insights into the skills required by students in these locations. This enabled the compilation of a table setting out skill areas suited to regional industry and community sectors, which were mapped to existing units of competency and qualifications. This table was then used to guide the production of resources. Students provided feedback on the resources developed. This included suggestions relating to how the resources might keep students’ interest and appeal to the IT preferences of 15-25 year olds, and how they might better enable online interaction between trainers and participants.

An initial print-based version was produced, as it was assumed that remotely based students would not have access to the bandwidth required to upload and download larger interactive pdf files. However print-based versions proved unpopular with the students who trialled them and RST subsequently focused to a greater extent on interactive resources for online or CD-based use.

RST developed content for 53 course units which were then piloted by 180 students in regional SA and Victoria, the majority of whom were engaged in school-based traineeships. The training resources were developed for RTOs to provide students with a foundation or knowledge base of transferrable generic skills across five sectoral groupings (agrifood; business, retail and IT; community services and health; construction, property, plumbing services, local government; and resources, infrastructure and mining). The learning resources provide the underpinning knowledge needed by students prior to developing skills and experience in a particular area of competence. Completion of summative assessments enables learners to achieve competency in the unit applicable to their sector, with each training resource mapped back to existing units of competency.

A blended learning approach was used in piloting the resources, with RST trainers providing face to face training for larger groups of students and coaching for more isolated students, using Skype and web-based interaction. While all students received training in generic foundation skills, training was tailored to local community needs. In local areas where, for example, most of the learners were involved in agricultural traineeships, the resources used were contextualised to agriculture and workplace assignments focused on skills needed in the agrifoods sector. In other regions where groups of learners sought skills relevant to working in local government, assignments and course content focused on, for example, the management of parks and gardens.

According to the proponent, feedback from students in the pilot was positive. They felt that the resources were superior to other training resources, as they were easy to follow and clearly laid-out. In terms of how the resources differed from existing training resources (such as student log books), the proponent described them as a much more compact and readily accessible means of providing skills and knowledge to learners.

**Longer term impacts**

**Workforce development impacts at the local training level:** Consistent with the project aims, use of the resources has enabled RTOs to provide training to larger groups of participants in localised areas of regional Australia. According to the proponent, this has the potential to curb “the exodus of young people from regions to capital centres where it’s not entirely necessary.”

**Study pathways for school leavers:** Many of the students who were involved in the pilot as school-based trainees have gone on to engage in training with RST at a higher level, for example by studying for diplomas or certificates in agriculture or horticulture.
**Broadened use and continued revision of the resources:** During the pilot period, RST publicised the resources among members of the Australian Agriculture Training Provider Network, with many RTOs providing feedback on how the resources might be improved. The involvement of RTOs in this capacity has allowed RST to tailor the resources to RTOs’ needs, thus increasing the likelihood that these and other registered training providers will continue to use the resources once in the public domain. This approach appeared to have been successful, with RST reporting that they were aware of at least 16 RTOs using the resources, including TAFEs in SA, WA and NSW and increasing numbers of additional RTOs were expressing an interest in using them on an ongoing basis. The proponent expressed surprise at the number of TAFEs who had shown interest in the resources while noting that the total number of RTOs using the resources was unknown once the resources were in the public domain and freely available. Interactive workbooks for the 53 units are available for free download from RST’s website, however no data was available from the proponent on site traffic or downloads.

RST has continued to use the resources beyond the pilot period, which has enabled them to review and revise the training resources at annual intervals as per their commitment under the WIP funding agreement.

**Ongoing and potential dissemination:** The proponent has continued promoting and workshopping the resources at successive conferences of user groups such as national and state-based Agriculture, Horticulture and Conservation and Land Management RTO Provider Networks. In addition, the resources are located on the Agrifood ISC training resources portal, which provides potential for significantly greater usage by RTOs.

**Developing a network of RTOs:** As noted above, RST engaged in collaborative relationships with other “like minded RTOs” who “road tested” the resources. These relationships have been sustained, with the same RTOs subsequently trialling and feeding back to RST on other new resources they have developed.

**WIP 188: Indigenous Workforce Development Plan for the Construction Industry in Murdi Paaki**

Murdi Paaki is made up of 16 communities covering a vast area of Western NSW. Indigenous unemployment is disproportionately high across the region and despite public and private investment in the region this is not necessarily translating into jobs for Indigenous Australians. Construction work, for example, is often performed by contractors from outside the Murdi Paaki region.

This WIP funded project ran for two years from February 2010 to February 2012. A global engineering consultancy firm, GHD, operating in the construction industry, was retained as the project proponent to develop an Indigenous workforce development plan for the construction industry in the Murdi Paaki region. The genesis for the idea had come from a member of the local community who was interested in building Indigenous enterprise capacity to operate in the local economy. The workforce development plan was to identify extant and up-coming construction work, and the skills that local Indigenous people would require to conduct that work. This longer view of planning for Indigenous employment differs from the mainstream employment services approach of linking individual candidates to existing jobs. Another purpose of the study was to assess the viability of a

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16 A second WIP project was funded to investigate the potential of the green skills in Murdi Paaki.
17 For an example of a project that took this approach to Indigenous employment, see WIP 220.
regional workforce planned approach to enhancing the economic life of Indigenous people - moving beyond the provision of training, to a more strategic approach that considers the creation and quality of jobs for Indigenous people.

The project involved a series of research steps that led to the development of the plan. They were:

- Desk based and stakeholder interviews to gauge the upcoming construction work program in the region (to 2020)
- Collation of statistical data on Indigenous employment and skills in the region
- Conduct of a ‘regional skills audit’ of the Indigenous population through surveys and interviews with local intermediaries and training organisations
- Consultation with stakeholders in the 16 Murdi Paaki communities, including Regional Assemblies, relevant business and organisations, employers and government agencies
- Development of qualitative case studies illustrating the lived experiences of Indigenous people in the region, enabling a deeper understanding of opportunities and constraints

Once the plan had been developed five specific initiatives, aligned with the plan, were identified for implementation. Of the five initiatives one was determined as beyond the scope of the project, and four others extended beyond the date of the final report and in three of those cases, the viability and funding for those initiatives remained uncertain.

Key lessons learned
The following issues were highlighted by the consultants in the final report as lessons that were learned or key findings that were made:

- The workforce development plan is a ‘living’ document and as such requires updating. This would require dedicated resources. If that involved following the procedures benchmarked by the consultants, this would require high level research and facilitation skills.
- There was real value in having a ‘bird’s eye view’ of the region for workforce planning purposes. Pathways into employment and training developed in the plan were focussed on individual communities. But it became clear in the planning process that viable opportunities for ongoing employment tended to cross communities. For example repair and maintenance work on public housing was identified as a potential source of ongoing work across the region. Despite the rapid response required for those services, costly external contractors are used to do the work. The regional nature of the plan enabled this to be identified as a possible source of sustainable Indigenous jobs and/or enterprise, and a feasibility study has been proposed.
- The consultants felt that ‘past failures’ were creating barriers to action relating to Indigenous enterprises. They concluded that any planning and/or initiatives in the region should learn from all explorations of new ideas, not just those that were considered successful.
- Evidence from within the project reinforced the need for initiatives to come from local communities for them to have credibility and to maintain momentum.
- The consultants’ experience of the project highlighted that longer term relationships are critical to establishing trust at the community level and that this takes time.
- The operation of multiple stakeholders and initiatives in a region require that proper detailed scoping be undertaken to understand ‘who is doing what’. This can avoid duplication but also allows for value to be added to what is already operating.
A one-stop shop linking industry and the community would provide a consistent place for external bodies to make contact with sources of prospective labour. Currently employers are saying that they are uncertain about where to go.

Outcomes

- An Indigenous workforce development plan for the construction industry in Murdi Paaki.
- A blueprint for developing a regional workforce development plan that crosses communities.
- A skills profile of the Indigenous population in Murdi Paaki.
- Identification of specific initiatives to build Indigenous capacity for employment in the construction industry in Murdi Paaki.
- The development of employment and training pathways for each of the local communities. These included profiles of upcoming work, the skills in the community and a map of existing initiatives and local needs. The information is based on the research conducted in consultation with the local working party members.
- A coalition of stakeholders that coalesced around the activities for the workforce development plan.

Impacts

The project has only recently concluded and as has already been noted, much of the further work that was identified out of the planning process had not been commenced at the time of this study. As such it is not possible to reflect on the ongoing or generative impacts of the project. However, the report does clearly outline what is planned for further work and the dissemination processes that might be used. This provides an opportunity for follow-up in terms of future impact.

Feedback from the local community suggested that the pathways to employment and training documents have provided information that is useful. It is too early to say how they will be used and whether the construction industry finds them equally useful.

WIP 199: The Building Primary Industries Regional Workforce Development Capacity Project

This project was conducted over a 16 month period from mid-2010 until late 2011. The Primary Industries Skills Council of South Australia (PISC) was the project proponent and the Department of Primary Industries and Resources of South Australia (PIRSA) was a project partner.

The aim of the project was to improve the workforce development capacity of rural employers in primary industries to recruit, retain and develop workers by empowering them to develop local solutions to this end. The project ran in three dryland farming areas of SA (Eyre, Mid North and Murray Mallee regions) and in one dryland area in Victoria (the Mallee region). The project used a “collaborative local community model” which involved a wide range of local and regional stakeholders as participants. Stakeholders included representatives of individual enterprises, regional development boards and other federal government and local agencies, industry sector bodies, job placement agencies, RTOs, schools and other organisations. These stakeholders were brought together in local action teams to identify areas of current and future skill demand and to develop tailored local plans to secure and retain skilled labour in line with that demand.

Key project participants included ‘industry champions’ from each of the four areas. These individuals were local community or opinion leaders and were, in the main, well-regarded employers from
farming and other sectors. Industry champions used their networks to identify and recruit action team members, as did staff from PIRSA and PISC.

The project was conducted in a context of low regional workforce development capacity. Project proponents noted that, with over 90 per cent of primary industry business being family owned, the industry had developed an informal workforce management culture with very little planning and poorly developed recruitment and retention practices. This, combined with a rapidly ageing workforce and increasing competition for labour, suggested that unless the industry moved towards a more structured workforce management model, its competitiveness would be threatened. It was acknowledged that each sub-region faced different sets of issues, which required solutions tailored to the local environment. The aim of the project was to empower each of the action teams to identify appropriate solutions to the unique workforce development problems they faced.

The first stage of the project involved PISC staff and consultants conducting a workforce development needs analysis in each local area in conjunction with action teams. Data pertaining to all aspects of workforce management was relatively scarce and often had to be obtained from local employers themselves. Significant initial work was undertaken to clarify demand for specific occupations, as the informal nature of recruitment processes used by employers in regional areas did not allow for data on job placements and job advertisements to be collected. Much effort was invested in building knowledge about which occupations were recruited through which channels (including migration units and local/national recruitment bodies). Project participants also undertook an assessment of RTOs’ capacity to deliver on local skill needs and demand for relevant industry training.

Several consultants were employed by PISC to work with regional committees to produce reports setting out local stakeholders’ views of the key issues relating to workforce development in the four areas. To the surprise of the project proponents, the issues identified and suggested responses to issues were similar across all four regions. Key issues identified related to skills shortages, retention of population within local areas, and a lack of knowledge of alternative means of recruiting staff outside of ‘word of mouth’ methods within local networks in employers’ immediate radius. The findings of these assessments were then communicated to regional stakeholders for further discussion and clarification and used to develop regional action plans. The action teams implemented some of the planned action points during the course of the project, and some teams have continued to progress this beyond the project’s completion date.

The role played by industry champions in each of the four regions was crucial to the success of the project. The industry champions provided a conduit for the project partners to tap into local knowledge. They did this by providing the following: advice on how the project might practically be implemented within the farming community; information about and introductions to other local employers who became involved in the project; and assessments of local views on workforce issues. One such industry champion interviewed in the course of this research was clearly a ‘best practice’ local employer in matters of workforce development. His experience provided the project partners with insights into the practices used by ‘more strategic’ employers in the sector, thus providing a model other employers might adopt.

Action teams in two of the four project regions were active and engaged. In another two regions they were relatively inactive. As outlined in section 4.6, this was due to a combination of factors which included: the wide geographical spread of action team members; difficulties involved in gaining the
participation of time-constrained farmers for whom workforce development was of low priority; low levels of commitment to the program from local regional development agencies and farming industry representative bodies; and a high degree of cynicism towards government-funded initiatives in local areas. The more successful and active teams were located in areas where community networking structures were already in existence. Project proponents found informal networks in local areas to be a very powerful means of sourcing information and facilitating the development of solutions to local problems.

Partners explained how the project’s ‘whole of community’ approach was unique in comparison to other agricultural sector projects focusing on workforce development. The involvement of a broad range of community stakeholders was considered important to project success. As one partner noted, “You’re not going to address issues in a region just by tackling the [specific] issue; you need to include the related industries and community structures and the like”.

Partners described how the project identified just how central workforce development was to enterprise sustainability and productivity. This was evident in the partners’ conversations with farmers who had implemented a workforce development approach and realised benefits in terms of being able to attract and more importantly retain staff. Retention of staff was the key issue for farmers, given difficulties recruiting new staff in an environment of skills shortages and dwindling local populations. In some cases, a workforce development approach included basic consideration of workers’ work-life needs. An example was given by one partner of an approach taken by farmers recruiting staff: “It might be that they recruit a farm manager with qualifications, but they'd make sure that they had a house lined up for them in the local sizeable town.” Such an approach would be more likely to ensure the retention of a farm manager with a family and children who had access to local amenities such as schools.

**Immediate outcomes**

**Development of regional workforce development plans:** Local action teams performed a scoping exercise to assess local skills training capacity and areas of skill shortage. They developed strategies to improve training capacity and addressed issues pertaining to skills shortages such as migration, school-based training and a lack of local accommodation for workers. For some teams, addressing issues around housing led to them forge partnerships with housing and accommodation bodies.

**Development of occupational profiles and a workforce development toolkit:** These resources were developed in consultation with farmers and designed for use by farmers and farm managers. They are written in easy-to-understand language and are accessible via the PISC website. Occupational profiles were developed after local consultations uncovered an absence of job profiles for in-demand occupations in regional areas. This had hampered employers’ efforts to recruit workers in the past because they were not able to adequately describe to potential recruits what advertised positions involved. PISC worked with local project participants to develop 40 occupational profiles covering occupation skill shortage areas, which were then validated with a range of enterprises. The occupational profiles were developed to assist with job role and skill identification with the expectation that they would be used by enterprises to recruit staff, in addition to being used by government agencies in targeting training and migration outcomes.

A second output - a workforce development toolkit - explains issues around industry attraction, formal recruitment, seasonal recruitment and training and migration options in basic terms. It
provides telephone numbers for relevant government agencies and information sources for local employers who encounter problems or require guidance.

The resources have been distributed to key regional bodies and PISC intends to continue to disseminate them further, for example by producing print based guides for the South Australian and Victorian Farmers’ Federations, to enable a wider reach for the resources. However PISC has not been able to publicise either resource to the fullest extent due to a lack of available resources. Despite this, a proponent related informal feedback received from regional employers who have used the resources and found them useful, particularly when recruiting migrant workers. This varied however from the account of a local project coordinator, who could “count on one hand” the farmers in one project area who had used the profiles.

Longer term impacts and outcomes

Building evidence and awareness of workforce development problems: A project proponent felt that a key impact of the project was that it had alerted local communities to the problems they faced in regard to attracting and retaining staff. Their understanding of these problems was much greater after the project than it had been before the project commenced. This had occurred as a consequence of the many discussions held with project participants and local employers, the reports and action plans produced, and day to day communication between local action team members and their communities. These activities, the proponent felt, had resulted in local employers developing “a more serious perspective on workforce development” and an awareness of how low regional workforce development capacity, built on informal practice, “might pose a problem for the running of their business”. The proponent stated “I do believe we did that [raise awareness]. And that’s important, because if we stop having these conversations they will just keep reverting back to doing it like they did it, and that’s not going to work.”

A second partner agreed that the most unique and successful element of the project was “the depth of understanding that it generated” about local workforce development issues and the dissemination, among community members, of the local knowledge it tapped into and codified. Importantly, the project also served to increase the proponent and partners’ understanding of how local communities worked, in terms of community structures and mores, as well as providing insights into dryland farming employers’ views and the staffing practices they used. The project’s “whole of community” focus on embedded issues in the sector and the influence that contextual factors exert over farmers’ willingness to adopt workforce development practices was felt to be in unique contrast to similar projects conducted in rural and regional areas. A project partner explained:

A lot of projects in the agriculture sector tend to still be very focused both by bureaucracy, and by industry, at the issues for the industry. They therefore they miss a lot of the side issues that actually influence whether something’s going to happen or not.

A third partner observed that the project increased partners’ knowledge of the nature of contextual factors that presented barriers to “changing the way farmers are doing things”, with respect to workforce development practices. The knowledge gained in the project enabled the partners to develop strategies to attempt to change farmers’ perspective in regard to workforce management more generally. As one interviewee noted, the project provided a means for partners to “better understand their [farmers’] map of the world. And from that place we can increase their
resourcefulness and we can unlock their limiting beliefs ... (that cause them) to go back to the same strategies”.

Project partners described how they had subsequently used this deep contextual knowledge in advocating the development of particular workforce development strategies in the primary industry sector in both state and federal policy contexts. One partner used the evidence generated in the project on a regular basis as a foundation for much of the policy advice they provided the state government, most commonly in relation to how workforce development can support that government’s policy focus on building the agrifood industry in SA.

The catalyst for regional culture change towards a workforce development perspective. It was the experience of one project partner that the involvement of local employers on action teams led them to recognise the importance of workforce development in regional areas more broadly and thus acted as a “catalyst for local culture change” towards a workforce development approach. The partner explained, of local ‘exemplar’ farmers’ use of workforce development practices, “it may have been something that they did on their own farm anyway, but they’re recognising (now) that it’s important more broadly.” This has led to wider community exposure of workforce development issues by the industry champions and local opinion leaders involved in the action teams. As a partner noted “You start getting those people talking about the issues, then it can become part of mainstream conversation.” This marked a shift in culture in the respect that, in the past, farmers rarely talked about their approach to workforce management with others in the community. As this partner explained,

It’s not - and this is not the right word in the farming context - but it's not ‘cool’ to talk about the fact that you're a good boss. ... whereas you can talk about your prize Merino ram or something.

Ongoing work of the action teams: As described in Section 4.1, the timeframe of the project proved too short for the action teams to achieve the objectives they set. The teams have worked beyond the project’s completion date to achieve the planned actions. This has included, in some regions, networking with local schools and migration bodies and working to establish regional learning centres (described below). As noted in earlier sections, the success and effectiveness of the action teams varied by region and partners felt that there was a high likelihood of follow-on impacts from the teams’ work in two of the four project regions. While one partner felt that the project partners did not have sufficient resources to maintain the team structures beyond the project’s completion, it was expected that individual team members would play a key role in taking actions and projects forward and supporting regional activity. A partner noted that implementation of the projects designed by the team in one project region was predicated on oversight or resourcing from regional development agencies or councils, with backing secured from state and federal agencies and industry bodies.

Potential for the establishment of regional learning centres: A project partner outlined how several of the action teams saw the development of regional learning centres as the one solution that would enable them to address many of the objectives set out in their action plans. This partner planned to seek government funding to establish a number of centres across South Australia on the sites of existing under-utilised regional agricultural colleges or research facilities. Such centres were seen to have the potential to provide accessible local delivery of skill programs through training and on-farm practice as well as providing accommodation for people undertaking training. There was strong
interest among some action teams in further developing dedicated agricultural training farms to allow out of area students to gain on-farm experience while completing secondary studies. In addition, teams advocated that if regional learning centres were to begin offering Higher Education courses in demand areas (particularly crop and soil science), more young people would remain in the regions and have opportunities to hone their learning through interaction with research activities.

The facilities identified by the project proponents are mostly state government-owned, so this initiative will require state support, and the long-term running costs would need to be funded by government. It is envisaged that centres would involve partnerships between multiple RTOs, in order to meet regional skill needs. However the proponents expressed reservations that this might not be effective in practice, noting that the “current VET funding model represents the most significant impediment to the development of this concept”. The regional learning centre model requires more active collaboration between RTOs, which is relatively rare in training markets where RTOs generally deliver around supply capability. The success of local regional learning centres was felt to hinge on the involvement of community networks in their operation, however cohesive community structures were lacking in some of the project areas.

The spread of the collaborative local community ‘model’ beyond the four project regions: Along with the four regions in the study, local stakeholders in other regions including the SA Riverland region and the Southern Mallee/Grampians region also sought assistance from PISC to set up similar local action teams. The Riverland team has been particularly active in championing a number of local workforce development initiatives.

WIP 212: Regional Agriculture and Mining Integrated Training
This project tested the viability of cross-industry skills training for entry level job seekers in one regional location and school leavers in another. The impetus for the project came out of a previous regional workforce development project funded by DEEWR under the National Skills Strategy. A recommendation from that project was to pursue a model of cross-industry skilling to support local labour markets in regional areas. It was contended that providing people with skills across key industries was likely to improve their local labour market options and thereby reduce exit from the region. Skills DMC was the project proponent and project parties were the National Farmers Federation, the Mineral Council of Australia and AgriFood Skills Australia. The sites were Morawa in Western Australia and Emerald in Queensland, selected for the presence of mining and agriculture industries and a demonstrated local commitment to collaborate on the project.

The key activities in the project included: developing a suitable training model; selection of pilot sites; drafting an appropriate training program (with key and complementary skill sets from mining and agriculture training packages); establishing reference groups with key local stakeholders; engaging a project officer for each site; candidate recruitment; delivery and testing of the training; and conduct of an internal process of evaluation.

Critical features of the project
The final report nominated a series of factors that were believed to have been critical in the success of the pilots. They were:

The program was employment not training driven: This required that employers commit to full involvement and that there were evident opportunities for employment of candidates. Industry and
the community were involved in the development of the training programs to ensure that they linked with local work. As such the selection and recruitment procedures were conducted as if they were for jobs, to engender a ‘work ethic’ from the outset.

Training design was based on training packages but refined to local conditions and need: It was critical to ensure compatible skills between the industries and then linking those to the relevant competencies in the training packages. The use of pre-existing competencies allowed trainers and project officers to concentrate their attention on the needs of local employers and the participants. The course also included job seeker competencies, including how to seek and keep employment.

Individual support for participants was critical but requires adequate funding: Most participants had never been employed, consequently the acquisition of a qualification helped to build their confidence in securing work. However, additional assistance in the form of mentoring and some literacy and numeracy support was also provided to candidates for whom this was needed. This was beneficial in smoothing the transition into placements and prospective employment. The project had not anticipated the degree of individual support that would be required. To maximise the benefits of mentoring and literacy and numeracy assistance supports, proponents felt that consideration should be given to planning them into entry level employment strategies, making it possible to engage experts to provide those services.

Early planning and engagement to build in time for contingencies: In one of the pilot sites, area flooding led to a change in the local conditions. The recovery took time and this had an impact on the project. It was felt that had early planning and buy-in taken place then this would have left space for contingencies to have been planned.

Participants at site level also made observations about key elements that shaped the pilot outcomes. They included:

- The involvement of industry associations was useful in giving the project credibility in the eyes of local employers. This was of great assistance in bringing employers on board.
- It was important for RTOs to be selected on the basis of their capacity to deliver skills training that is specified in the local course.
- It was felt by one participant that the duration of the course had not been adequate to establish competency for each of the candidates and that consideration for different student capacity should be built into cross-industry training plans.
- External parties need to ensure that they are ‘advisers’ rather than ‘interventionists’ and provide guidance allowing local stakeholders to identify issues and solutions suitable to the context. Otherwise initiatives have the potential to ‘miss the mark’ and lose momentum.
- It was felt that the involvement of local governments (as in Morawa) was a critical ingredient for building ongoing local activity in workforce development. Having them involved in the pilot improved the chances of further value being added to the project with follow-on initiatives, as well as providing an institutional means of retaining knowledge that was being gained.

Outcomes

Of the 29 participants (14 unemployed people in Morawa, and 15 school students in Emerald), 25 completed a Certificate II drawn from the RII09 Resources and Infrastructure Industry Training...
Package and the AHC10 Agriculture, Horticulture, Conservation and Land Management Training Package. In addition 24 of the participants went on to secure employment and three went on to further education. These were regarded as excellent outcomes, particularly the acquisition of employment which reinforced employer feedback that the entry level training had assisted in making the candidates job-ready.

Impacts

Established a viable model of cross-industry skilling at entry level: The pilot was regarded as having successfully established that cross-industry skilling was useful to both young job seekers as well as to employers looking to employ entry level employees. It was generally felt that the quality of training and learning had been high and that the support received by candidates in assisting them into their first workplaces was particularly critical in securing their employment.

Improved the retention of young people in the community: A driving motivation for involvement in the RAMIT project was the desire to build the sustainability of local communities. The provision of cross-industry skills was thought to have improved the participants’ employability across local industries; and to have given them industry ‘tasters’, providing options to select a preferred career path. The high rate of achieved employment improved the longer-term potential of those young people remaining in the region. One of the project parties pointed out that the success of employment outcomes in Morawa was particularly significant given the size of the local community (population 650).

Reinforced the status of the industry education and training alliance within the region and with government: One of the pilot sites had a very active and cohesive committee that pre-existed the WIP project. The alliance membership includes major regional employers, the shire council, the local school and agriculture colleges, and the Chamber of Commerce. The group is pursuing a strategy to create ‘community revitalisation through education’ and become a skills hub for the region. The RAMIT project was one component supporting that overall objective. A key benefit of the success of the project was raising the profile of the local alliance. It provided further evidence of their commitment to training and education in the region and it was hoped this would increase their chances of attracting investment to the region and enhance their status as an education and training centre.

The full impact of a cross-industry training strategy was not realised: Some project partners who had experience in regional workforce development strategies provided useful insights about the project strategy. One view was that while the project established that cross-industry training can work at entry level, the project did not necessarily test the degree of local engagement that employers have to regional workforce development per se. It was suggested that it was relatively easy for employers to provide placements for school and entry level candidates, and that barriers can start to emerge when a higher level commitment is asked for. This was not a criticism of the project, which was concerned with entry level skill acquisition; rather it was a warning to not assume a deeper commitment from employers in regard to workforce development over the longer term.

An important piece in regional workforce development planning: While the project was not a holistic regional workforce development strategy, in that it had a relatively narrow focus on entry level skills as opposed to seeking to address a broad range of WD problems/issues, it provided a critical ingredient for such plans to be successful. As one of the project parties explained, while the
project concentrated on entry level cross-skilling, the concept and practice of cross-skilling is a key element in making regional skill eco-systems operational. They identified four key elements to make regional workforce development successful. They were: that industries work together on an equal footing and that no single industry operates to the detriment of another in the local labour market, otherwise collaboration is not possible; that there is someone on the ground that works to keep relationships going throughout and beyond any single initiative; that cross-industry training is provided to deliver key transferable skills across the different layers of the labour market, and not just at entry level; and that there are passionate and committed people on the steering committee that are present to deal with issues as they (inevitably) arise.

WIP 220: Business Partnership Project Blacktown

Blacktown local government area has the highest population of Indigenous people in Sydney, and they are disproportionately unemployed when compared with the whole Blacktown population. An Aboriginal owned enterprise, Yarn'n, which operated in the Indigenous employment services area, had been engaged in talks with the local council to commence a partnership for improving employment outcomes for Indigenous people in the region. When a key person from the council went on extended leave, the Aboriginal enterprise, with the encouragement of DEEWR and assistance of WIP funding, proceeded with this project. It ran over an 11 month period from August 2010 to July 2011.

According to the proponent this project differed from their work in mainstream outcomes focussed employment services, because it provided the freedom, time and opportunity for them to engage at ‘another level’, in that the proponent was much more able to consciously consider the issues being raised by employers and the community. It allowed them to think and act laterally, and explore and deploy solutions by involving all the relevant parties. In the proponent’s view, the capacity to practice a deeper, collaborative approach was critical in achieving the project outcomes, as well as shifting key employers into active and ongoing engagement with Indigenous employment and wellbeing in the region.

The explicit aim of the project was to secure ongoing employment for Indigenous people in the Blacktown area by using a business partnership approach. The following activities were undertaken by the project team:

- Research into the constraints on Aboriginal employment in the area from the perspective of both job seekers and prospective employers
- Intensive candidate searches and assessments
- Employer and community liaison work
- Assistance with recruitment, and
- Post-placement support

Key features of short-term, place-based Indigenous participation projects

The proponent came to the project with a long history of experience in Indigenous employment, and deep and extensive networks in government and links to the not-for-profit sector. They had fewer contacts with the private sector in Blacktown, although they did have some relationships with national employers who had operations in Blacktown. They had originally hoped that the local council might provide the link into the private sector. While this did not happen, and they were apprehensive
about working with the private sector as it was “out of our comfort zone”, the project showed they were able to expand into that base using their existing contacts. By the end of the project they were working in a variety of ways with several major employers.

The proponent had originally planned to employ a project officer to manage the process. Due to business circumstances they decided to manage the project with existing staff. This proved to be a worthwhile decision, as it became clear that utilising their pre-existing relationships and networks was critical to the success of the project. The proponent explained that had an ‘external’ project officer come in it would have added at least another six months for them to build those community and employer contacts and relationships.

A critical issue that constrained the project was the reluctance amongst job services providers to share access to their candidates. Due to the outcomes-based payment system, (and possibly an underlying culture of competition), collaboration with employment services agencies during the project was challenging. In some cases where the project had vacancies, available agencies were still unwilling to offer up potential candidates for fear they would lose the outcomes payment from the government. The project proponent also identified a need to undertake a scoping of existing government initiatives and activities in the location to ensure that duplication was not taking place, or that one initiative was not stepping on another.

Factors that improved employer engagement:

- It was important to target growing industries and not declining ones. This meant that skills gained and jobs identified were likely to be more enduring and employers were more likely to have vacancies.
- It was important to approach and negotiate Indigenous employment opportunities at a suitable time in the business cycle, when employers were free to have quality conversations.
- It was critical to conduct research to establish the type of demand, labour flows and needs of employers being targeted.
- Some employers were apprehensive about getting involved with an Indigenous employment program due to past difficulties they had faced in recruiting and retaining Indigenous workers. This apprehension stemmed from employers feeling that they are “walking into something they don’t know well” and consequently relying heavily on receiving assistance. In light of these factors, employers were very responsive to “packaged Indigenous employment solutions” which provide the level of assistance specific to their needs. However packaging a solution requires careful researching and understanding of an employer’s needs. One employer receiving this type of assistance responded by saying that “for the first time Aboriginal employment seemed simple.”

Factors that improved working with Indigenous job seekers:

- Assistance to candidates was based on recognising and acknowledging their skills and attributes. This was critical to building positive strategies to overcome barriers or skills gaps. Candidates found it very difficult to ‘label’ their skills. They needed a ‘translator’ to help name them in a way that was appropriate to getting a job. The prospect of ‘selling yourself’ was difficult for people for whom self-promotion is culturally inappropriate.
Some candidates were fatigued and were distrustful of employment services based on past experiences. For example, candidates complained of being sent to apply for jobs that did not suit them. The proponent explained that when this led to ‘failure’ it further diminished the confidence of the job seeker, and could frustrate the employer.

The low confidence felt by candidates was easily eroded if tailored assistance was not given. This was described as ‘going on the journey with them’, and being responsive to their aspirations.

For mentoring to be effective it needed to be more than just checking to see if someone was still employed. It needed to be structured around the employment aspirations and journey of the candidate. This meant that mentoring visits needed to be planned and researched with that in mind.

Word of mouth referrals were important for engaging with job seekers in the local area. The proponent used their own networks, and then used snowballing strategies to further publicise job vacancies and skilling opportunities, because they received a limited number of referrals from job service providers.

They recognised a need to bring employers and the community together more to demystify the job market. They had observed that job seekers with a limited exposure to the labour market commonly overestimated what was required in a job and the qualifications that were needed.

Outcomes

At the conclusion of the project 75 Indigenous people had undergone skill profiling, 100 candidates receive accredited training linked to local job opportunities, and 50 people successfully gained employment with a 90 per cent retention rate after 6 months. In addition the proponent established Indigenous employment partnership arrangements with 30 employers in the Blacktown region.

Built local alliances for supporting Indigenous welfare: The proponent, in response to an employer describing difficulties retaining Indigenous apprentices, established a coalition of 10 organisations to run a fortnightly community event (Friday Night Football) which the partners fully funded. The event brought local Indigenous people and employers together. ARL football ‘heroes’ were called upon to contact young men who were struggling with their attendance at work. As a result the retention issues were resolved and the local community became more aware of local employment opportunities.

Increasing the viability of an Indigenous enterprise: The WIP project enabled the proponent to work on improving the viability of an Indigenous enterprise by assisting them with creating a new revenue stream. This led to the enterprise employing a greater number of Indigenous people.

Ongoing impacts

It is difficult to assess the full impact of the project. Adequate time has not elapsed for follow-up work to establish the effect of employment on the candidates or how many of the 100 trained candidates went on to secure jobs. Notwithstanding this, the proponent was clear that without the WIP fund, and simply working within outcomes based employment services, the impacts would not have been as great or led to the ongoing relationships and further collaborative projects that have emerged. The following longer term impacts were evident:
**Creation of new partnerships:** A new relationship built out of the Friday Night Football alliance led to setting up a mentoring program with two major employer associations for young Indigenous people working in the construction and motor trades industries.

**The provision of new contracts to Blacktown employers:** The proponent continues to provide packaged employment services to employers in the region. Employers appear to have “gone out of their way” to ensure that the successful procedures developed, and the specific services of the proponent, continue to be used.

**Securing ‘stewardship’ for a new coalition:** The project has established new coalitions of support for Indigenous well-being and employment within the Blacktown region. The proponent will continue to work with those parties as well as pursue the local council to take up a stewardship role now the WIP project is concluded.

**New evidence for the policy debate:** The proponent regarded the outcomes of the project as evidence that a strategy for time-defined regional projects was a worthwhile way to supplement outcomes-based employment services currently available to Indigenous job-seekers. It was felt that the project provided time and space to explore better ways of securing quality Indigenous employment outcomes.
A2.6 Projects relating to: Skill recognition for volunteers; High Performance Workplaces; Workforce Development for SMEs

WIP 165: Discuss, Display, Do: Skills recognition for volunteers

The Discuss Display Do project (ddd) had its genesis in the converging interests of Service Skills Australia (SSA), which was pursuing improvements to existing recognition of prior learning (RPL) systems in the services sector, and the Federation of Parents and Citizens’ Associations of New South Wales (P&C Federation) who were interested in actively supporting skill recognition for its volunteers. The parties came together using WIP and NSW Department of Education and Training funding to trial a new recognition of competencies system amongst the P&C Federation’s members and other associated volunteers. The ddd model was rolled out to 100 unemployed and 50 employed volunteers in four regions across NSW using a network of P&C Federation assessors. The regions were selected based on their high levels of unemployment and relative vulnerability to economic downturn.

RPL systems enable individuals who may not have had access to training for qualifications to gain formal recognition of their extant skills, experience and knowledge. Research relating to RPL has identified barriers to using RPL systems. These include the complexity of the system, that it can take a long time and be costly, and the difficulties experienced by candidates who are required to produce a considerable amount of documented evidence. A report commissioned by SSA in 2009 confirmed that a system placing the burden of proof on paperwork to be produced by candidates was particularly cumbersome for services sector workers with a history of part time, casual and high turnover jobs, where they are very often undertaking ‘reactive learning’ – all factors that limit the documentation of employment and training.

The P&C Federation saw the project as a means of ‘giving something back’ to their volunteers, while also increasing their capacity as an organisation by rewarding incumbent members and providing a basis for recruiting new members through expansion of their ‘brand’.

The ddd model

The ddd model of recognition of competencies differs from traditional RPL processes in that rather than relying on the provision of documentary evidence, such as proof of previous training, employment references and job descriptions and the like, it focussed on having a ‘competency’ or ‘professional’ conversation. This placed the onus on the assessor to walk the participant through their previous work and life experiences. They guided them in matching those experiences to skills, and then to the competencies specified in relevant national training packages. Assessors assisted in identifying possible documentary proof but also enabled the candidate to show their skills through relevant activities. The following key elements in the process are outlined in the WIP final report:

- **Discuss**: the assessor asks the candidate a series of questions that relate to their work and life experiences.
- **Display**: the assessor asks the candidate to provide documents and/or materials that relate to their experiences—including for example job descriptions, performance appraisals, formal reports from workplace supervisors, minutes of meetings, Treasurer’s reports, risk assessments, event planning paperwork and canteen menus.

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18According to the author of the SSA report, this is learning which occurs spontaneously in response to situations.
Do: the assessor asks the candidate to demonstrate how they can do a task or activity, which may also involve further discussion or questioning.

The P&C Federation implemented the model through a network of assessors recruited from active members and office bearers in the P&C Federation. There were four lead assessors that had been trained to Certificate IV level in Training and Assessment (TAA), 25 regional assessors with five units in the TAA and 60 assessor advocates with two units. The role of the network was to “assess, gather, record, present their evidence and recommend entitlement to a qualification to be conferred by a co-operating RTO”.

Participants were eligible for recruitment to the program if they were involved in volunteering. In most cases the candidates were within the P&C Federation structures, but anyone from the local communities who was interested in being involved and had volunteered in some capacity was included. The program was advertised through the local school P&C Federation structures but appeared to be disseminated most effectively by word of mouth and personal recommendations.

**Key features of the model**

A critical feature of the project was how it facilitated the formal recognition of skills amongst volunteers. SSA regarded this as an important aspect of the project for two main reasons: first, because volunteers are excluded in most states from receiving government funding for skill development; and second, because the model engaged with a cohort of citizens that are often excluded in a variety of ways from the national training system. They include the following groups:

- People who were ‘not in the labour force’ and therefore not eligible for government funded training or job assistance;
- People who were under-employed;
- Those working in services industries with high proportions of casual and part-time jobs, where formal skilling processes and qualifications are relatively rare;
- People who are ‘time poor’, in part due to caring responsibilities in addition to their volunteer commitments;
- People with low confidence in their capacity to engage in training; and
- People with limited knowledge of the training system.

Another key feature of the project according to the project proponent was that the skills being assessed were not just those associated with volunteer work – they were recognising any of the skills that were possessed by the volunteer candidates and could be mapped to the national training packages. In this way the process was less about ‘volunteer skills’ than it was about skills that resided in each of the volunteers involved. As expressed by one of the ddd assessors, “… It was all about the journey for each person. It wasn’t about a list of competencies that we were looking for in them.”

Project assessors were of the view that the ddd process, with the concentration on ‘unearting’ the skills in each person by referencing their lived experience, was particularly powerful in introducing people that were “intimidated by formal learning situations” to the skills and training system.

They also believed there were benefits in using the P&C Federation network of assessors. Their fluency in the processes and skills associated with volunteering allowed for effective probing to map

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19 The exception is Victoria under the Skills For Growth program.
those skills to the training packages. As peers and fellow community members, assessors were often well equipped to put participants at ease and to approach the discussions in plain language, avoiding the jargon of the training system.

Several interviewees highlighted the need for assessors to have specific skills and attributes to guide the ddd competency conversations. Those most frequently alluded to, though not named as such, were associated with emotional intelligence and effective emotional management. The level of personal disclosure that could take place in discussions suggested that strategies and skills to handle those moments were important. As a party to the project described, there was a need for assessors to be respectful of such encounters given the degree of intimacy that was sometimes involved,

... [participants] didn’t do it by anything but choice, but it was always just like I said, just a little bit shocking at the end when you got to go, wow, you could see them realise, “I’ve said things here that I wouldn’t have normally said to anyone”. That’s the safety of the model, I suppose, and there’s a need to be mindful of that. And that means you can’t start a conversation that you can’t finish. No one should take that too lightly.

In some locations, particularly in regional settings where community members experienced social isolation, participation was encouraged by involving key people in the local community to spread the word about the project. It was particularly effective when other community members were able to attest to the informality and welcoming environment of the ddd in action.

Care needed to be taken to ensure that meeting venues were comfortable and accessible to participants. Reluctant candidates were particularly sensitive to this and one of the project assessors described a town where the venue had to be changed three times to finally hit upon a place where people felt ‘safe’ to attend.

It was recommended by project participants that face-to-face meetings were important so that the required level of rapport and trust could be established. However, there were circumstances, due to lack of time, where parts of the process were successfully conducted electronically after an initial meeting.

The inclusive nature of the program was regarded as fundamental. In a few instances early on, when the process was new, some candidates were told they were ineligible. This was soon overturned and the rule was made that everyone interested was entitled to participate, because it was the deeper engagement with each candidate that uncovered the skills. A preliminary process to screen people in or out was considered anathema to that understanding. The project manager felt vindicated for taking this position given that every candidate that undertook the process was found to have competencies that were able to be mapped to the national training framework.

**Barriers and limitations**

The project manager described encountering considerable cynicism about the value of skills recognition inside and outside of the P&C Federation. RPL was assumed to be a ‘soft option’ that could not deliver the same quality outcomes as traditional training processes. Several other assessors described starting the project with a similarly jaundiced view of the ddd model but after being involved in the rigour of the process and witnessing the transformative impact on participants,
changed their view and became advocates. However, the lack of faith some people had in the value of skills recognition as a practice led to mixed levels of commitment,

... where it worked, it works really well, but in some places it just didn’t get the lift it should have because it was seen as the softer option if you like, so the people that were marginalised, oh quick, let’s just give them a qual and then feed them through a system. So it didn’t necessarily - people wanted to process them rather than take the journey and the time that took. I don’t think there was enough appreciation from the RTOs particularly around, take the journey, build the esteem, the qualification comes at the end of it. But that nearly - nearly by that stage, is icing on the cake. All the investment has happened to this person prior.

It was suggested by two interviewees that this might have been avoided had there been a greater degree of early involvement by all of the executive members of the P&C Federation in trialling the model. In this way support for ddd might have been wider. The project manager also expressed disappointment that there was not always a system of ‘follow-up’ for each of the candidates involved. It was clear in some instances that other forms of support might have benefitted participants in reaching their employment and training goals and that these activities were beyond the scope of the ddd. While they could tentatively advise on these matters, it was clear that in some cases targeted intervention was likely to be highly beneficial.

Impacts
The project was found to have impacts on the ddd participants, the P&C Federation network assessors, and to some degree, the P&C Federation as an organisation.

The participants:
The process of ddd was challenging for some individuals and for the organisation but the benefits of empowerment that flowed from the process were considered of tremendous value to the individuals who participated. It was described more than once as ‘transformative’ by both participants and the people involved in managing the pilot who were interviewed for this study. They recounted the following impacts of the DDD for participants:

The ddd process built confidence and self-esteem in many participants: Identifying and naming their skills and establishing that those skills were recognised in national training frameworks had an empowering affect. While there was no formal evaluation that assessed what happened to candidates after the ddd process, interviewees were able to recount stories of participants who credited their involvement in the ddd to changes such as

- Using the qualifications to secure better quality employment
- Using newfound confidence to negotiate improved hours in existing jobs
- Going on to further education to pursue career aims

The process was also described as “a learning process in and of itself” in that the assessors and candidates gained an increased understanding of the training and qualifications system and how it could be utilised to improve their personal circumstances. Examples were provided of several people using their ddd qualifications as a springboard for further education and changes in career direction.
Candidates were better able to ‘articulate’ their own skills and this was regarded as critical for marketing themselves to prospective employers and improving their labour market options. A project partner explained:

> It was an extremely worthwhile project in the self-esteem and the confidence building that it gave our volunteers. It was quite effective. It's really good for somebody who's actually looking for work, because when you put things into a skills framework and they've got it on paper - I know jobs don't get won based on the paper but getting them through the door does.

Candidates improved their understanding of the importance and value of education: This led some participants to be more actively involved in the education of their children by giving them greater confidence to assist their children’s learning.

The process brought candidates to the national training system: People who felt that they could never receive a formal qualification accessed the national training system. The project manager explained,

> The Recognition of Competencies demonstrated that those people that were less likely to be successful in the structured framework, if you like, met success easily in the unstructured one. So it definitely tapped into those people that never ever dreamt of obtaining a Cert II, Cert III, Cert IV, because of like I said, let’s start with the access: showing up at TAFE for some people was absolutely, not even, couldn’t have even entertained the thought.

The participating organisations
The project provided the momentum for changes within the P&C Federation and some of the training organisations involved. They included:

Successful lobbying of DEEWR to recognise P&C Federation volunteering as an approved activity for Centrelink purposes: This meant that people in receipt of a Centrelink benefit could use their P&C Federation volunteering to meet an activity test, Mutual Obligation or participation requirement. This was a separate and valuable means of recognising the work of volunteers in a practical way.

Built strong and important relationships with other organisations: The P&C Federation built an ongoing relationship with the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group through the involvement of some of their office holders in the ddd process. The P&C Federation continue to have strong relationships with RTOs party to the project that have adopted the ddd competency conversation into their practices.

Difficulties for the P&C Federation in accommodating the newly empowered volunteers in their structure: Some participants became enthusiastic about becoming more involved in the P&C Federation but the organisation was not ready. An observation made by one of the project parties was that, like many enterprises, skills and motivation were “… unleashed, but the systems and practices weren’t in place to capitalise on them”. This had the potential to frustrate people seeking to have their skills further utilised within the organisation.

ddd did not successfully ‘re-brand’ the P&C Federation as had been hoped: It was generally felt by the project parties that while they had achieved great success in building the confidence levels of the
many participants involved, most of the benefits of the project had been for the existing P&C Federation membership and that the ‘external branding’ of the P&C Federation was not significantly affected by the project. Rather than this being seen as a failing, it was thought that the P&C Federation’s original expectations of the ddd project had been unrealistic.

**Sustaining project outcomes**

Nothing is currently in train to continue the ddd process beyond or within the P&C Federation. Despite all of the parties agreeing that there was great power and benefit in the model, in the absence of external funding neither the SSA nor the P&C Federation have the capacity to explicitly progress the model.

The project manager described the importance of the ddd project in bringing about changes in the culture of the P&C Federation. While the ddd process is not formally taking place, the principles that underpin it have remained. They can inform volunteers about the skills that they are building, with confidence, but they cannot offer formal recognition for them. Consequently the project manager expressed concern that this change in culture is likely to dissipate as the leaders who experienced the ddd leave the organisation.

The fact that I’m still in P&C means that ddd still gets aired, as in the ideology, the rhetoric, the experiences, the values. But if you come back and have this conversation in five years’ time I have a feeling it might be just a box in the archive.

SSA has publicised the model in a series of eight forums with its stakeholders in the volunteer sector. Interest in the model was significant in some quarters. However in the absence of funding for volunteer training, the model has not been taken up by any of those organisations as yet.

A series of recommendations was made by the SSA on the basis of the project and their accumulative knowledge relating to both systems of skills recognition and skilling volunteers. These matters remain firmly on the broader agenda of the ISC but as it currently stands there is no specific program of activity to pursue those changes. This was regarded by the ISC as unfortunate but inevitable in the face of shifting external priorities and the need to resource and concentrate on their central mission. However, they were adamant that this does not preclude the ISC from advancing the model or other recommendations whenever the opportunity arises.

**WIP 169: Workplace Productivity Tool Pilot – Skills utilisation**

The proponent in this project was Australian Industry Group (AI Group), a peak body representing employers across industry sectors. The project was conducted over a two year period between 2009 and 2011. The aim of the project was to develop and pilot a paper-based diagnostic tool that would help organisations find ways to enhance organisational practices and in particular, practices relating to skills utilisation, that will lead to increased productivity. The tool was piloted at seven sites and this process included the involvement of dedicated consultants who worked with the pilot organisations over an eight-month period to assist them in adopting high performance working methods.

According to the proponent, the aim of the project was to identify key features or attributes of high performing workplaces and examine ways of transferring these practices to other organisations; in particular the smaller, trade exposed firms in AI Group’s membership base who were facing difficulties in the context of ongoing structural adjustment.
Elements of the project included:

- A literature review to identify ‘best practice’ in skills utilisation and high performing workplaces conducted by the National Centre for Vocational and Educational Research (NCVER)
- A survey by AI Group of 338 member organisations to assess practices associated with skill utilisation, such as skills mapping and matching
- Case studies of five AI Group member organisations (in the manufacturing, defence services and aged care sectors) that were considered best practice in terms of productivity. The project team identified the actions, processes and structures they put in place to create high performing workplaces.

The information drawn from these project activities was used to design a Workplace Productivity Tool. Evidence from these initial activities identified seven key elements which appeared to be critical to creating a high performance workplace and which provided the framework for the tool. They comprised leadership, participatory decision making, team-based work systems, developing and utilising the skills of the workforce, quality improvement, learning from others (networking and benchmarking), and knowledge sharing. The diagnostic survey tool was then piloted in seven organisations (all SMEs, with workforces of less than 200 employees) to test its usefulness.

The tool provided a diagnostic element, enabling users to compare their practice against a best practice benchmark. Once the results of the survey were calculated, each site made decisions about the area it would focus on and then developed improvement strategies including action plans, communication plans and risk management plans to guide and support its work in the identified areas for improvement. The tool includes templates of each of these plans for companies to use as a guide. It also provides advice to companies on its use, though the companies in the pilot did not administer the tool single-handedly, as throughout they had the support of a consultant. Consultants worked with each company for 20 days over an eight month period. All of the consultants that worked with the pilot organisations were linked to Enterprise Connect – typically they had had successful careers in industry and were now working part time in a business advisory capacity.

Lessons from the pilots
Reflecting on the project and the lessons it held for practitioners seeking to implement high performance work practices, a proponent commented that while the project proved that it is possible to successfully distil and codify high performance strategies, and work with other organisations to embed these strategies, it was not easy to do so and required considerable “upfront” commitment and much time on the part of organisations. In addition, the skills needed to embed these practices were deemed “tacit or cultural attributes” relating to good people management.

Nonetheless, the proponent was positive about the impact of the project at the pilot companies whilst acknowledging that factors in the companies’ operating environments exerted a countervailing influence on their performance during the pilot period. Section 4.6 describes other lessons relating to how external events in the pilot companies’ operating environments and inadequate staffing and resourcing can divert attention away from planned project activities and reduce the impact and effectiveness of implementation at the site level. The proponent stated,
... some of the companies might have been well and truly down a high performing workplace pathway, but the change in the currency can really disrupt things. So I’m not going to sit here and pretend that we found the silver bullet, but companies that went through the process or journey have gained a lot from it and were very appreciative of it. But it didn’t necessarily solve all the issues.

Likewise the report submitted to the WIP stated that the pilot companies “were all of the view that their productivity had improved, or would improve in the short term as a result of the implementation of measures developed through the application of the Workplace Productivity Tool.”

The report contained several lessons relating to the implementation of the project in the pilot sites that are common in much of the literature on success and risk factors in organisational change processes. These lessons focused on the need to involve managers at all levels of the organisation to ensure buy-in and effective implementation at the shop-floor level; difficulties measuring and isolating the impact of interventions given multiple change initiatives being implemented simultaneously; the impact of changes in the trading environment; the fact that many companies did not have basic business metrics in place, which precluded attempts to measure performance impacts at the site level; and the need to manage employee scepticism about the project, given the propensity for workplaces to conduct diagnostic exercises on a regular basis with few changes occurring at the workplace level as a result.

Little evaluation of outcomes and impact
Proponents noted that a period of longer than eight months (the duration of the piloting phase) is necessary before performance results, both measurable and qualitative, can be reliably reported. The project, as planned, had a built-in impact evaluation component, whereby pilot organisations were to provide the project team with “quantitative and qualitative feedback on outcomes” immediately after the pilot’s completion, and again at six and twelve months after completion of the pilot phase (ending in April 2011). However no formal evaluation process has occurred. Informal contact between the proponent and pilot organisations has indicated that some of the pilot organisations have continued to implement the high performance working strategies they adopted during the pilot. In another case, a pilot company had encountered “major financial problems” brought about by currency fluctuations which had diverted attention away from ongoing implementation of high performance work practices. The proponent was intending to go back to the pilot organisations to evaluate the impact of the project but noted that at the time of interviews, organisational resources did not permit this, although an increase in staff numbers might allow them to do so.

Longer term impact
A 44-page, PDF version of the final report, which includes a paper-based version of the tool, is accessible from the “Reports and Policy Development” section of AI Group’s website. The tool and the key messages have been integrated into AI Group’s policy work and the services they offer to members. AI Group’s workforce development advisers promote the tool to companies. Where possible, the tool is utilised with work undertaken within companies around lean production processes and ‘competitive systems and practices’. The proponent noted that the findings from the project have informed a number of AI Group policy outputs and the work that they do with members to assist them in developing workforce development plans. Some of this work has involved discussion
with member organisations about developing their workforce in the context of adopting high performance working methods.

The proponent interviewee had not sought information from others in the organisation as to whether the resources had generated interest from organisations seeking assistance from AI Group in using the tool, or whether external organisations had provided feedback on use of the tool. The proponent noted the need for a sustained dissemination strategy for the project, in order for it to “snowball”, whilst also stating that AI Group was unable to undertake this role in a dedicated manner given the plethora of other issues requiring advocacy by the Group. Despite this, the proponent noted that the policy messages arising from the project were part of AI Group’s broad position and that they were “gaining increased traction and interest”.

AI Group developed a longer term strategy to roll the project out more broadly, beyond the seven pilot sites, and applied for second-round WIP funding to implement this strategy. However their application was unsuccessful. Following the pilot period, the proponent reported that one large organisation had used the tool on a widespread basis, with considerable assistance from AI Group to this end. However beyond that initiative, AI Group had not sought to extend use of the approach more broadly outside of the pilot organisations. The proponent expressed a desire to implement the project more widely and to “drive some really powerful messages … I think we put our toe in the water and it would be good to do more.” However, expansion of the project, as proposed, was viewed as being wholly contingent on further government support. The proponent added that other options for funding were however being considered.

WIP 175: Business Building Blocks

This project was conducted over a two year period from mid-2010 until mid-2012. The Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia (COSBOA) was the project proponent, with Business Enterprise Centres Australia (BECA) and the University of Western Sydney the principal program partners. COSBOA was the formally designated project manager and UWS was contracted to provide content and technical development. The project was subject to a formative evaluation conducted by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) and this was funded by the WIP as a separate project (WIP 213) which has not been subject to evaluation as part of this study.

The stated aim of the project was to promote a workforce development approach to address the management skill needs of Small Business Organisations (SBOs) and their engagement with the national training system. This was to be achieved by means of the design, delivery and piloting of seven online, open access business management learning units (BSB30307 Certificate III in Micro Business Operations). The course was accredited by North Sydney Institute TAFE. The units, launched in May 2011, were aimed at individuals who owned, managed, or intended to establish ‘micro’ businesses employing less than five people.

Project participants in the pilot included individual users, who accessed the training online, and two cohorts of trainees who engaged in ‘blended learning’ provided by two regional NSW Business Enterprise Centres (BECs). The latter involved BEC instructors supplementing delivery of the online course content with personalised assistance provided through regular teleconferences, face to face meetings, e-mail correspondence, group workshops, assessments of users’ business plans and other forms of support.
An online platform was chosen to provide flexible learning opportunities for small business owners subject to time constraints who might otherwise find it difficult to access similar training offered by TAFEs or other training providers. A project partner described the rationale for the development of the course:

The intention of the project (was) to get reasonable quality-level training materials to small business in a flexible access manner ... research shows that if people engage in formal training, they have better outcomes in their business performance. The number of business failures is lower. ... This was a really good way to get that formal training out to people, without having to send them off to TAFE two nights a week, which they just don’t do.

Relatively little marketing of the BBB occurred due to key project partners facing resource constraints and limited budgets. One partner stated that numbers of users accessing the site were “reasonable” as a result of marketing efforts which included BECs publicising the course within local networks, UWS developers publicising the course at conferences and producing brochures, and a ministerial launch that generated some interest.

While the learning materials were open access (free of charge), accreditation came with a charge and the user was required to arrange payment for accreditation with a registered training provider. The project partners developed the course based on the assumption that small business owners are not interested in obtaining formal accreditation, but that they value the opportunity to learn and build business expertise through access to course content. The BECs piloting the blended learning approach received no funding to provide this training. It was assumed that they would receive the $1,495 fee paid by users to obtain an accredited certificate on successful completion of the course. However only two of the 89 training participants in the BEC pilots opted to pay for accreditation.²⁰ A BEC instructor explained that this was because “the piece of paper wasn’t important to them” and because accreditation was seen as a substantial expense for small business owners who were trading in difficult conditions. The BEC instructor proposed what they considered to be a more effective model whereby users would pay per module (eg $150 per module) and pay only a nominal fee for accreditation (eg $100) on completion of all seven units.

The option for payment by module is currently available for online users, who can enrol in the full course or in individual units. While access to the course remains free, the BBB website²¹ states that accreditation is charged at $200 per individual learning unit (with users receiving a Statement of Attainment on completion of each unit) or $1,000 for accreditation of the full course (seven learning units). Accreditation fees are paid by users to registered training providers.

Project partners from the UWS had already developed an online platform and functionality suitable for online learning programs aimed at small business people (as used in the Start, Run, Grow program and Financial Analysis for Business Planning Tool they had previously developed for the NSW Government). However they highlighted several innovative elements of the BBB including the

²⁰ The total number of accreditations (two) was cited in the PwC evaluation report and confirmed by the manager of the BEC from which the two participants achieved accreditation. However, a UWS project partner queried this figure and indicated that it may be higher, adding that they had heard “anecdotally” “that many participants completed the courses off-line through traditional TAFE qualifications.”

assessment methodology used and the capacity to now measure which areas of the website and training content the users are most interested in.

**Initial (immediate) outcomes:**

Over the 12 month pilot period (1 June 2011 to 31 May 2012) there were 4,923 unique visitors to the BBB website and 327 registered active users (training participants). No BBB participant completed online accreditation during the pilot process.

The PWC evaluation included results of an online user evaluation survey with an achieved sample that was too small to enable robust conclusions to be drawn on user satisfaction (n=10). Users tended to rate the training as ‘average’ in terms of their satisfaction with the course and whether they would recommend it to other SBOs. However a project partner from UWS had talked to a number of site users who had provided positive feedback on the site on the basis that it was “simple, clear and basic”.

The two BECs delivered the course to 89 BBB participants, all of whom completed the content online. Of these, six participants received training from one BEC, four of whom were New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) participants who intended to establish businesses and another two who had existing businesses. The remaining 83 pilot participants received training from a second BEC. Of this group, 50 were business owners and 33 (NEIS participants) intended to start a business. Of this cohort of 83 participants, 72 per cent (existing business owners) intended to start a business had successfully done so. The instructor, who maintained contact with the pilot cohort more broadly, reported that the impact of having undertaken the training for course completers included better business survival rates and business outcomes, along with a greater awareness of their legal and compliance obligations.

The PWC evaluation report notes that “anticipated results as measured by the number of users enrolled in the project were not achieved”. Project partners reflected that this may have been for a number of reasons. The market for small business support resources was crowded and competitive, small business owners were time constrained and unwilling to engage in training, and the course was publicised to only a minimal degree.

Several partners felt that uptake would have been greater had the course been designed at Certificate IV level. The UWS partners initially proposed that it be a Certificate IV level course but received WIP funding which was sufficient only to support the design and development of a Certificate III course. Another partner suggested that uptake of the program would have been higher if it had been targeted to NEIS providers in the very early stages of its development. It was suggested that “piggybacking” off the NEIS program and obtaining the buy-in of NEIS providers early on, by consulting with them on ways the BBB could meet their needs, would have improved the usage and success of the program.

While traffic numbers to the site were smaller than anticipated, a partner remained positive about the impact of the project, describing BBB as “a good first step in getting open access training out there, for small business”, at a time when online learning was a relatively new medium. A project partner from a BEC offered another perspective, noting that the value of BBB lay in its worth as an
investigative tool which allowed those intending to establish businesses to assess the viability of their planned business idea.

**Longer term outcomes/impacts of the program**

**The uncertain future of the program:** As initially designed, the BBB program was intended to have a national rollout, however there was little consideration of who would fund or execute this. Project partners from participating BECs felt that the BEC network provided a structure for continued rollout of the program, and that the program could be targeted at NEIS participants on an ongoing basis. BEC trainers have continued to use material from the BBB units in training NEIS participants beyond the pilot period. The sustainability of the website was an issue of concern to the developers, whose organisation (UWS) was currently hosting and providing maintenance support costs of $24,000 per year for the site. However UWS did not have ongoing funding and were trying to find another organisation to host the site. Similarly a project partner felt that blended learning delivered face to face could only be sustained if users paid for individual units or if it was subsidised by government funding. Project partners from UWS noted that the formal evaluation of the BBB and qualitative analysis of the project team indicated that the BBB resource was of high value, but that it needed to be located within an appropriate structure to realise its potential and provide a strong return on the investment by the funder.

**Development and trial of a Certificate IV program:** On the basis of feedback from the BECs that there was latent demand for the course as a Certificate IV level course, the UWS funded the development of four additional units to bring the BBB up to Certificate IV level, and were piloting the Certificate IV course with a TAFE in Victoria (using a blended learning approach). UWS partners expected this Certificate IV course to have a higher accreditation conversion rate. Whilst the Certificate III content is in the public domain, the additional Certificate IV modules remain UWS’s intellectual property. Project partners felt that the Certificate IV filled a gap in the market for owners of existing businesses, whilst the BBB Certificate III material was perhaps more suited to those intending to establish a business. The Certificate IV material content was more advanced and complex, with completion of the units requiring greater effort from participants. Those completing the Certificate III BBB are able to have this converted to Certificate IV on completion of extra Certificate IV modules.