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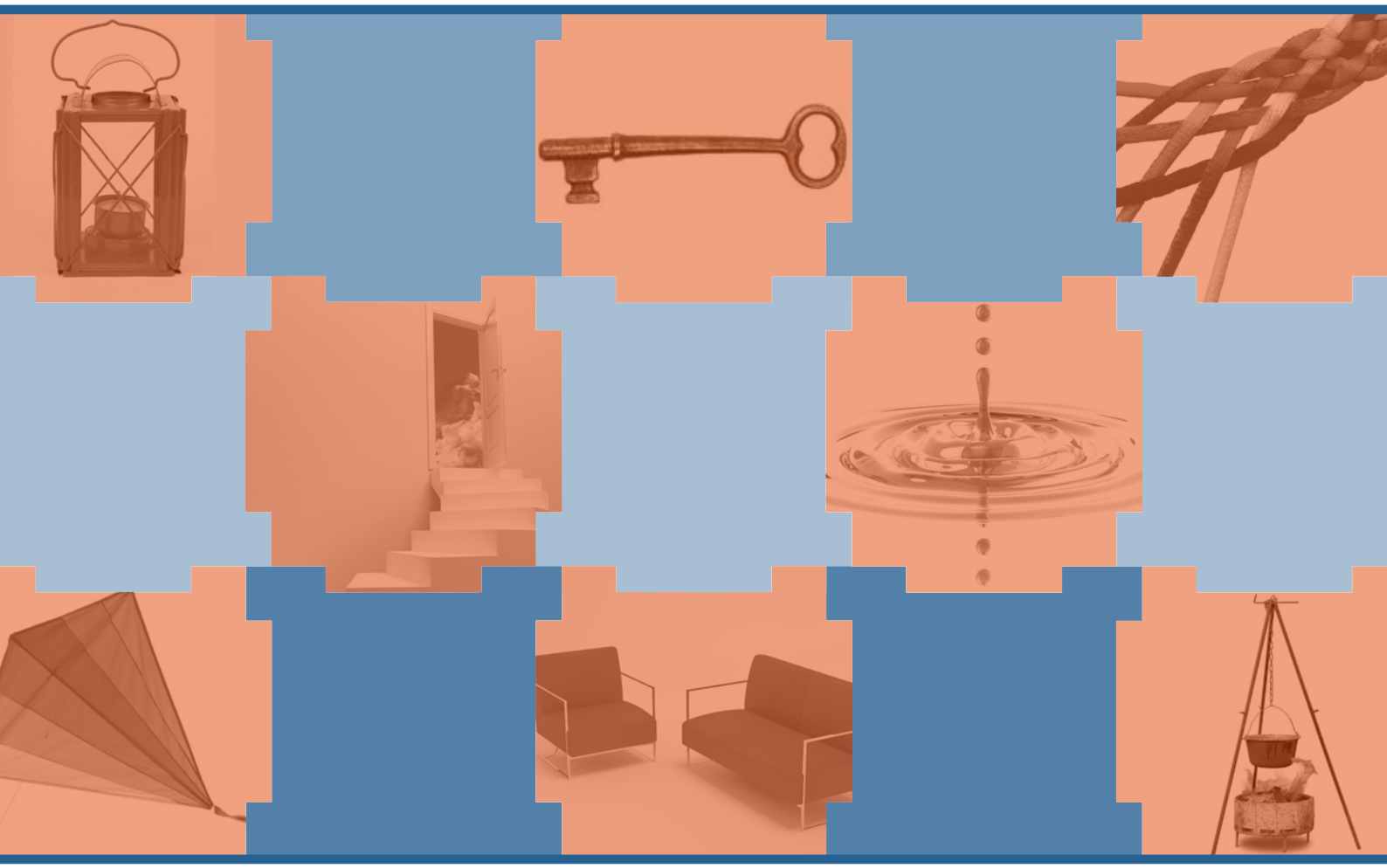

Putting the jigsaw together:

Flexible Learning Programs in Australia
Final Report

Associate Professor Kitty te Riele

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THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE
Building Better Learning

PUTTING THE JIGSAW TOGETHER

FLEXIBLE LEARNING PROGRAMS IN AUSTRALIA

Final Report

JULY 2014

The Victoria Institute

Associate Professor Kitty te Riele

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About

The Victoria Institute

The Victoria Institute is a research institute with a focus on inclusive education. We work with researchers, teachers, communities and policy makers to improve educational experiences and outcomes for all.

Our research aims to build better learning for students from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds.

Led by Professor Roger Slee (Director), we aim to analyse, evaluate and challenge education practices, curriculum and assessment.

Located in Melbourne, the Institute forms part of the College of Education at Victoria University.

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Abbreviations

ABS: Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACE: Adult and Community Education
BSL: Brotherhood of St Laurence
CALD: Cultural and Linguistically Diverse
CARE: Curriculum and Re-Engagement
CCC: Canberra College Cares
COAG: Council of Australian Governments
COMET: Community Outreach Model of Education and Training
CVCAL: Community VCAL / Community Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
DEECD: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DEEWR: Department of Education, Employment and Work Relations
DHS: Department of Human Services
DSF: Dusseldorp Skills Forum (since May 2014: Dusseldorp Forum)
EREA: Edmund Rice Education Australia
ESU: Educational Services Unit
FLC: Flexible Learning Centre
FLO: Flexible Learning Options
FYA: Foundation for Youth Australians
GDP: Gross domestic product
HOL: Hands On Learning
HSC: Higher School Certificate
ICAN: Innovative Community Action Networks
IT: Information Technology
LOTE: Language other than English
NAB: National Australia Bank
NESB: Non-English Speaking Background
OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation
PLP: Personal Learning Plan
RTO: Registered Training Organisation
SACE: South Australian Certificate of Education
SAS: Special Assistance Schools
SEDA: Sports Education and Development
SKYS: St Kilda Youth Services
SROI: Social Return On Investment
SSEP: Senior School Engagement Program
TAFE: Technical and Further Education
VCAL: Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCE: Victorian Certificate of Education
VET: Vocational Education and Training
WAVE: Wirreanda Adaptive Vocational Education
YOTS: Youth Off The Streets
YOYO: Youth Options Youth Outcomes

Executive Summary

The research for *Putting the Jigsaw Together* focused on the provision of education for disadvantaged young people through flexible learning programs in Australia. The overall goal of the project was to both assess and enhance the potential of flexible learning programs to contribute to marginalised young people's learning and wellbeing, as well as to national educational attainment and social inclusion goals.

Provision of flexible learning programs in Australia

The research developed an extensive and detailed database of flexible learning programs across Australia, and made the data publicly available through a user-friendly website, hosted by Dusseldorp Forum: http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/program-database/

The research found:

- There are three broad structural categories of flexible learning programs: programs operating within mainstream schools, programs operating within TAFE or ACE, and separate (stand alone) programs.
- Nationally there are over 900 flexible learning programs, educating over 70,000 students each year.
- About one-third of programs offer credentials at both junior and senior secondary level. Almost half offer only junior secondary credentials and almost one-fifth only senior secondary credentials. About half of the programs also offer accredited VET certificates across a wide range of industries.
- Almost all programs indicate they target young people who are at risk of non-completion and early school leavers, reinforcing their shared mission of providing education opportunities for young people who may otherwise miss out on crucial secondary schooling.
- The website assists young people (and their parents, youth workers and teachers) to find a program that suits them, and enables flexible learning programs to learn about and from each other.

Good practice in flexible learning programs

The research analysed publicly available documentation from more than 20 purposely selected programs, as well as conducting detailed fieldwork (observation on-site and interviews with various stakeholders) in eight of those programs. This generated insight in how they work and the outcomes they achieve, and led to the development of a model to understand flexible learning programs and support successful flexible learning provision: the Framework of Quality Flexible Learning Programs [FQFLP]. The model has four key dimensions representing the work of flexible learning programs: Valued Outcomes, Actions, Principles and Conditions. The report argues:

- All the dimensions of the Framework for Quality Flexible Learning Programs are of relevance across all flexible learning programs for marginalised young people. That is, all programs engage in specific actions, informed by their explicit or implicit principles, aimed at achieving valued outcomes, and enabled (or constrained) by certain conditions.
- Rather than mandating exactly what a flexible learning program should look like, the Framework for Quality Flexible Learning Programs enables programs to apply it to their own specific context and purposes. Diversity among flexible learning programs means they may place different weightings on the specific aspects that are part of those dimensions (see below) and each of these aspects can be operationalised in many different ways.

- Specific aspects for Valued Outcomes achieved by flexible learning programs include:
    - o better futures (through credentials and career pathways),
    - o successful learning (academic achievement and engagement with learning),
    - o personal growth and wellbeing (emotional, behavioural, social and health outcomes),
    - o recognition from community (for programs, staff and students),
    - o contribution to community (through volunteering as well as reduced costs).
- Specific aspects for Actions taken by flexible learning programs include:
    - o create meaningful learning opportunities (curriculum that is relevant and individualised),
    - o provide significant support for learning (enable young people to achieve successful learning),
    - o build genuine and caring relationships (based on mutual respect, trust and care),
    - o provide practical support for living (such as support with housing, transport, legal issues, health, meals, and childcare),
    - o engage with community (including parents and carers, community agencies, and employers),
    - o perform reflection and innovation (a commitment to continuous improvement).
- Specific aspects for Principles that underpin flexible learning programs include:
    - o commitment to each student's needs, interests and rights (aimed at a high quality education and involving attention for both wellbeing and learning),
    - o recognition that every young person has strengths (finding and building on strengths),
    - o valuing life and learning as meaningfully connected (learning happens in real-life situations),
    - o responsibility for empowering and transformative education (commitment to an education that is genuinely enabling for young people).
- Specific aspects for Conditions that enable (or constrain) flexible learning programs include:
    - o flexibility (in terms of curriculum frameworks and organisational regulations),
    - o systemic support and resources (from governments, education systems and umbrella organisations),
    - o engaged and knowledgeable staff (commitment, knowledge, skills and attitudes of all staff, including teachers, youth workers, tradespeople, and/or Indigenous workers),
    - o shared vision (based on strategic leadership),
    - o productive partnerships (including with local business and service providers).

Implications

The report concludes with implications for a wide range of stakeholders in relation to seven core issues:

- A Flexible Learning Sector
- Financial and Social Returns on Investment
- Overall Coherence and Alignment
- Evidence for Success
- Young People's Input and Strengths
- Staff as the Greatest Asset
- Showcases of Innovation

As detailed in the report, flexible learning programs generate substantial benefits for individual young people as well as for their communities and broader Australian social and economic imperatives.

INTRODUCTION 1

This chapter outlines the focus and purpose of the research project presented in this report, titled *Putting the Jigsaw Together*. Chapter 1 also provides commentary on terminology for this field of education and training, an overview of types of programs included, and a synopsis of the chapters that follow.

1.1 The Research Focus

The research for *Putting the Jigsaw Together* focused on the provision of education for disadvantaged young people through flexible learning programs in Australia. Drawing on the image of a jigsaw, the research provides a meta-analysis of flexible learning programs in Australia, their outcomes and how they achieve these; that is, what works and why. Based on previous research (by the lead researcher as well as by others in Australia and internationally), the starting points for the research were that:

- Access to secondary school level education is a right for all young people.
- Education leads to valuable social and economic outcomes for both young people and society.
- Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds want the same opportunities for a successful life as everyone else.
- Flexible learning programs promise insights into how to provide these opportunities for young people who have not experienced the full benefits of schooling.

In the past few decades a wide variety of alternative educational programs have been developed in Australia, aimed at re-engaging marginalised young people with education and enabling them to gain secondary school credentials. These programs exist both within, and outside, mainstream schools. Such programs are characterized by a shared vision of providing 'enfranchising' and inclusive educational pathways for young people, who, for complex and varied reasons, are disengaged by mainstream schooling. They recognise that mainstream approaches to school have not worked well for these young people and, therefore, different approaches are needed.

"A wide variety of alternative educational programs exist both within and outside mainstream schools, aimed at re-engaging marginalised young people with education and enabling them to gain secondary school credentials."

Usually not included in this definition of flexible learning programs, are behaviour schools and suspension centres (because these are attended by coercion rather than by choice) and schools based on alternative philosophies such as Steiner or Montessori (because these do not primarily aim to serve disadvantaged youth). The emphasis in flexible learning programs tends to be on catering for students in the 15-18 year old age range, in part due to recent legislative changes to participation requirements for young people (see Chapter 2.2), but this can extend several years younger and older than that.

Terminology in this field varies and is contested (see Te Riele, 2006a; 2012a). Programs may be referred to as alternative education, second chance education, or re-engagement programs. One critique of these terms is that they reinforce the status of such programs as on the margin of educational provision. Therefore, this report refers to flexible learning programs, emphasising the innovation in pedagogical and curricular approaches demonstrated through the flexibility of these programs. Their counterpart is referred to as mainstream schooling. Although this term may be seen to reinforce the dominant status of traditional approaches to secondary education, it is useful because of its common sense appeal as evidenced by its widespread usage by young people and adults in flexible learning programs. Finally, the population of young people in flexible learning programs is referred to as disadvantaged (since this is a commonly used term in practice, policy and literature) and occasionally as marginalised or disenfranchised. These terms are treated as largely synonymous, but in opposition to terms such as disengaged and at risk, since the latter are more likely to carry 'deficit' connotations.

1.2 Types of Programs Investigated

This research for *Putting the Jigsaw Together* distinguished between three main types of program, as outlined below:

1) Programs within mainstream secondary schools. These may take the form of electives, extracurricular activities or as replacement of regular classes for part of the school week. These programs may not directly lead to the attainment of educational credentials, but work to enable young people to learn and remain engaged in their school. Major organisations supporting such programs include the Beacon Foundation, Big Picture Education Australia, Clontarf Foundation, and Hands on Learning Australia. In addition, many secondary schools have their own 'in-school' program, which may be individually developed or supported through state government initiatives such as Links to Learning (in New South Wales) or the Senior School Engagement Program (in Western Australia).

2) Programs within TAFE and Community Colleges. It is common for TAFE and Community colleges to offer certificates in general education, ranging from a Certificate I in Access to Work and Training through to the Year 12 equivalent Tertiary Preparation Certificate. Many of these courses were initially designed for adults, but they increasingly cater for teenage students as well. Students can often be enrolled on a part-time as well as a full-time basis. In addition, some TAFE and Community Colleges have developed specific courses in general education for groups of disadvantaged young people. However, if these are offered as a holistic, separate program (in a separate space, with a fairly stable cohort of students and staff, and with relatively more face to face class time and other supports) they are included in the next category.

3) Separate alternative programs. These programs usually offer Year 9, 10, 11 and/or 12 education. They include entirely separate schools that are registered/accredited in their own right, as well as separate programs that are governed by a mainstream school, and separate programs in TAFE and Community Colleges. The first set is most easily recognised as offering alternative or flexible education. Large networks of such separate schools include Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) Youth+, Sport Education Development Australia (SEDA), and the Flexible Learning Options (FLOs) within the South Australian Innovative Community Action Networks (ICAN). Smaller clusters of schools include the Youth Off The Streets (YOTS) schools (New South Wales), Melbourne City Mission Melbourne Academy, and Oakwood

schools (Victoria). In addition, many separate schools are 'one-off' initiatives. Separate programs may also be governed by a mainstream school: for example, Canberra College Cares (CCC), Tenison Woods College Flexible Learning Program (FLP) and Wirreanda Adaptive Vocational Education (WAVE) program (see Appendix I). Examples of separate programs governed by a TAFE College include Hunter Institute Skills for Tomorrow and Northern Sydney Institute Youth Options Youth Outcomes (YOYO) (see Appendix I).

The diversity across and within these three types of programs is a strength, with programs able to adapt to their own cohort of students and context. It is also, however, a drawback, as it hinders programs from coming together as a 'sector' of flexible learning programs. They are often isolated, ad hoc, and underfunded, and may have little time for reflection as a unit, group or community on what really works and why. Fragmentation is also evident in research on flexible learning programs (which is mostly of a case study nature) and in philanthropic funding (which tends to focus on supporting specific programs for a short period and/or defined purpose). This fragmentation hinders professional development, communication, quality assurance, and advocacy – therefore reducing the benefits each program can bring to young people that could arise from better knowledge about other programs, given the diversity acknowledged and welcomed above.

1.3 Goals of the Research

Putting the Jigsaw Together was initiated and funded in order to explore, report on, and begin to address problems created by the fragmentation of flexible learning programs depicted above. The overall goal of the project was to both assess and enhance the potential of flexible learning programs for marginalised Australian youth to contribute to young people's wellbeing as well as to national educational attainment and social inclusion goals. Put simply, the research project aimed to answer 'who gets what?' alongside 'what works and why?'.

Specific goals were to:

1) Investigate access to flexible learning programs across Australia.

2) Analyse the diversity of programs.

3) Analyse outcomes from promising 'good practice' programs.

4) Share implications and resources for enhancing successful educational provision for marginalised young people to assist future practice and policy.

"Put simply, the research project aimed to answer 'who gets what?' alongside 'what works and why?'."

Better knowledge about successful flexible learning programs, boosted by better dissemination of this knowledge, is needed so they can act as triggers for further innovation (Holdsworth, 2004; Mills and McGregor, 2010; Te Riele, 2008) both for other flexible learning programs and for mainstream schools aiming to better serve disadvantaged young people.

1.4 Overview of the Project and Report

The research undertaken for this project employed a tiered analysis of programs in Australia through three phases:

PHASE 1. Investigated the provision and diversity of such programs across Australia, with the results (listing over 900 sites) available through the Dusseldorp Forum website.

PHASE 2. Analysed publicly available documentation from over 20 programs to generate insight in how they work and the outcomes they achieve. Short vignettes of each program are also on the Dusseldorp Forum website.

PHASE 3. Involved more in-depth research with eight of those 'vignette' sites. For each program one member of the research team collected additional documentation and spent 3-4 days on-site to observe activities and interview staff, students, community stakeholders and, where possible, graduates.

The report contains four further chapters. Chapter 2 provides background to the research (through evidence for the significance of flexible learning programs), an overview of relevant policy, and an outline of key findings from national and international research literature about alternative and flexible education. Chapter 3 offers findings from Phase 1 of the research in terms of the provision and diversity of flexible learning programs across Australia. Details about the methods used are provided at the start of Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 4 proposes a framework for understanding the work of flexible learning programs and applies this to the findings from Phase 2 and 3. Chapter 5 sums up the research findings and proposes implications for a range of stakeholders.

WHAT WORKS & WHY 2

This chapter provides background to the research through an analysis of relevant policy, reports and previous research. It begins by providing evidence for the significance of flexible learning programs in relation to the benefits of increasing educational attainment. The second part of the chapter reviews relevant policy in Australia. Finally, the chapter analyses scholarly literature based on national and international research on alternative and flexible learning programs to develop insights about good practice.

2.1 Significance of Flexible Learning Programs

Flexible learning programs enable young people to attain educational credentials as well as confidence, knowledge and skills necessary for work, life and further learning. Flexible learning programs do this for young people who, without such programs, would be far less likely to be able to achieve these outcomes. Every young person has potential, but some young people have the odds stacked against them in terms of their life circumstances. In their report Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia for the Productivity Commission, McLachlan, Gilfillan and Gordon (2013, p.2) note as a 'key point' that:

> A child's earliest years fundamentally shape their life chances. Gaps in capabilities between children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families and their more advantaged peers appear early in life. Starting school 'behind the eight ball' can begin a cycle of disadvantage that sets a trajectory for poorer outcomes later in life.

The educational disadvantage due to the unequal social distribution of economic, cultural and social capital means young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds may be set back up to three years behind their peers, placing "an unacceptable proportion of 15-year-old students at serious risk" of not being able to achieve a successful life (Thomson et al, 2011, p.xiv). Evidence about early school leavers in Australia demonstrates they are disproportionately drawn from disadvantaged backgrounds, including low-socioeconomic backgrounds, Indigenous backgrounds, and regional and remote areas (ABS, 2001; COAG Reform Council, 2013; Lamb, Dwyer and Wyn, 2000; McMillan and Marks, 2003; Muir et al, 2009). Apparent retention from Year 7/8 to Year 12 has increased dramatically in the past few decades: from 35 per cent in 1980, to 64 per cent in 1990, and 72 per cent in 2000 (ABS 1993, 1998, 2010; DEET, 1993. It has grown since then to reach 81.6 per cent in 2012 (ABS, 2013a).

"One-fifth of young people do not complete Year 12 in a linear trajectory through high school."

This means about one-fifth of young people still do not complete Year 12 in an uninterrupted linear trajectory from the start of high school. Moreover, as Year 12 completion has become the norm, the negative consequences of early school leaving have intensified. Early school leavers are four times more likely to make a poor transition from school than Year 12 completers (Deloitte Access Economics, 2012, p.23).

Moreover, as Year 12 completion has become the norm, the negative consequences of early school leaving have intensified. Early school leavers are four times more likely to make a poor transition from school than Year 12 completers (Deloitte Access Economics, 2012, p.23).

In 2009, all governments in Australia agreed to a target to raise the Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment rate from 83.5 per cent in 2009 to 90 per cent by 2015 (CoAG, 2009)[1]. It has been calculated that to meet the CoAG 90 per cent target, 92,527 additional young people will need to achieve Year 12 or equivalent between 2009 and 2015 (CoAG, 2009, p.20; see Chapter 2.2 for more detail on these policies). Monitoring by the COAG Reform Council (2013, p.9) shows that "progress needs to be faster if governments are to reach COAG's target". The Council (2013) also notes that the attainment by students from the lowest socioeconomic backgrounds and from Indigenous backgrounds, still exhibited a considerable lag.

"The contribution by flexible learning programs to enabling disadvantaged young people to complete school is significant."

Analysis by the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA, 2011, p.64) highlights that in 2011 more than 107,000 young people aged 20-24 (8.1 per cent of this age group) were considered 'most at risk', because they did not hold Year 12 or post-school qualifications and were not engaged in study or full-time work. The same patterns of disadvantage in terms of young people's backgrounds applied. The FYA report (2011, p.65) suggests:

> Patterns of secondary attainment and of disengagement among young adults provide clear evidence of the disadvantage experienced by particular groups of young people — especially Indigenous students, those from rural and remote areas, those with a disability and those from low SES backgrounds. If Australia is to meet the educational attainment targets that have been set — 90 per cent of young people with Year 12 or equivalent and 40 per cent with a university level qualification — then these groups that at present have low levels of attainment must be the focus of attention. Only when policies and resources are directed to better meeting the needs of those who are currently not well served by the education and training system will school completion rates improve.

In this context, the contribution by flexible learning programs to enabling disadvantaged young people to complete school is significant. In the words of one provider, they offer a "passport to a positive future" (Melbourne City Mission, 2012, p.1). The vital role of education in combatting disadvantage is highlighted by McLachlan, Gilfillan and Gordon (2013, p.2) who maintain:

> Education is a foundation capability. It improves a person's employment prospects and earning capacity, and the evidence points to a relationship between education and better health and raised civic and social engagement.

[1] The 2009 attainment rate is higher (at 83.5 per cent) than the more commonly used retention rate (76 per cent). There are two reasons for this: 1) it is calculated for an older age group (20-24, instead of those progressing directly from Year 7/8 who get to Year 12 at age 17 or 18), and 2) it includes also the completion of 'equivalent' vocational certificates by young people who have left school before Year 12 (CoAG, 2009, p.20).

The economic benefits of education are substantial. Year 12 completion leads to improved participation, productivity and earning capacity. Evidence demonstrates:

- Among young people (aged 20-24) who are not studying, those who have competed Year 12 are much more likely to be employed than those whose highest year of school completed is Year 10 or less: 86 versus 68 per cent (FYA, 2012).
- Among all Year 12 completers (aged 15-64) 83 per cent participate in the labour force, compared to 69 per cent of early school leavers (ABS, 2013b).
- Among Year 12 completers (aged 15-64) who do not have further (non-school) qualifications, 75 per cent are in the labour force, compared to 59 per cent of the equivalent group of early school leavers (ABS, 2013b).
- Year 12 attainment leads to 10 per cent higher earnings for women, and 13 per cent for men, compared to those who had attained Year 11 or lower (Forbes, Barker and Turner, 2010, cited in McLachlan, Gilfillan and Gordon, 2013, p.165).
- For every additional male teenager (aged 15-19) completing Year 12 between 2009 and 2012, an estimated lifetime productivity gain of about $367,901 is achieved (Deloitte Access Economics, 2008, p.29).

Based on these kinds of improvements to participation and earnings, Deloitte Access Economics (2008, p.ii) calculates that:

> Interventions that reduce youth disengagement [by improving secondary education attainment levels] could potentially return 23.6 times the government's initial investment to society and 7.6 times directly to the government through increased taxation revenues.

Earlier work by Access Economics (2005, p.6) demonstrated that "by halving the number of early leavers between 2004 and 2010, it was estimated that benefits of around $8.2 billion in net present value terms could be gained" (p.6) and that retaining an extra 50,000 young people in schooling per year would lead to "GDP some 1.1% higher in 2040, the equivalent of close to $500 a year per Australian in today's money" (p.iv).

"The benefits of educational attainment go beyond the economic sphere and include personal and social wellbeing."

Such calculations do not include the human costs that result from the continuing cycle of disadvantage that follows from the non-completion of school (OECD, 2012a). McLachlan, Gilfillan and Gordon (2013, p.109) point to the wide range of positive impacts of improved educational attainment:

- Better labour market outcomes (employment and earnings).
- Better health and improved life satisfaction.
- Raised levels of civic and social engagement (volunteering, associations, interest in civic/political matters).
- Reduced crime.

This underscores that the benefits of educational attainment go beyond the economic sphere and include personal and social wellbeing. The Australian Treasury describes wellbeing in a way that is much broader than economic activity, namely "as primarily reflecting a person's substantive freedom to lead a life they have reason to value" (cited in McLachlan, Gilfillan and Gordon, 2013, p.46). Such wellbeing can be understood as social inclusion, which is defined by the Australian Social Inclusion Board (2012, p.12) as people having the resources, opportunities and capabilities they need to:

- Learn (participate in education and training).
- Work (participate in employment, unpaid or voluntary work including family and carer responsibilities).
- Engage (connect with people, use local services and participate in local, cultural, civic and recreational activities).
- Have a voice (influence decisions that affect them).

Improved educational attainment (through credentials as well as improved knowledge, skills and confidence) supports social inclusion across these four domains. For example, the OECD (2012b, p.3) suggests that "skills relate to civic and social behaviour as they affect democratic engagement and business relationships". For the wellbeing of the nation as whole, Australian Treasury looks not only to the opportunities (for a variety of 'goods' including consumption, health, leisure, and community participation) available across the population in general, but also to "the distribution of those opportunities across the Australian people. In particular, that all Australians have the opportunity to lead a fulfilling life and participate meaningfully in society" (McLachlan, Gilfillan and Gordon, 2013, p.46).

"The economic and social benefits that educational success generates for young people, as well as for society as a whole, are well-established."

Through the focus of flexible learning programs on supporting young people's education as well as their wellbeing (also see 2.3), flexible learning programs make a substantial contribution to Australian society, as well as to the life chances of the young people with whom they work.

The economic and social benefits of educational success – both for young people themselves and for society as a whole – are thus well-established. Through the focus of flexible learning programs on supporting young people's education as well as their wellbeing (also see 2.3), flexible learning programs make a substantial contribution to Australian society, as well as to the life chances of the young people with whom they work.

2.2 Policy Landscape and Footprint

National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions

In the past decade federal, state and territory governments have changed the requirements around compulsory schooling and participation for young people. In relation to this, they have established policies regarding the provision of flexible educational pathways. These policies impact on the practices of flexible learning programs and also increase the significance of such programs for attaining policy targets and meeting the needs of disadvantaged young people.

The core set of relevant policies are associated with the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions, which was negotiated between the Australian Federal, State and Territory governments through the Council of Australian Governments (CoAG) in 2009. As part of this, all governments agreed to a target to raise the Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment rate from 83.5 per cent in 2009 to 90 per cent by 2015 (CoAG, 2009, p.7). The relevant 'performance benchmark' (CoAG, 2009, p.14) clarifies the 90 per cent target as "the proportion of young people aged 20-24 who have attained Year 12 or a Certificate II or above". Year 12 leads to the award of an upper secondary certificate. Certificate II is a vocational qualification[2], predominantly provided by state-run Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Colleges and some private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).

"These policies impact particularly on those young people who traditionally have left formal education 'early'."

In relation to this National Partnership agreement, all the states and territories amended their legislation (some prior to the agreement, most afterwards) so that across Australia it is now compulsory for young people to complete junior secondary school (Year 10, usually at age 15 or 16) and until age 17 to participate full-time in schooling, recognised training or paid employment (or a full-time combination of these) (DEEWR, 2011). Despite the latter range of options it is worth noting that, led by policy reference to 'the raising of the school leaving age' across several jurisdictions, the common public impression is that it is compulsory for young people to remain in school until age 17. Policy also placed restrictions on the availability of welfare benefits for young people under age 21 who have not completed Year 12 or an equivalent qualification (DEEWR, 2011). Access to welfare benefits by young people has been further restricted in the 2014 Federal Budget (Australian Government, 2014).

These policies impact particularly on those young people who traditionally have left formal education 'early'. Mainstream schools have had to make adjustments to cater for a wider range of young people. In addition, both new and existing flexible learning programs (the focus of this report) are playing a central role in providing access to education for this group. There are indications that the policies have

> driven 'demand' amongst students for alternative education pathways. This has prompted providers in public and private education markets to respond with the provision of flexible learning opportunities (Dandolo Partners, 2014, p.84).

[2] International convention is to classify Certificate II as equivalent to lower rather than upper secondary education.

Implementation of the various policies associated with the National Partnership agreement has been supported through several key strategies. Two of particular relevance are Youth Connections and School Business Community Partnership Brokers.

The Youth Connections program was set up for "eligible young people who are at risk of disengaging, or already disengaged from education, and/or family and the community" (DEEWR, 2010, p.11) and provided regionally by organisations who were awarded the tender by DEEWR. Youth Connections providers were required to provide young people with "access to education or training through an alternative learning facility" (DEEWR, 2010, p.12). This approach led to a higher profile of existing flexible learning programs as well as to the establishment of new programs.

"The Youth Connections program has consistently delivered positive outcomes for young people and is strongly supported by education and training, community and youth sector stakeholders."

Over 70 per cent of Youth Connections participants fell into the category of being "disengaged from schooling" (rather than still connected to school but "at risk of disengaging"), highlighting the crucial role of access to alternative learning facilities (Dandolo Partners, 2014, p.68). The final evaluation of the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions (Dandolo Partners, 2014, p.70) concludes that "The Youth Connections program has consistently delivered positive outcomes for young people and is strongly supported by education and training, community and youth sector stakeholders". Specific outcomes include:

- Over the life of the program, 25,029 young people were recorded as commencing or re-engaging in education for a minimum of 13 weeks. The majority of these (68.9 per cent) were at Connection Level 2B, that is "severely disengaged" (p.70).
- In a nine month testing period (January to mid-September 2013), 51 per cent of young people had addressed or minimised a barrier to learning, such as low self-esteem, behavioural problems, low literacy and numeracy, and socialisation issues (p.72).
- Where circumstances are known, the majority of young people (78 per cent) were engaged in education, training and/or employment six months after completing the program (p.74).
- The Youth Connections model encourages providers to work together, increasing capacity and creating avenues for professional development (p.75).

School Business Community Partnership Brokers (commonly shortened to Partnership Brokers) were the focal point for a strategic, whole of community approach. Flexible learning programs have proven to be an important component of the networks developed by Partnership Brokers. A requirement for Partnership Brokers was to complete an annual environmental scan, and as part of this some Partnership Brokers developed a local service directory for young people and their parents, carers and case workers that includes flexible learning programs (for example, see Sydney Business Education Partnerships, 2013).

By April 2014, Partnerships Brokers had worked with over 4000 partnerships – 86 per cent of them new ones established with support from a Partnership Broker – and 43 per cent of current partnerships were

deemed self-sustaining (Department of Education [Australia], 2014). A Social Return On Investment (SROI) analysis of five Partnership Broker organisations demonstrates they all created "a positive return on the DEEWR cash investment" (SVA Consulting, 2013, p.3) and every $1 invested led to up to $3.70 worth of social value.

The National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions ended in 2013, though the Departments of Education and Human Services received funding in the 2013 Federal Budget to extend the programs funded under the Partnership until the end of 2014 (DEEWR, 2013). The May 2014 Federal Budget confirmed the end of the Youth Connections and Partnership Brokers strategies. This sits alongside a range of other budget measures that reduce support for young people, such as new limitations on access to unemployment benefits and deregulation of undergraduate university fees (Australian Government, 2014; also see Browne, 2014). In addition, the federal government emphasised that "State Governments have primary responsibility for running and funding […] schools" and that the current level of Commonwealth funding for schools is "unaffordable" (Australian Government, 2014, p.7).

"A Social Return On Investment (SROI) analysis of five Partnership Broker organisations demonstrates they all created "a positive return on the DEEWR cash investment" and every $1 invested led to up to $3.70 worth of social value."

Writing to each regional Partnership Broker and Youth Connections provider, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education, Senator Scott Ryan, explained that this decision was based on the government's wish to balance the budget. In relation to employment for young people, he suggested that the government is "increasing personal initiative and responsibility by restoring Work for the Dole" and "improving the financial incentives for young people to find and stay in employment" (Ryan, 2014a, p.1). He argued that "the next round of Job Services Australia to commence in July 2015 will effectively address the needs of young Australians seeking work" (Ryan, 2014b, p.1).

In relation to education, Senator Ryan drew "clear lines of responsibility between the Commonwealth Government and state and territory governments" (Ryan, 2014a, p.1) and stated that the responsibility for "ensuring schools are engaged in both the broader community and assisting students to make choices and take advantage of work, training and education activities" (Ryan, 2014b, p.1) lies with state and territory governments and non-government school systems.

The final evaluation of the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions (Dandolo Partners, 2014) demonstrates that in the relatively short time since it was established the National Partnership, as a package, has had a positive impact on participation, engagement, attainment and transition outcomes for young Australians. In particular, the evaluation report (Dandolo Partners, 2014, p.6) concludes:

- Since the National Partnership commenced, participation and attainment rates have increased.
- The major impact has been on extending participation by those in education, rather than encouraging re-entry into education by the unemployed.
- The National Partnership has created efficiencies in the youth attainment and transitions area through better coordination of initiatives and information sharing.

- The Compact seems to have increased participation and reduced the number of job seekers receiving benefits, at minimal cost – though this may depend on any causal link between the Compact and youth inactivity.

The report also indicates that the need for the kind of work fostered through the National Partnership remains current, noting that "the number of disengaged young people remains high" (p.6); "Australia's school completion rates, in particular, continue to lag behind leading OECD nations" (p.7) and "the transition of young people from education and training into full-time employment remains problematic" (p.8). For future policy three broad areas are identified as priorities (Dandolo Partners, 2014, pp.7-9):

- Prevention of disengagement from schooling, with particular attention to positive school climate and appropriate curriculum choices.
- Streamlined services that enable supporting disengaged young people quickly and that are integrated across providers and stakeholders.
- Collaboration between schools, community and business to enhance employment opportunities for young people.

"The evaluation report indicates a continuing need for the kind of work that had been fostered through the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions."

Three other National Partnerships (operating under the rubric of Smarter Schools) have also been useful for flexible learning programs by aiming at addressing disadvantage, supporting teachers and school leaders, and improving literacy and numeracy. For example, some schools utilised their Smarter Schools funding to resource their Beacon Foundation program (Beacon Foundation, 2014) for working with the local community, to enable young people's successful transition to employment, further education or training. However, the National Partnerships for Literacy and Numeracy and for Improving Teacher Quality have already come to an end, and the National Partnership for Low Socio-economic Status School Communities is scheduled to finish in 2015.

Of continuing relevance for supporting flexible learning programs is the Schools Assistance (Learning Together — Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004 (Australian Government, 2011). This legislation allocates targeted funding to Special Assistance Schools (SAS) primarily catering for students with social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Once recognised as an SAS by the relevant state or territory education minister, a non-government flexible learning program can receive maximum Socio Economic Status (SES) funding (70 per cent of the relevant Average Government School Recurrent Costs amount) (DEEWR, 2012). This approach is used by some flexible learning programs that are registered as schools, such as those operated by Edmund Rice Education Australia Youth+ (EREA Youth+, 2014).

Some Relevant Policy in Specific States and Territories

The legislative changes required by the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions mean that there are major commonalities in relation to requirements for young people to engage with education. Nevertheless, there are some differences between states and territories, for example in relation to the

procedures for young people leaving a school prior to completing Year 10 and to the accreditation of flexible learning programs. Funding arrangements in different jurisdictions are complex, and often involve specific initiatives that may be temporary, either because they are pilot programs or because they lose government support following an election or change of cabinet ministers. Moreover, state and territory policies in relation to funding for education in general are likely to change as a result of the 2014 federal budget, as noted above.

"Funding arrangements in different jurisdictions are complex, and often involve specific initiatives that may be temporary."

An overview of policies specific to certain jurisdictions is provided by Te Riele (2012a) and an update of that overview has recently been produced for Dusseldorp Forum (Deslandes, 2014). To avoid repetition, the focus for this chapter is on two sets of relevant policies in specific states and territories. These policies relate, first, to approaches to discipline that impact on flexible learning provision and, second, to state-wide approaches that support flexible learning programs.

Policy Focus: Discipline vs Learning

Some recent state and territory policies are focused on discipline (behaviour management) rather than learning. For example, Queensland principals in government schools have been given "greater discipline powers to manage disruptive student behaviour" and as part of this policy the Queensland government has offered "an enhanced commitment to alternative learning centres that provide highly specialised support to students with the most complex needs" (Langbroek, 2013, n.p.; also see Langbroek, 2014 and Education Queensland, 2013a).

The Northern Territory government is considering a similar approach, with measures dealing with "offences relating to non-compliance with enrolment, attendance and participation requirements" to be supplemented with "provisions to accommodate different models and places of education delivery and the specific needs of some groups of students" including the option "to facilitate and mandate attendance at a location other than a traditional school campus. For example, an engagement centre" (Department of Education [NT], 2014, p.20).

These approaches by the Queensland and Northern Territory governments utilise existing 'behaviour schools'[3] that can only be attended through compulsory referral (for example see Education Queensland, 2013b), but may also lead to increased pressures on flexible learning programs to cater for students affected by these policies.

In Victoria, school principals have also been given increased authority and freedom to suspend and expel students (DEECD, 2014a; Dixon, 2014). The option of referral to a re-engagement program, however, is not made directly in related documentation (as it is in Queensland and the Northern Territory) but rather two-layers deeper within the online departmental guidelines. Moreover, the guidance is that:

[3] As explained earlier in this report, such behaviour schools and centres were not part of the research project reported on here.

When determining if a re-engagement program is a suitable option for a child or young person, the primary consideration must be the educational and wellbeing needs of that individual (DEECD, 2014b, n.p.).

Policies that Support Flexible Learning Provision

State-wide approaches that support flexible learning programs exist, to varying degrees, in South Australia, Western Australia and Victoria.

The most systematic, state-wide approach to flexible learning program provision in Australia is the South Australian strategy for Innovative Community Action Networks (ICANs) and Flexible Learning Options (FLO) (DECD (SA), 2013a). The most recent ICAN guidelines are for the 2013-15 period (DECD (SA), 2013b) but with the end of the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions it is unclear whether ICAN will be able to continue beyond 2015.

In 2013 the West Australian Alternative Education Forum was to coordinate and advance the provision of alternative education in Western Australia. It is a collaboration between the WA Department of Education and non-government providers of alternative education (WA Alternative Education Forum, 2013; also see Canning Coalition, 2013). Western Australia has provision for 'stand-alone' flexible learning programs (including non-government ones) to register as a Curriculum And Re-Engagement (CARE) school. State schools can offer the Senior School Engagement Program (SSEP) in Year 11 and 12, as a 'within school' flexible learning program.

"Flexible learning programs will continue to be necessary for achieving policy targets to raise educational attainment and improve productivity, and for meeting the needs of young people for whom mainstream schooling approaches are disengaging or obstructive."

In Victoria the Youth Partnerships program established and supported initiatives "to improve the support and responses provided to vulnerable young people" across seven demonstration sites (DEECD, 2014c). Although only funded until mid-2014, the program seems to have informed the Victorian government's Children and Youth Area Partnerships that are part of the Victorian Vulnerable Children's Strategy 2013-2022 (DHS [Victoria], 2013). Moreover, the DEECD website has comprehensive information about what it calls "re-engagement programs" (DEECD, 2014b).

Across Australia, the end of the various National Partnership agreements mentioned above is of concern for the provision of innovative programs specifically designed to enable the education of disadvantaged young people. Flexible learning programs will continue to be necessary for achieving policy targets to raise educational attainment and improve productivity, and for meeting the needs of young people for whom mainstream schooling approaches are disengaging or obstructive – perhaps more so now than ever.

2.3 What the Research Literature Tells Us

The focus of this review of national and international literature on flexible and alternative education for disadvantaged youth is to summarise the evidence-base of good practice in alternative education provision suggested by previous research, that is, "what works and why?". The sources consulted for this review are listed in Appendix II. The insights described below are based on multiple sources, and therefore publication information is only provided when quoting or drawing on a specific reference.

Relevant Learning for a Better Future

The fundamental purpose of flexible learning programs is to provide relevant and productive learning and teaching in order to enable better futures for their students. This is particularly important, since most of these students come from disadvantaged and marginalised backgrounds. Positive outcomes from education open doors – and for most young people in flexible learning programs, education and/or training qualifications provide one of the few avenues available to break the cycle of disadvantage impacting on their life and career choices.

"Young people in flexible learning programs want to learn, and want access to the improved life opportunities that such learning enables."

Successful learning for marginalised students tends to be linked to relevant and personally engaging learning experiences, often with a 'hands-on' applied learning and/or vocational element. Having some autonomy and control over one's own learning also supports engagement. In order to ensure that the purpose of learning activities is meaningful and responsive, individualized learning plans that utilise the interests and skills of young people are beneficial. Such plans can take a 'strength–based' approach where

> the voices of young people are instrumental in addressing the barriers, and their re-engagement in accredited learning and strengthened positive participation in community is built around individual strengths and interests (ICAN, 2010, p.3).

Young people in flexible learning programs want to learn, and want access to the improved life opportunities that such learning enables. As research by Te Riele (2012b, p.62) shows, formal educational credentials are the outcome of participating in a flexible learning program that is most highly valued by students and graduates, since these credentials represent a path towards increased life chances, employment, and independence. Thus, "the balance of opportunity between activities that engage and those that lead to accreditation is a critical one" (ICAN, 2012, p.x).

Davies, Lamb and Doecke (2011, pp.33-38) identify five core pedagogical strategies:

- Making learning less formal.
- Providing flexible learning options.
- Addressing literacy and numeracy skill development needs.
- Making learning applied and hands on.
- Offering programs that integrate technologies.

Closely related are recommendations on curriculum delivery developed on the grounds of best practice by Mills and McGregor (2010, pp.10-11). They argue alternative education programs need:

- To provide students with pathways towards further education and work.
- Flexibility to create a curriculum that is responsive to students needs and goals.
- To ensure that they enable young people to acquire new knowledge, skills and ways of seeing the world.
- To use a curriculum that is connected with students' worlds as well as being intellectually challenging.

A key challenge for flexible learning programs is to provide curricular justice; that is, connecting curriculum to the lives of young people, and also providing access to powerful knowledge that has high status in society. The former is necessary as a hook to engage young people and as a recognition of the validity of their life experiences. The latter is necessary to open doors to future opportunities.

Respect and Wellbeing

As Zyngier and Gale (2003, p.1) point out, it is helpful when educators "take account of students' own reasons for why they are disengaged from schooling and what changes schools and teachers themselves might need to consider". Young people are often very well aware and able to express clearly what went wrong with their schooling and what works for them. The concept of a pedagogy of listening suggests that a teacher's open and attentive listening affirms what young people say they need for better education and training achievement and outcomes. Phillips (2013, p.674, citing Mitra, 2003) argues that when alienated students are given the opportunity to express their perspectives and thereby influence change in their school, it gives them a sense of ownership and leads to engagement with learning.

"Research is clear that genuine and caring relationships with teachers and peers are essential for the success of flexible programs."

Davies, Lamb and Doecke (2011, p.22) recognise attention to wellbeing as one of four key strategies used in successful re-engagement programs. As they indicate, this involves not only the kinds of practical supports listed above, but also the development of positive and beneficial relationships. Being "a subject of care" (Noddings, 1992) in the context of learning is empowering for students, many of whom previously have experienced a lack of care in their own lives. The research findings of McGregor and Mills (2011) and Keddie (2014) reinforce the importance of this recognition of difference for young people in flexible learning settings.

The centrality of mutually respectful relationships in schooling is well established in relation to mainstream education. Research is also clear that genuine and caring relationships with teachers and peers are essential for the success of flexible and alternative educational programs.

Using the concept of an enabling space, Wyn et al (2014, p.7) suggest both schools and alternative programs can function as such, and describe an enabling space as one "where students can form respectful relationships and derive a sense of meaning, connection, and control over their lives".

Students cited across the literature describe relationships that made a difference for them as grounded in mutual respect and trust, and they highly valued being treated like adults, that is, more like equals, at this stage of their schooling. Students in flexible learning programs perceive good teachers as approachable and responsive in their communication, taking time to listen, and being patient and consistent with their support. For example, students in Phillips' study (2013, p.692) were found to

> have their most successful, memorable, and impactful learning experiences when in an environment that fosters a positive climate and prosocial relationships. There are nuances when looking closely at the relationships in terms of what works for each student, but some common themes do emerge across participants and should be noted. When trust, understanding, patience, and respect are fostered between teachers and students, a positive climate is created and learning is facilitated.

Such a positive climate relies not only on individual staff but on a whole school culture that is safe, welcoming and supportive. Moreover, it is widely agreed that a relatively small program and/or class size is helpful. It is important to recognise that educators in flexible learning programs usually need to invest significant emotional effort and time to establish trusting relationships with young people. Once trust is established, caring relationships are a fertile ground on which more rigorous learning can take place. Smyth et al (2013a, p.316) confirm: "mastery of academic learning is highly contingent on teachers engaging with the social and emotional lives of young people".

"A positive climate relies both on individual staff and on a whole school culture that is safe, welcoming and supportive."

Community Connections

The kinds of alternative educational programs examined for this project respond to the educational needs for young people who experience mainstream schooling as disengaging, unsupportive or even disruptive to their learning. This finding directs our focus to understanding young people's circumstances and, in response, changing the education and training options on offer. There is a consistent emphasis in the literature on the educational importance of recognizing complex clusters of factors that contribute to disengagement from learning and eventually to leaving school too early. As Davies, Lamb and Doecke (2011, p.29) argue: "Best practice delivery interventions recognise that they are dealing with people who have a variety of structural or situational obstacles before them that affect their ability to learn" in, and outside, formal schooling.

Flexible learning programs work because they look beyond perceived inappropriate behaviour or lack of aspiration as key reasons for disengagement and early school leaving (for example, see Archambault et al 2009) to explore and address broader societal obstacles to young people's educational outcomes such as poverty, poor housing, ill-health and racism. This strategy requires involvement of the community beyond the school grounds: "Successful programs tap into the variety of resources around them to deliver positive outcomes and nuanced pathways" (Davies, Lamb and Doecke, 2011, p.41). There are several layers of community involvement relevant for all flexible learning programs:

- Extended families and other significant people in students' lives.
- Social institutions and support organisations.
- Employers and local businesses.

At best, partnerships are not only a matter of accessing resources, but a genuine "local community-based collaborative approach" (Hayes, 2012, p.646) that serves both young people and their community. An exemplar is practice informed by an Indigenous epistemology of relationality "where community, kinship and family networks are at the centre of all relations" (Keddie 2014, p.57). This is of benefit for making connections and recognising diversity among Indigenous students, and enables "learning through (as well as learning about) Indigenous culture" (p.57).

"Partnerships not only provide access to resources but can offer a genuine 'local communit-based collaborative approach' and transform flexible learning programs into full-service hubs"

Successful provision of alternative education attends to the practically and materially enabling conditions necessary for students to be able to participate and succeed. This can include helping with transportation, access to childcare for the children of young parents, providing meals, and support in liaising with other agencies. Interagency approaches – bringing together official institutions who deal with issues such as housing, income support, counselling, health, child care and justice, as well as education – feature strongly in flexible learning provision. As a result, flexible learning programs often resemble full-service hubs rather than 'merely' schools.

Local businesses and employers can also play an important role, offering work experience opportunities, sponsorships and funding, and networks. Mills, Renshaw and Zipin (2013, p.15) provide an example of a school providing "enterprise learning opportunities", partnering with local businesses. Such collaborations contribute not only to meaningful learning but also to positive validation of flexible learning programs and the students who enrol in them (see Wilson, Stemp and McGinty, 2011), as well as building government, interagency and community support.

2nd Chance or 2nd Best?

In addition to the above suggestions for good practice in flexible learning programs, previous research also raises some concerns about this kind of educational provision. One concern is that the approach to curriculum may lead to a risk that potential education or training future pathways are being closed down. Teachers may adjust educational expectations with good intentions, because they see wellbeing as more crucial than learning. Yet, such actions by the teacher risk reinforcing any perceived deficits because a second concern is that students who are never asked to complete challenging tasks, never get the chance to learn to do them. As Slee (2011, p.37) argues, "People, believing that they are helping, may be propping up the edifice of exclusion". Warning bells ring when programs refer to young people as 'troubled adolescents' or as students who cannot fit mainstream schooling. Such perspectives "can (unwittingly) sabotage" a constructive approach to providing flexible learning programs (Te Riele, 2012b, p.69).

Kim and Taylor (2008) describe the alternative school they researched in the US as caring, but also as letting down students who aspired to go to college because the curriculum did not provide access to the

required qualifications. A recent overview of alternative education (Te Riele, 2012a) indicated that university was an atypical destination for graduates from flexible learning programs. On the other hand, without access to such programs young people are likely to have had even fewer options. Programs that embed genuine educational pathways provide ongoing options for this group of students to improve and broaden their life chances and choices.

Particularly relevant in the context of recent policy developments (see Chapter 2.2) is the concern that flexible learning programs might be perceived to be a place to send students who are 'unwanted' in mainstream schools, rather than to positively address students' needs. As Kim and Taylor (2008, p.207) emphasise, "These stigmas are some of the biggest obstacles barring the success of alternative education". Not only does this let mainstream schools 'off the hook' for catering to all young people (see Slee, 2011) but it also means that flexible learning programs "can be perceived not so much as a 'second chance' but as 'second best': schools on the margins for students on the margins" (Te Riele, 2008, p.3).

"Programs that embed genuine educational pathways provide ongoing options for this group of students to improve and broaden their life chances and choices."

Such perceptions undermine the crucial role such programs play as incubators of innovation. Many staff choose to work in flexible learning programs because these offer possibilities for developing new and effective approaches for creative and holistic educational engagement. Moreover, we need to be mindful that about one-third of these programs are found in, and can be the highlight of, mainstream schools (see Chapter 3.2), with the potential to offer direct inspiration to the school as a whole.

Chapter 4 of this report will illustrate the capacity for innovation of flexible learning programs through an examination of several case studies. First, however, Chapter 3 will present findings from Phase 1 of the research.

PROVISION OF FLEXIBLE LEARNING PROGRAMS IN AUSTRALIA

3

This chapter presents the results from Phase 1 of *Putting the Jigsaw Together,* based on the analysis of the database of flexible learning programs that was developed as part of the early stages of the research project. After explaining the methods used for Phase 1, this chapter examines the size of the flexible learning sector, the curriculum offered (that is, credentials and activities), and characteristics of the student population. The chapter concludes by considering the contributions made by this phase of the research to supporting access to, and shared learning within, flexible learning programs.

3.1 Overview of Phase 1

Phase 1 of the research project investigated the access young people across Australia have to flexible learning programs. The starting point was provided by the database developed by Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF) in 2011 (see Holdsworth, 2011; Te Riele, 2012a). DSF invited responses from "those programs/ schools that cater for young people at risk of not completing their education" (Te Riele, 2012a, p.5) to an online survey distributed through its networks. The resulting database included more than 400 individual entries. For the current project, this database was cleaned (for example, removing inappropriate entries) and some additional questions were added (such as a question requesting a paragraph of text describing the program and its purpose). (See Appendix III for a screen shot of all current questions on the Dusseldorp Forum website). Criteria for inclusion of programs were established to match the focus of this project, namely that the program:

- Aims to adapt the approach to schooling to support young people to (re-)engage.
- Enables young people to gain recognised secondary school-level credentials.
- Mainly serves young people who are disadvantaged or disenfranchised (in education and/or society).
- Focuses on learning, although this will often go hand-in-hand with attention to well-being.
- Can be attended by choice.

These criteria capture most of the landscape and footprint of alternative education provision (see Chapter 1.1). Nevertheless, there are some explicit and deliberate exclusions. First, behaviour schools (also called suspension centres or positive learning centres) that can only be attended through referral, with the enrolment being compulsory for the young person, are not included. Second, schools that based on a particular alternative philosophy (such as Steiner) were excluded because they primarily cater for parents' or students' personal preference rather than serving disadvantaged young people. Third, programs that work at primary school level, with young people under age 11 were not able to be included for reasons of feasibility. Finally, programs that offer support (such as mentoring or homework advice) but are not centrally

focussed on leading to secondary school credentials were also excluded. These exclusions do not deny that many of these schools and programs do valuable work with and for young people, and neither do they suggest that the distinctions between programs are always sharply drawn. Nevertheless, the criteria above proved to be useful both to serve the focus of the project and its feasibility.

"The criteria for inclusion in Phase 1 capture most of the landscape and footprint of alternative education provision."

During 2012, Phase 1 started with using the selection criteria above to add to the revised DSF database. A range of directories was consulted, including local service directories (such as those prepared by Partnership Brokers), state and territory based lists (compiled by state departments as well as youth organisations, for example, the Queensland re-engagement map produced by the Youth Affairs Network Queensland), national online directories (such as australianschoolsdirectory.com.au, ourcommunity.com.au, and education.net.au), and lists provided by umbrella organisations such as the Beacon Foundation, Big Picture Education Australia, Clontarf Foundation, Edmund Rice Education Australia Youth+ and Hands on Learning Australia.

In addition, the project undertook online searches (using Google) for websites of flexible learning programs, online searches of TAFE colleges and Community Colleges for relevant course offerings, and publications by and about programs (for example, see the documentation listed in Te Riele, 2012a). When no additional programs could be located, lists of programs (nationally, or only those in a specific jurisdiction or organisation) were sent to stakeholders across all states and territories in Australia requesting advice on whether any programs were missing or any listed programs should be excluded (for example, because they no longer existed).

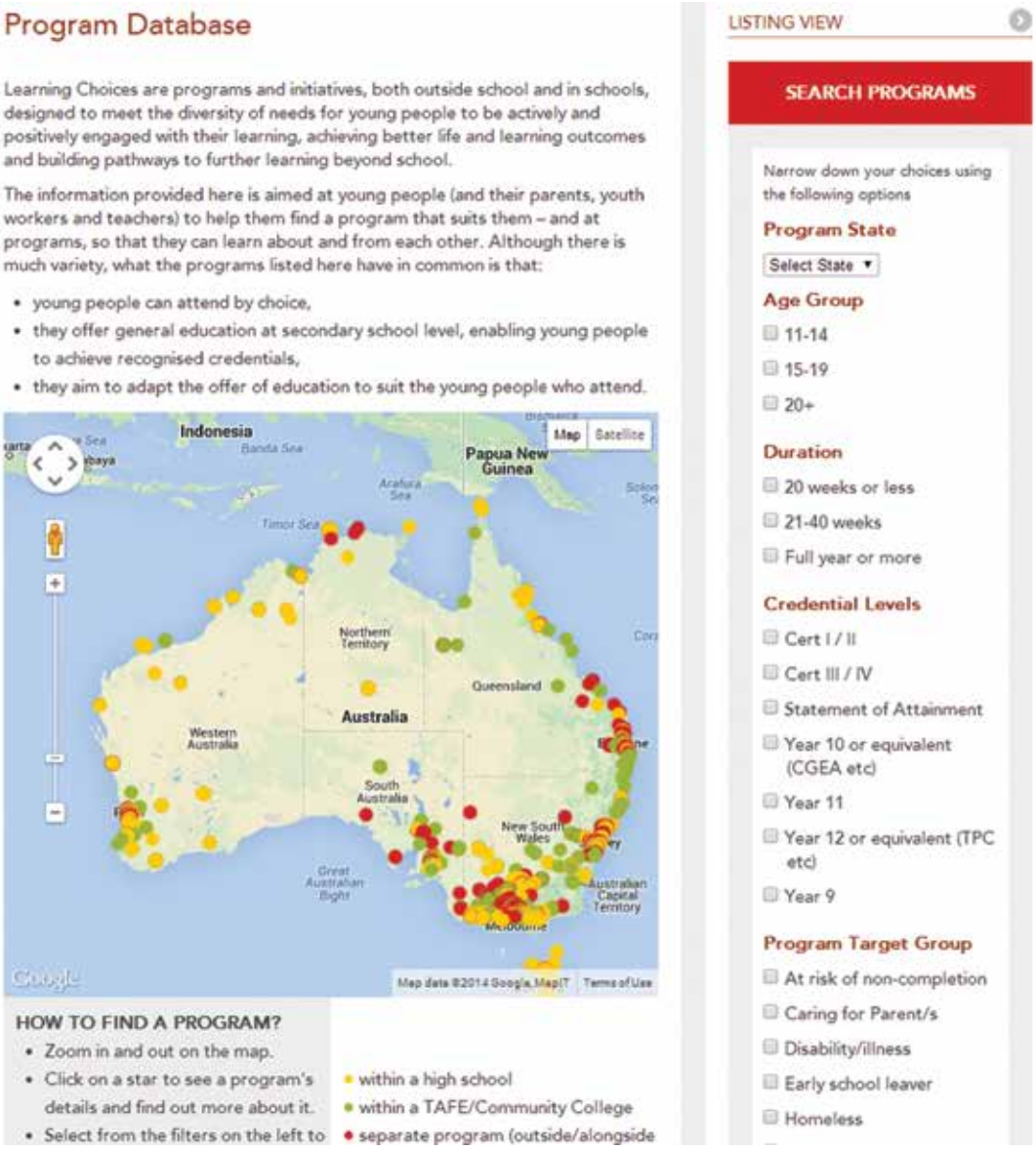
In February 2013, the final database of over 800 sites was provided to Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF) and, in collaboration, translated into a user-friendly, searchable map and list through DSF's 'Learning Choices' website. An option was provided for people to add a program through this website (moderated by the DSF web designer with support from this project's lead researcher) so that by June 2014 the number of sites had grown to over 900. Following the re-design of the website by the (re-named) Dusseldorp Forum in May 2014, the database can be accessed at: http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/program-database/

The material on this website serves two main purposes:

- For young people (and their parents, youth workers and teachers) to find a program that suits them.
- For flexible learning programs to learn about and from each other.

Through the database a wide range of material about each program is provided, for example, information about student population and curriculum, as well as location and contact details. The database can be searched by zooming in on a particular location on the map, and/or by applying filters such as age group and program duration. It is also possible to search an alphabetical listing of the programs. Figure 3.1 displays a screenshot of part of the main page for accessing the program database through the 'map view'. As the map in Figure 3.1 demonstrates, the location of programs largely reflects the concentration of the Australian population along coastal areas and in capital cities.

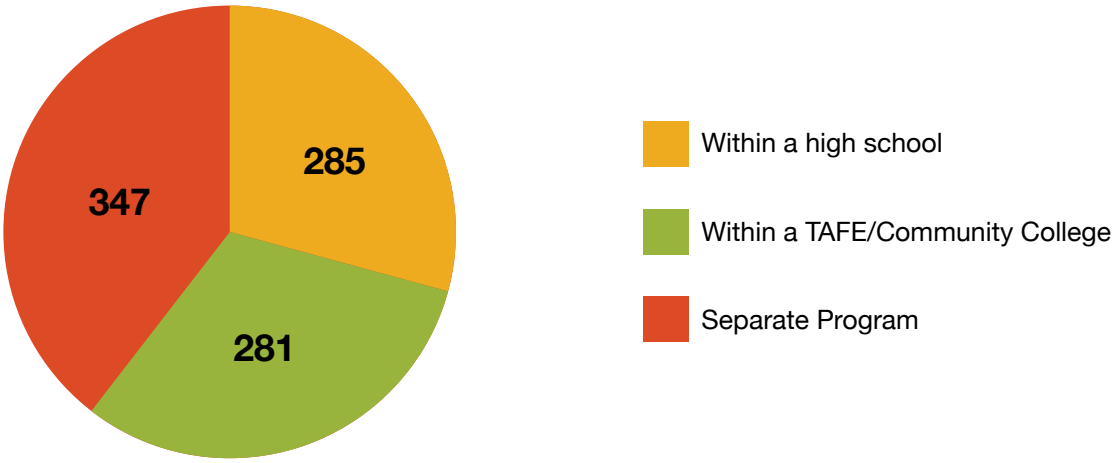
Figure 3.1: Screenshot of website for accessing program database (map view)



3.2 Findings

In order to capture a wide range of types of flexible learning programs, while meeting the criteria outlined in 3.1 above, the database included three structural arrangements for flexible learning provision: within a high school, within a TAFE or Community College, or as a separate program (either entirely 'stand-alone' or as an annex or campus that is connected with a school or college). These are identified through the three different colours of dots on the map (see Figure 3.1). The distribution among these three types is fairly even, although with somewhat more programs in the third category (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Structures of flexible learning programs



There are 913 programs in the database (July 2014). These programs educate, at a conservative estimate[4], 70,000 students per year. The development of the database was highly systematic and as a result it offers the best available data about the number of flexible learning programs and students in Australia. Nevertheless, the database is unlikely to have captured all programs, since some programs would not have been visible through the search methods used and new programs have been established since 2012. This means the numbers above are likely to be an underestimation of the true size of the flexible learning sector in Australia.

"There are over 900 programs in the database that educate, at a conservative estimate, 70,000 students per year."

Credentials and Activities

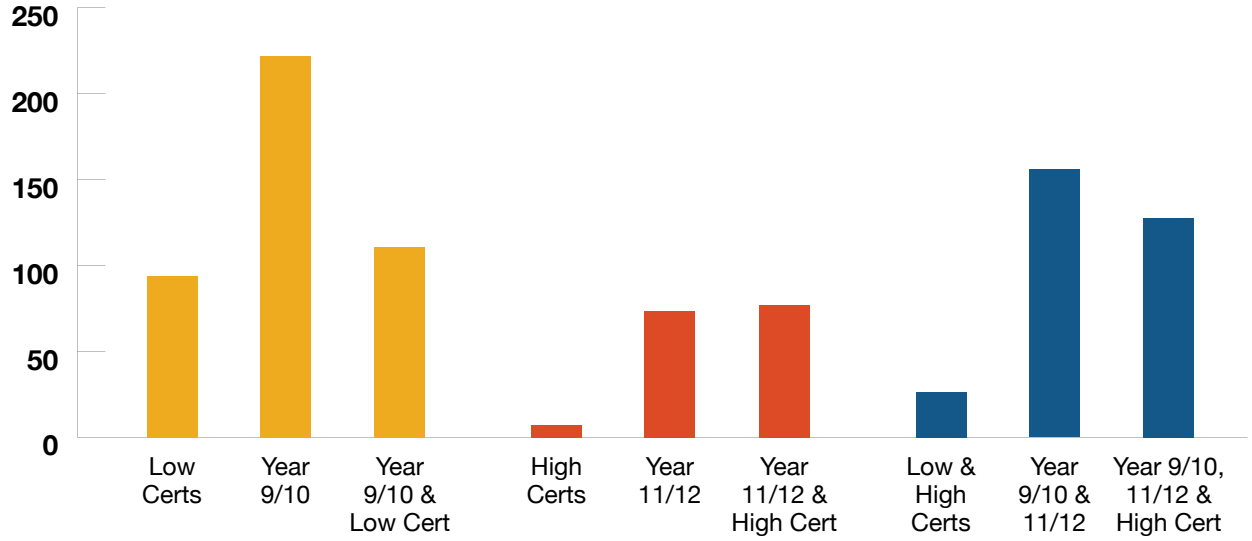
The programs included in the database indirectly or directly enable achievement of a school-level credential. Programs operating within a TAFE or Community College as well as stand-alone programs usually lead directly to the award of one or more qualifications. Programs operating within a high school (such as Beacon, Clontarf and Hands On Learning) support young people's learning and engagement and thus (indirectly) their completion of junior and/or senior levels of secondary education

Figure 3.3 provides an overview of the credentials the flexible learning programs help their students to attain. The first three columns (in yellow) refer to sites that offer credentials at junior secondary level.

[4] Exact enrolment figures are not available for every program.

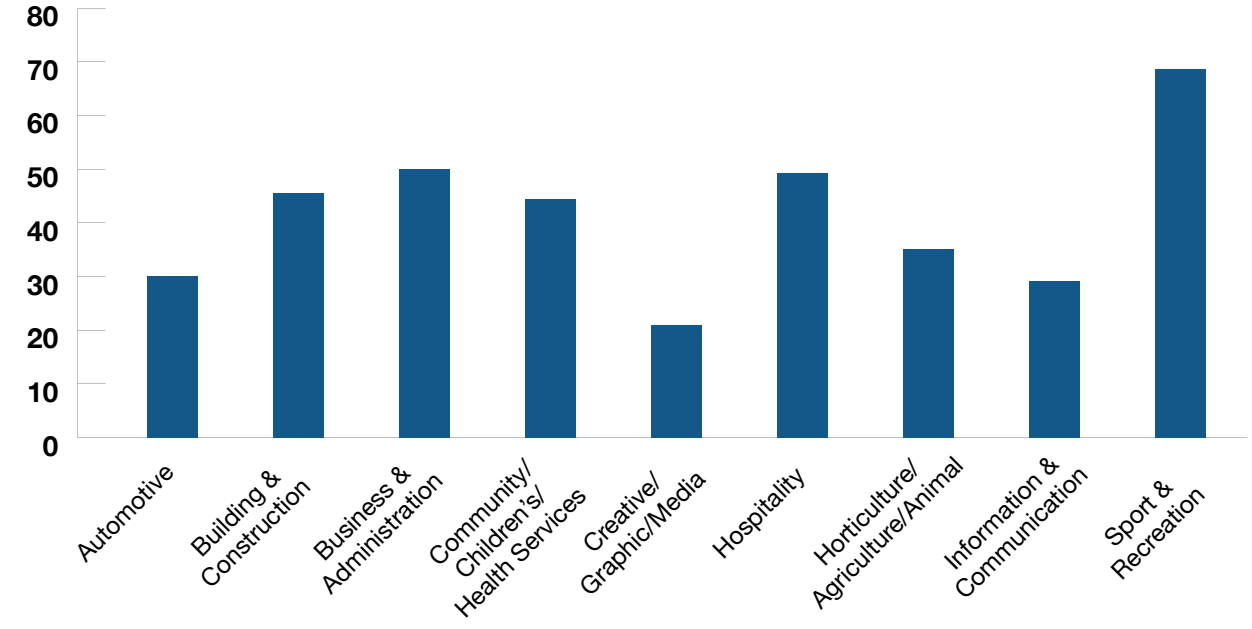
Low level certificates ('low Cert') include Statement of Attainment, Certificate I and Certificate II[5]. Year 10 includes equivalent qualifications, such as the Certificate in General Education for Adults. The middle three columns (in orange) reflect the number of sites that offer credentials at senior secondary level. High level certificates ('high Cert) include Certificate III and Certificate IV. Year 12 includes equivalent qualifications, such as the Tertiary Preparation Certificate. The final three columns (blue) indicate the number of sites that offer credentials at both junior and senior secondary level. These make up just over one-third of all sites.

Figure 3.3: Credentials



The number of flexible learning programs that offer certificate qualifications indicates that about half of the programs offer some level of formal, accredited Vocational Education and Training (VET) as part of their curriculum. Not all of these provide details about the specific industry, while others give students access to more than one vocational area. Based on the available data, Figure 3.4 indicates the nine most popular VET industries in which certificates are offered.

Figure 3.4: VET Industries



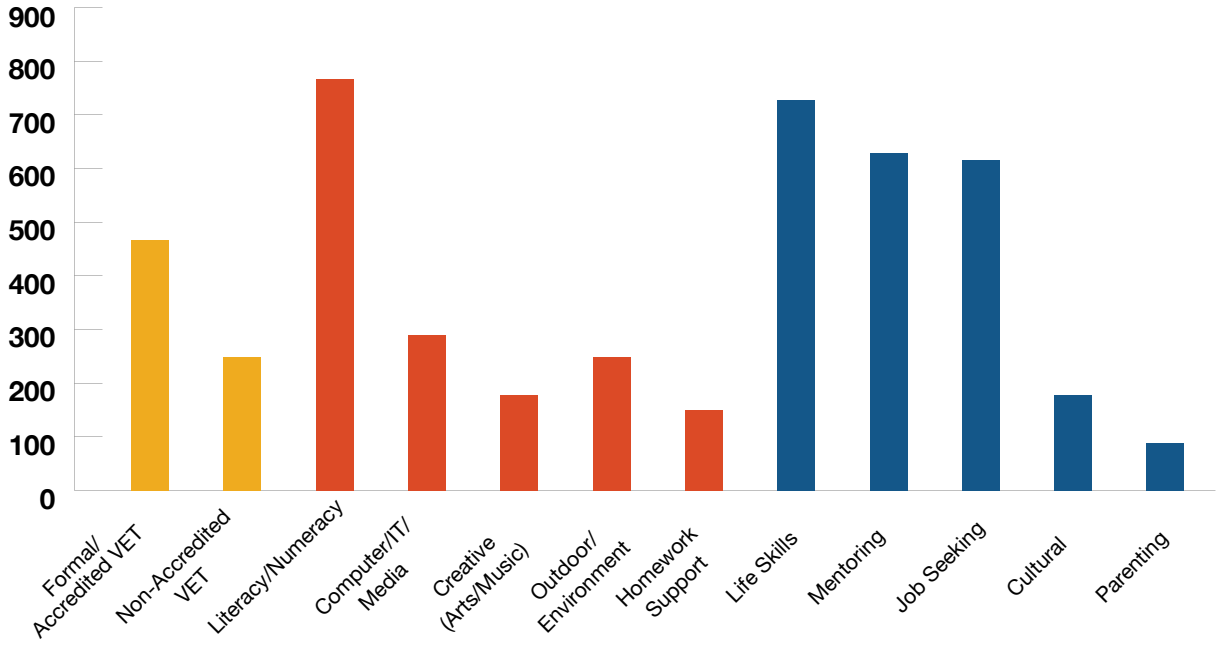
[5] According to standard international conventions, Certificate II qualifications are classified as lower secondary qualifications and Certificate III qualifications as the equivalent of Year 12.

"Flexible learning programs offer many activities to engage young people with meaningful learning and support them to achieve credentials. In the category of general learning, literacy and numeracy activities are most common."

In order to engage young people with meaningful learning and support them to achieve various credential, flexible learning programs offer many activities. The database comprises 12 categories of activities, which includes accredited and non-accredited VET (yellow columns in Figure 3.5), as well as activities for learning (orange) and for life (blue). The vast majority of programs offered a wide range of these activities.

In terms of learning, the most common are literacy and numeracy activities. The strong level of attention for students' life outside and beyond the program is evident in the large numbers of programs providing life skills, mentoring and job seeking skills. Most programs offering cultural activities specify that these are focussed on Indigenous culture. Figure 3.5 provides information about the number of programs offering each category of activity.

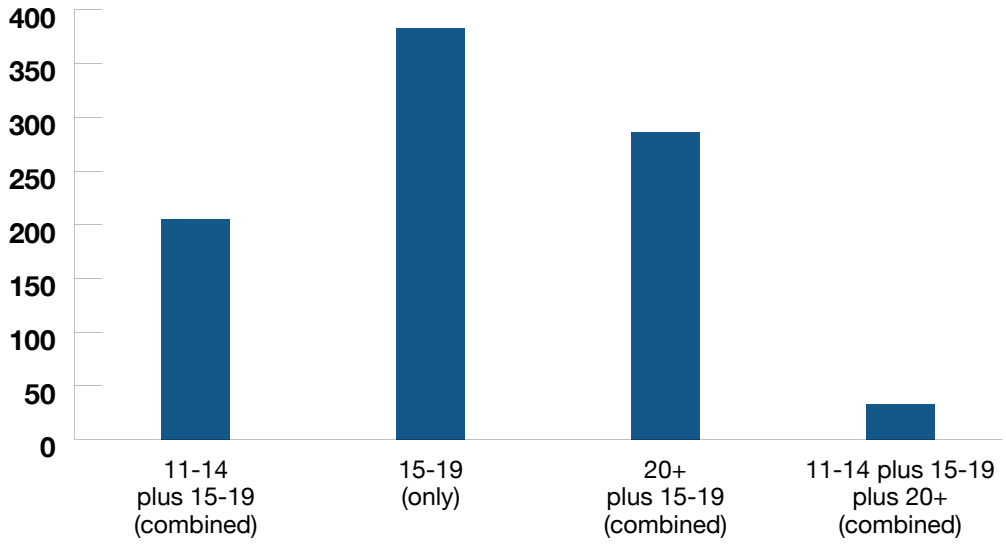
Figure 3.5: Program Activities



Student Population

Most programs cater for both male and female students, with only 3 per cent being for females only and 5 per cent for males only. Very few programs are targeted exclusively at the younger (age 11-14) or older (20 years and older) age groups. Instead, programs tend to cater for one or both of those age groups in combination with the 15-19 year old age group, which is the fundamental cohort that flexible learning programs work with (see Figure 3.6). More than 40 per cent of programs target only the 15-19 group.

Figure 3.6: Age Groups

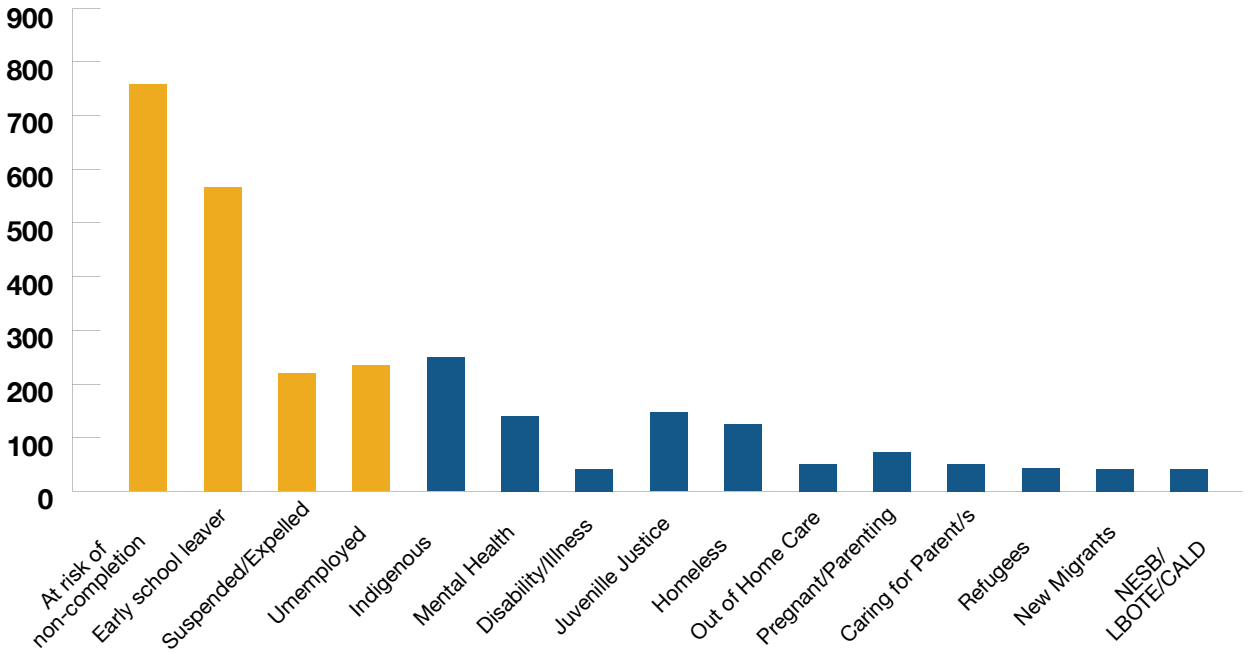


In terms of students' background, the database includes 15 types of program target groups. Two of the options are at risk of non-completion and early school leaver. Exploring the data demonstrates that one or both of these apply to over 97 per cent of programs. Other substantial general categories are suspended/expelled from school, and unemployed. These generic categories are shown as yellow columns in Figure 3.7.

These results reinforce the programs' shared mission of providing education opportunities for young people who may otherwise miss out on crucial secondary schooling. In some ways, this is the closest we come to a definition of flexible learning programs. Many programs catered for (almost) all categories listed, but some had a more specialised focus, for example, on Indigenous young people, homeless young people, or pregnant and parenting young people (shown as blue columns in Figure 3.7). Figure 3.7 shows the total number of programs that cater for each group of students.

"Almost all programs cater for young people 'at risk of non-completion' and/or for 'early school leavers'. This is the closest we come to a definition of flexible learning programs."

Figure 3.7: Program Target Groups



3.3 Summary of Phase 1

Overall, Phase 1 of the research demonstrated that flexible learning programs form a sizeable 'sector' of Australian education, serving a large number of young people:

- The database lists over 900 flexible learning programs. Almost two-third of these are part of a mainstream school or TAFE/ACE institution – and most are quite small (fewer than 100 students per year). Nevertheless, in terms of the number of sites, they can be seen to constitute a substantial sector.
- The conservative estimate of 70,000 students in flexible learning programs equates to 7 per cent of the total 15-19 age group attending a (secondary, further or higher) education institution in Australia (ABS, 2014).

The findings from Phase 1 also highlight the diversity of this sector, for example in terms of:

- The structure of programs (within schools, within TAFE or Community Colleges, or as stand-alone annexes or schools).
- The types of credentials and activities offered.
- The characteristics of young people they work with.

At the start of this chapter, two purposes were asserted for the material on the website: 1) to help young people find a suitable program, and 2) to support flexible learning programs to learn about and from each other.

In relation to the first purpose, the detailed information about credentials and activities offered (as well as about program duration and students catered for) together with the 'map function' makes it easy for young people (or their parents, carers, youth workers or teachers) to look for a suitable program in an accessible location. A staff member from a flexible learning program commented that "Your website is fantastic, thank you! I use it regularly when one of my learners (students) moves from Bendigo to Melbourne or elsewhere around Australia" (Van Maanen, 2014).

As an example, using the map to zoom in on Melbourne, as well as filtering by programs that run for a full year and offer Year 12, leads to 14 programs being shown (eight red, two green and four yellow dots). Clicking on one of the dots provides brief details of the site (see Figure 3.8) and clicking on "Find out more …" leads to a page displaying detailed information drawn from the database (see Figure 3.9).

Figure 3.8: Example of finding a suitable program for a young person

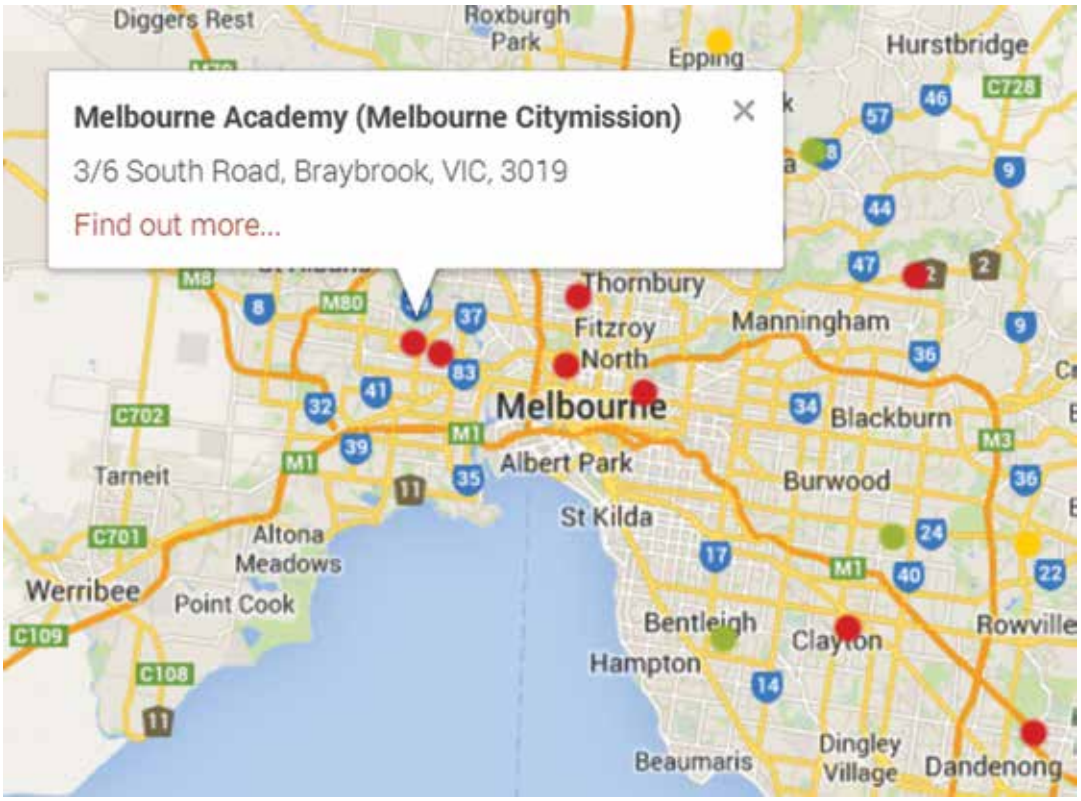
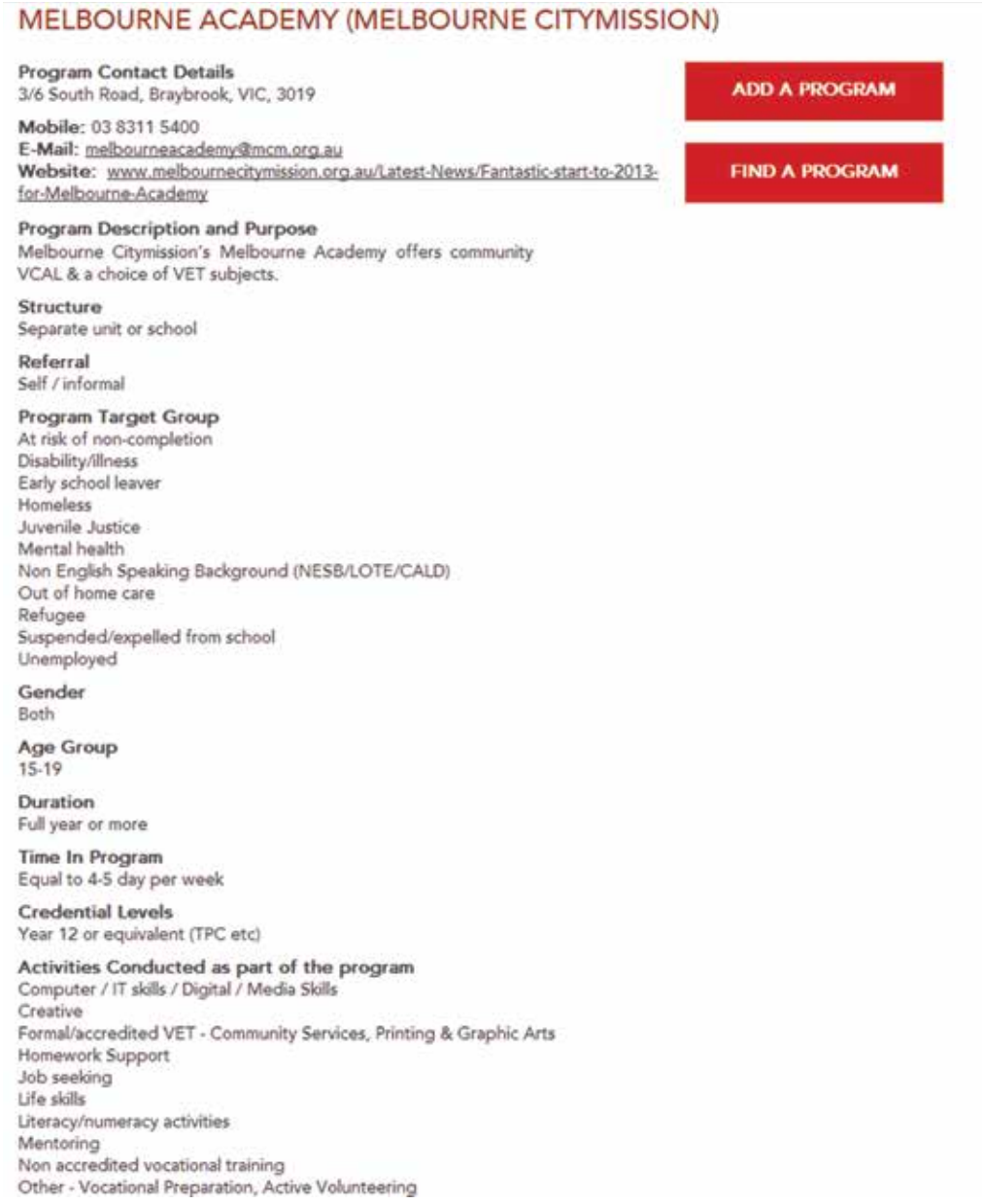


Figure 3.9: Example of a webpage with detailed information



MELBOURNE ACADEMY (MELBOURNE CITYMISSION)

Program Contact Details
3/6 South Road, Braybrook, VIC, 3019

Mobile: 03 8311 5400
E-Mail: melbourneacademy@mcm.org.au
Website: www.melbournecitymission.org.au/Latest-News/Fantastic-start-to-2013-for-Melbourne-Academy

ADD A PROGRAM

FIND A PROGRAM

Program Description and Purpose
Melbourne Citymission's Melbourne Academy offers community VCAL & a choice of VET subjects.

Structure
Separate unit or school

Referral
Self / informal

Program Target Group
At risk of non-completion
Disability/illness
Early school leaver
Homeless
Juvenile Justice
Mental health
Non English Speaking Background (NESB/LOTE/CALD)
Out of home care
Refugee
Suspended/expelled from school
Unemployed

Gender
Both

Age Group
15-19

Duration
Full year or more

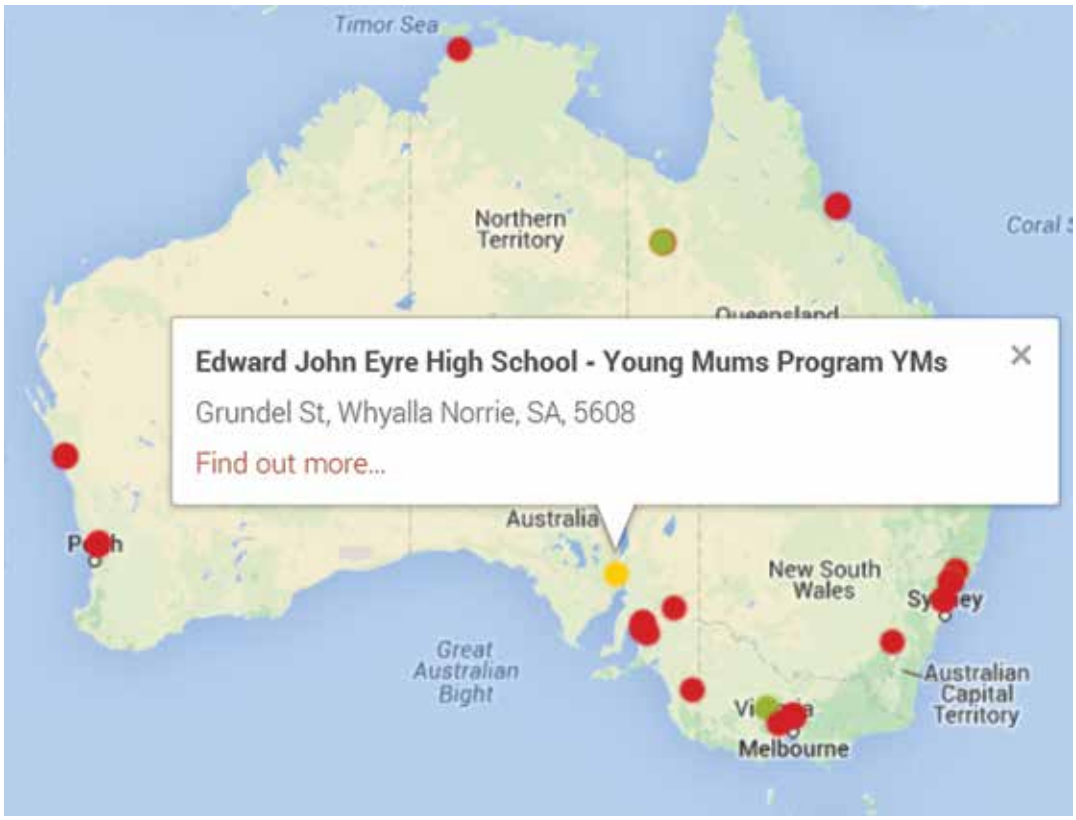
Time In Program
Equal to 4-5 day per week

Credential Levels
Year 12 or equivalent (TPC etc)

Activities Conducted as part of the program
Computer / IT skills / Digital / Media Skills
Creative
Formal/accredited VET - Community Services, Printing & Graphic Arts
Homework Support
Job seeking
Life skills
Literacy/numeracy activities
Mentoring
Non accredited vocational training
Other - Vocational Preparation, Active Volunteering

Regarding the second purpose, the website makes it easy for flexible learning programs to learn about and from each other, in order to build networks and share knowledge. For example, an organisation may decide to set up a site for young mothers, but not have much experience working with this group. Applying the filters Target Group (selecting pregnant/parenting young people) and Activity (selecting parenting skills) reveals 40 programs around Australia which are likely to have expertise in this area (see Figure 3.10). The organization can click on various dots to find out more about each program, before deciding which one(s) to contact to initiate a conversation.

Figure 3.10: Example of finding a program with relevant expertise for an organisation



In summary, the evidence from Phase 1 demonstrates that flexible learning programs form a sizeable and diverse sector of education provision in Australia, serving and achieving successful outcomes for a significant proportion of young people. The availability of the database created through Phase 1 on the Dusseldorp Forum website has made it easy for young people to find a suitable program, and for programs to find out about and learn from each other.

GOOD PRACTICE IN FLEXIBLE LEARNING PROGRAMS

4

4.1 Overview of Phase 2 and 3

Phases 2 and 3 of *Putting the Jigsaw Together* analysed publicly available documentation from more than 20 programs to generate insight in how they work and the outcomes they achieve. Phase 2 initially developed a set of 'vignettes' from which a smaller number of programs were chosen for more in depth case studies in Phase 3. In both phases, the programs had publicly available evidence for their outcomes as well as details about, and arguments for, their practices.

"Phase 2 developed a set of 2-page vignettes from which a smaller number of programs were chosen for in-depth case studies in Phase 3."

Hundreds of flexible learning programs in the revised DSF database (see Chapter 3) exhibit good practice. Since it was not feasible to include so many programs in this research, three further criteria were applied to create a list of possible vignettes. The short-list of programs selected for a vignette included:

- At least one of each of the three structural types of flexible learning provision (within a high school, within a TAFE or community college, or as a separate program).
- Regional and metropolitan programs.
- Geographic spread across Australia.

Publicly available documentation to explore the selected programs included annual reports, newsletters, evaluation reports and websites. The scoping data were then summarised in short (2 page) vignettes, providing information about how each program works, outcomes, data sources, and contact details (see Appendix IV for an example of a completed vignette). The vignettes served two purposes: 1) to generate insights into flexible learning programs across Australia, and 2) to be useful for young people and their families, as well as other flexible learning programs, by offering information about these specific programs. All programs selected for a vignette were given the opportunity to provide feedback, corrections and/or additional information, and most did. Table 4.1 provides an overview and further details are in Appendix I. Some programs also provided photos for the web version of their vignette, see: http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/

Table 4.1: Overview or programs with vignettes (Phase 2) and case studies (Phase 3)

Program Name	Location, State	Regional or Metropolitan	Structure Type
Bankstown Senior College	Bankstown, NSW	Metropolitan	Separate
*Beacon Program at Cressy High School (Beacon at Cressy)	Cressy, TAS	Regional	Within School
Bendigo NETschool	Bendigo, VIC	Regional	Separate
Blacktown Youth College	Bidwell;Broken Hill; Lawson, NSW	Metropolitan and Regional	Separate
Brotherhood of St Laurence Frankston High Street Centre CVCAL	Frankston, VIC	Metropolitan	Separate
Canberra College Care	Stirling, ACT	Metropolitan	Separate
*EREA Youth+ Townsville Flexible Learning Centre (Townsville FLC)	Townsville, QLD	Regional	Separate
Hands on Learning McClelland College	Frankston, VIC	Metropolitan	Within School
*Hunter Institute - Skills for Tomorrow (Skills for Tomorrow)	Blue Haven, NSW	Regional	Within TAFE
Illawarra Senior College	Port Kembla, NSW	Regional	Separate
Macleay Vocational College	Kempsey, NSW	Regional	Separate
Northern Sydney Institute - Youth Options Youth Outcomes (YOYO)	Hornsby, NSW	Metropolitan	Within TAFE
*SEDA Sports Development Program Darwin (SEDA NT)	Brinkin, NT	Metropolitan	Separate
*St Kilda Youth Services SKYS Education: 2Faze and Young Parents (SKYS)	Port Melbourne, VIC	Metropolitan	Separate
*St Luke's Educational Services Unit (St Luke's ESU)	Bendigo, VIC	Regional	Separate
Tenison Woods College Flexible Learning Program	Mount Gambier, SA	Regional	Within School
The John Berne School	Lewisham, NSW	Metrpolitan	Separate
U-Turn Program Moonah	Moonah, TAS	Metropolitan	Separate
Warriappendi School	Marleston, SA	Metropolitan	Separate
Western Bulldogs Fresh Program	Footscray, VIC	Metropolitan	Separate
*Wirreanda Adaptive Vocational Education (WAVE)	Morphett Vale, SA	Metropolitan	Within School
Youth Futures WA COMET	Clarkson, WA	Metropolitan	Separate
*Youth Off The Streets Key College (Key College)	Redfern, NSW	Metropolitan	Separate

**These programs were included in both Phase 2 and Phase 3; in brackets are the shortened names that are used in this chapter*

Phase 3 involved more in-depth research through case studies built up from eight of the programs developed as vignettes in 2013. Selection for a case study was based on evidence from the vignette indicating that the program was succesfully achieving valuable outcomes, and on ensuring a diversity of programs (in terms of types and locations). For each case study program, one member of the research team collected additonal documentation and spent 3-4 days on-site to observe activities and to interview staff, students, community stakeholders and, where possible, graduates. Ethics approval for this phase of the research was granted by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VU HRE13-038). All programs agreed to be named, but pseudonyms are used for individual people in interview quotes.

Detailed reports (36-40 pages) for each case study program were prepared, including background information, findings based on the data about valued outcomes, actions, principles and conditions, a summary of the program's most remarkable features, and photos from the site. As with the vignettes, each draft report was provided to the program for corrections and feedback before final agreement to make the report public. The eight case study reports can be downloaded from the Dusseldorp Forum website URL above.

In Table 4.1, the eight case study programs are indicated with an asterisk before the program name. Also included is a shortened program name (in brackets) which is used to identify data sources from those eight programs when quoted in this chapter.

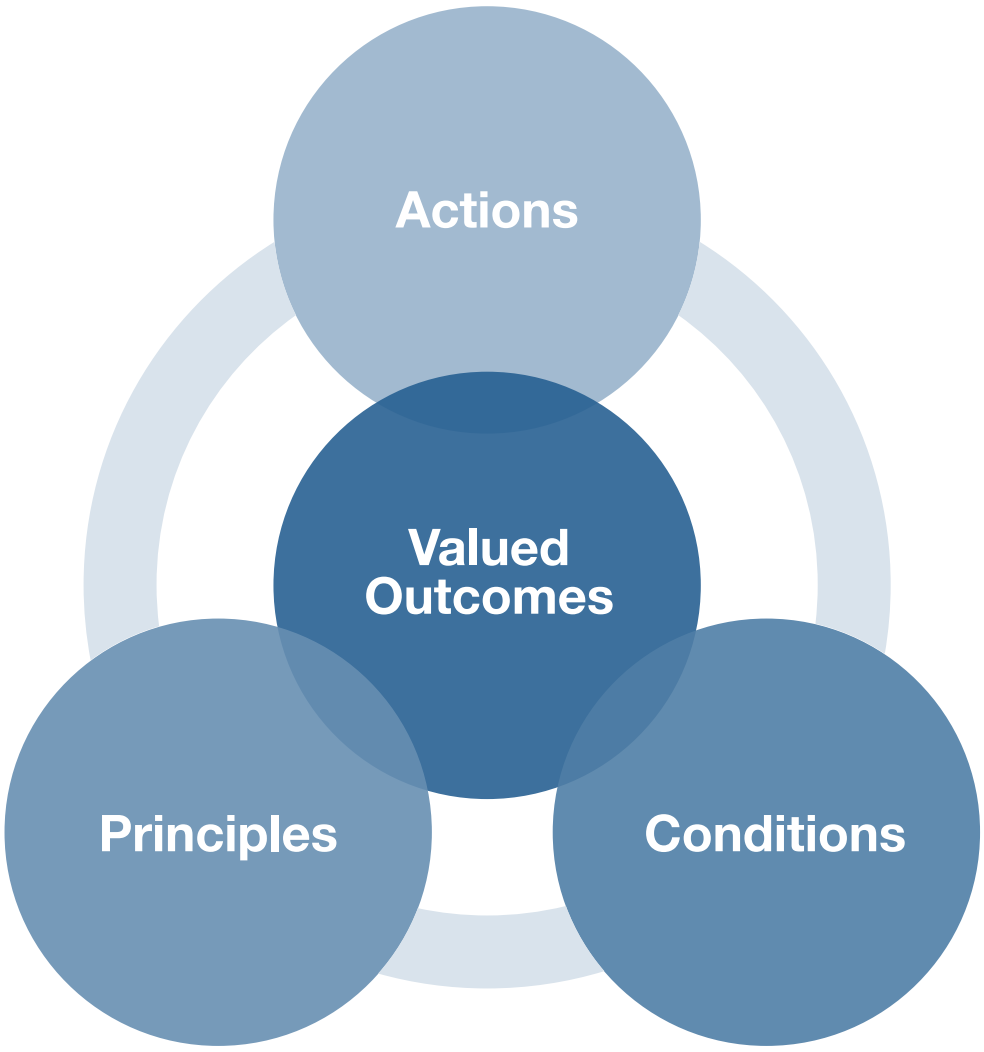
The analysis of data from both the vignettes and the case studies led to the development of a model to understand flexible learning programs and support successful flexible learning provision. The key dimensions presented in the model (Figure 4.1) were derived from a pattern analysis of all the qualitative data to arrive at shared themes to express the most common facets of flexible learning programs in Australia exhibiting valued outcomes. Accordingly, the result is called the Framework of Quality Flexible Learning Programs [FQFLP]; the full version is presented in Figure 4.6 at the end of this chapter.

"The Framework of Quality Flexible Learning Programs [FQFLP] was developed through pattern analysis of all the qualitative data from Phase 2 and 3."

Both the case study reports and the findings presented in this chapter are organised through the FQFLP. The model has four key dimensions representing the work of flexible learning programs: Valued Outcomes, Actions, Principles and Conditions. These dimensions are interrelated, as evident in the schematic representation of the model in Figure 4.1. The dimensions address aspects that are of relevance across flexible learning programs for marginalised young people. The dimensions are:

- **Valued Outcomes.** This addresses outcomes from the program that count as 'success' in the perspectives of key stakeholders: students, graduates, staff and community members. Evidence is provided for achieving those outcomes, based on interviews, fieldwork observations, and program documentation.
- **Actions.** This dimension refers to the actions carried out through the program that support the achievement of the valued outcomes. This offers practical insights in how successes are realised.
- **Principle**. Underpinning the program's practices are principles that produce a foundation for actions. These principles together form the (implicit or explicit) philosophy or vision of the program.
- **Conditions.** This dimension includes various conditions that enable or hinder people in a program to act on its principles and achieve valued outcomes.

Figure 4.1: FQFLP: Overview of Key Dimensions



Note: This model was developed by Kitty te Riele as Chief Investigator of the project team.
Use permitted for non-commercial purposes and with attribution to Kitty te Riele and this report.

4.2 Valued Outcomes

Valued outcomes are at the heart of successful flexible learning programs. Actions are taken and principles committed to in order to achieve these outcomes. Rather than pre-determining what counts as success, the findings are based on the documentary data from the 23 vignettes, but especially on the more detailed interview and observation data from the eight case studies. The analysis identified five major categories of valued outcomes that apply across programs in Phase 2 and 3, although there is variation in the way this takes shape in each program. These five categories are listed in Figure 4.2 and discussed in detail below.

Figure 4.2: Valued Outcomes[6]

Better Futures

All valued outcomes from flexible learning programs support the achievement of a more positive future for both young people and the community. Nevertheless, categories 2-5 (see Figure 4.2) are mainly oriented towards outcomes for the present. The better futures category captures outcomes that are more explicitly future-oriented.

> **"Recognised credentials form a key that opens doors to future opportunities for work or further study."**

Gaining recognised and valuable credentials is a key that opens doors to future opportunities: "to go where you want to, whether it's actually straight into employment or whether it's into a university pathway" (Dianne, community member, SEDA Darwin). Flexible learning programs enable young people to complete Year 9, 10, 11 and or 12, or an equivalent certificate and many also offer access to a wide range of specific vocational qualifications (see chapter 3.2). A parent told us: "my daughter's got more diplomas, and certificates, and so many other things than what she would have been able to achieve outside of school" (Trish, WAVE). Completing Year 12 can be a safety net for the future or, as Kayla (student, SKYS) explained it: "Year 12 is my backup plan. You need your Year 12 these days to be able to move on to have a good future".

[6] See note for Figure 4.1

The vignettes provide evidence of the numbers of students achieving various credentials, and of destinations and pathways – for example, for WAVE (see vignette):

- Twenty-six graduates of 2012 took up employment, including four apprenticeships.
- Eight graduates enrolled in private or TAFE training courses.
- Two went on to university.
- Two continued their studies in other schools in South Australia.

"Many flexible learning programs develop generic employability skills and an authentic understanding of what workplaces are like."

Many programs have a focus on enabling employment. For the Beacon Program at Cressy District High School, Jessica (staff) said the goal is "to give them the edge in the workplace". Several young people gained part-time employment while still enrolled in the program and as a direct result of the program, for example, through a work-experience placement or staff networks. Generic employability skills and an authentic understanding of what workplaces are like are developed in many flexible learning programs. Also very common is explicit attention to exploring career options and developing pathway plans. This was highlighted for flexible learning programs by Jessica (staff, Beacon at Cressy):

> *I guess you know you have been successful at Cressy when the students leave Year 10 and they have a clear understanding of what they want to do, what sort of person they are and what sort of person they want to become. […] They all have a pretty firm understanding of what their interests are and what that can lead to and what steps they need to take to get there.*

For most programs, this was about supporting young people to clarify and achieve their own career goals, whatever they may be: "if you want to go and become a bricklayer, we're going to help you get there. If you want to get into university, we're going to help you get there" (James, staff, SKYS).

Other programs took a highly strategic approach to supporting future employment, such as Hunter TAFE Skills for Tomorrow, a program for young mothers. One of the staff, Jocelyn, explained, "This program was about setting them up so they've got all the tools they need, and skills and ability to continue on to further study and/or employment". Val (community stakeholder) emphasised that this "toolkit" included "competencies that are relevant to the local labour market".

Young people also gained a better sense of their capabilities and an awareness that a better future was possible for them. As a result they increased their hopes and aspirations for further study and employment. Ethan (graduate, WAVE) said, "My career is up and running through WAVE" and contrasted this with otherwise being "in jobs I don't want".

Successful Learning

The achievement of credentials and pathways into further study and work is necessarily preceded by the successful engagement of students with learning. Successful learning as an outcome includes both

academic achievement (new knowledge and skills) as a product, and engagement with learning as a process. Evidence for success in terms of process is provided by attendance, because many of these students "would have been long-term non-attenders" (Shannon, staff, Key College). Dave (staff, St Luke's ESU) agreed, "the first thing is getting them in and having them attend and engaging them so that they want to come along". A powerful indicator that young people do indeed want to come along is the distance they travel to get to the flexible learning program. This was common across many programs, with an example provided by Mark (community member, SKYS):

> *Some of the young people who are going to the [SKYS] centre, the kids won't go to the secondary school that's maybe across the road, but they'll travel an hour and a half to get to this place, because they feel that it's connecting and inviting.*

"Successful learning includes both the product of academic achievement and the process of engagement with learning."

Young people's engagement with learning is apparent in their changing purpose for attendance as well as in their identification as a successful learner. Bryce (student, Key College) said, "For me, school was a place where I just went there to socialise about, not somewhere where I come to learn. Now I enjoy learning". Moreover, young people are putting effort into their learning: "working really hard" (Aden, student, WAVE). Simon (staff, SEDA Darwin) illustrated the academic achievements of students:

> *One particular student did not submit one piece of work to his school. He's nearly finished all his work [for us] to date this year, and it took probably a good term and a half for him to realise that he was capable of doing that […]. There's no stopping him at the moment. He's doing really, really well.*

Successful learning in flexible learning programs also means young people are gaining new and improved knowledge and skills, ranging from applied numeracy for budgeting, to barista skills, to essay writing at Year 12 level and "learning to learn" skills (Bendigo NETschool vignette).

Personal Growth and Wellbeing

The ability of flexible learning programs to enhance young people's personal growth and increase their self-confidence is not only an action that leads to the credentials and successful learning outlined above, but also a valued outcome in its own right. It means that young people are personally 'better off' as a result of the program.

Confidence in their own abilities is necessary for students to achieve their goals. Danni (graduate, Key College) said, "They just really helped me to believe in myself and then that's how I kept pushing forward". A staff member from the same site expanded:

> *Success is if a kid puts his foot through the door, stays for the day and leaves with a smile or a positive comment. He leaves knowing he is capable of being in a school situation, taking part in a program and actually learning.* (Kris, staff, Key College)

Students are proud of their achievements, especially when this is a new experience: “I’m just looking forward to graduating and just getting that certificate underneath my belt and being proud that I actually finished something” (Maddie, student, Skills for Tomorrow).

“Improved wellbeing means that young people are personally ‘better off’ as a result of the flexible learning program.”

Improved wellbeing is evident when “everyone gets along real good” (Vincent, student, Townsville FLC), students “take some leadership” (Peter, community member, SEDA Darwin) and students are “making decisions for their own lives and their own futures” (Wendy, student, Townsville FLC). Jason (staff, SKYS) suggested:

> *We have a sense when kids are doing well and obviously making personal progress when they do things like get their housing sorted out or get off drugs or they seem to present better, or their punctuality improves, their attendance improves. So those are indicators that something is working.*

Simon (staff, SEDA) remembered asking students for a word to sum up the program, and they came up with the Hawaiian word Ohana: “SEDA Ohana, they described it. It apparently means family. So that’s how the students described it, because they felt really connected to each other”. In Skills for Tomorrow, one student returned to class on Tuesday after giving birth on the Friday before, saying, “This is where I belong” (vignette). For Jeff (staff, Townsville FLC) the “vibe of the place” is an indicator of constructive, positive relationships, but he wryly observed that “I don’t know how you could put that on a piece of paper and send it away on a funding submission”.

Personal wellbeing incorporates emotional, behavioural, social and health outcomes for young people that benefit both their own lives and those of people around them. The Brotherhood of St Laurence Frankston High Street Centre CVCAL (vignette) found though its evaluations: “positive impacts on student confidence, empathy, aspirations for the future, relationships, anger management and alcohol/drug use”. In relation to improved health, Pearl (student, Townsville FLC) proudly stated that in a recent camp “There was no smoking on the trip, and I did well”. Lex (community member, WAVE) noticed a change in students who now “have hobbies which are healthy instead of destructive”.

Recognition from Community

This category of outcomes refers to recognition from community stakeholders for the program and for students. Parents are often extremely grateful for the way in which flexible learning programs have turned the lives of their children around. Helen (parent, WAVE) declared, “I really feel that they’ve made such a huge difference to my kids’ lives that it’ll never be forgotten for us”.

External agencies demonstrate recognition through prestigious awards, for example in 2009 Canberra College Cares received the Inaugural NAB Schools First National Impact Award (see vignette) and in 2012 Skills for Tomorrow received the Gold Award in the ‘Inclusion’ category at the annual TAFE NSW Innovation and Excellence showcase (see vignette). Individual staff at various programs also have had the quality of their work recognized (for example, see the vignettes for Beacon at Cressy, Illawarra Senior College, Macleay Vocational College, Key College on the website). Flexible learning programs have been cited as

examples of good practice in various reports (for example, see the vignettes for Hands on Learning and Macleay Vocational College).

Public acknowledgement of students' efforts and achievements is a major benefit because "if you're going to do something and then you do it, it makes you feel like a million bucks and especially when people start recognising it" (Mathew, staff, WAVE).

"External agencies demonstrate recognition, both for flexible learning programs and for their staff, through prestigious awards."

A high profile indication of public recognition is provided by the Beacon program at Cressy, in relation to their Charter Signing ceremony where Year 10 students publicly make a pledge to their school with the support of the wider community that by the following year they will be in further education, employment or training:

> *Picture this, they [the students] walk in, everyone stands up and cheers and some really high energy music is playing, and they just clap as they walk in. All of a sudden the kids feel, 'they're clapping for me'. […] Then you have a point where the community members come up and they say, 'we're willing to do this, and we want to support that'. When they get cheered off stage, it's like 'wow, I'm not on my own here'. They've got all this support.* (Lucy, staff, Beacon at Cressy).

Such recognition from the community also helps to counter stigma and stereotypes about flexible learning programs and their students; for example, seeing young parents as "actually out there and trying to do the right thing, the best thing for themselves and for their children" (Shirley, staff, Skills for Tomorrow) and seeing students "as real people and not this stereotype of what an at-risk youth is" (Jayne, staff, WAVE).

Contribution to Community

Not only do programs and students get recognition from the community – in turn they also contribute to the community. Vignettes and case studies provide evidence of the benefits for the wider community generated by flexible learning programs. The connection between higher educational attainment and improved community outcomes is appreciated within flexible learning programs. This is especially the case in relation to students who have young children of their own. Jayne (staff, WAVE) suggested, "Success could mean learning how to look after your child and have them develop into a healthy adult, and break a cycle that's been perpetual for generations". Pippa (student, Skills for Tomorrow) highlighted the role of education for breaking this cycle of disadvantage in relation to her son:

> *I want to work so I can bring Mervin up. Not to buy him everything and give him everything he needs, but if he does need stuff for growing up, then I want to help provide that, instead of being like, no, I don't have the money sort of thing. Because I grew up in a very - not poor, but we were always struggling. Mum still worked, but she only worked very casual jobs, because she had four kids, so she wasn't working that much. […] So in the way of helping Mervin, I think it will help him in the future if I do get a job or something out of it.*

For some young people, flexible learning programs create a 180 degree turn around, diverting them away from "many years in the justice system " (Martha, community member, SKYS), from "mischief" (Gary, community member, SEDA Darwin) and from "walking around the streets and causing trouble" (Gareth, graduate, St Luke's ESU). Gary (community member, SEDA Darwin) referred to programs ticking "all those kind of boxes that government look for".

From a parent perspective, Helen (WAVE) suggested that her son:

> *is going to become a positive community member now as a result, whereas, the path that he was going down before was very, very negative. […] He's learnt now that he is a valuable member of the community and that he can contribute to that. So he's not going to be a burden on society because he's positive now that he can get some work.*

At a personal level, families also benefit from this U-turn. Martha (community member, SKYS) gave an example of a mother who said SKYS had "given me my son back".

For employers, flexible learning programs provide graduates with valuable skills: "the employer who has got the student now, and they're a great employee, that person wouldn't have been available" (Bill, staff, WAVE). This is especially important in the context of the knowledge economy, with employers requiring more highly-skilled employees.

"It helps out in the greater good of everyone." (Jenna, graduate, WAVE)

Finally, a major contribution to the community is made directly through volunteering and service. This is particularly evident through the vignettes, with many of these referring to students' contributions through fundraising for various charities; volunteer activities for primary schools, sports clubs and nursing homes; participation in community events; and construction, creative and horticultural works. Two specific examples are:

> *Student projects include: building a community garden and organising activities for residents of the Footscray Lions Club retirement village; repairing and donating bikes to charity; camps that include a community service task for each student.* (Fresh, vignette)

> *Students participate in NAIDOC Week, the local ANZAC service, Landcare and 'Waste Into Art' environmental projects, Deadly Days and One Deadly Step Health Program community events and assist with Salvation Army and Red Cross appeals and a preschool reading program.* (Macleay Vocational College, vignette)

This demonstrates that students "are actually engaged in the community and giving back to the community" (Gary, community member, SEDA Darwin). A neat summary of all these various ways in which flexible learning programs contribute to the community is provided by Jenna (graduate, WAVE): "So it sort of helps out in the greater good of everyone".

4.3 Actions

To achieve the valued outcomes outlined above, staff in flexible learning programs utilise a range of actions. These actions were evident from observations during site visits, accounts in interviews, and descriptions of how a program works in documentation (as portrayed in the vignettes). The analysis identified six major categories of actions that are relevant across programs in Phase 2 and 3, although specific activities vary between programs. These six categories are listed in Figure 4.3 and discussed in detail below.

Figure 4.3: Actions[7]

Create Meaningful Learning Opportunities

Flexible learning programs are characterised by a curriculum that is purposeful, relevant, enjoyable and individualised. This means the content of learning is meaningful for students. Emily (staff, Beacon at Cressy) affirmed, "every teacher is committed to teaching about how that subject has relevance in the world of working". Many programs have a strong focus on literacy and numeracy, and this also can be taught in ways that are relevant and practical. An exemplar is provided by Jayne (staff, WAVE):

> *I try and make my SACE subjects relevant to real life, so things that they can actually use when they get out of here. So buying a car is one of the maths assignments. Figuring out how much paint you're going to need to paint a room in a house, looking at renting a house, and everything that goes into renting a house. All those kinds of things, I try and make things as relevant as I can in the subjects.*

As highlighted by the vignettes, popular additional short courses and electives offered by programs include white card (for employment in the construction industry); first aid; hospitality such as barista, food handling and responsible service of alcohol; industrial subjects such as woodwork and mechanics; and creative subjects such as music, photography and drawing.

[7] See note for Figure 4.1

Flexible learning programs commonly deliver work experience opportunities and employment skills, such as resume writing, job interview techniques and visits to an "expo of jobs and industries where we may like to go one day" (Carl, student, Beacon at Cressy). As noted in 3.2, many programs offer accredited vocational certificate courses. For example:

- Illawarra Senior College: "VET subjects in hospitality, construction, business, engineering and digital media [that] count towards both HSC [Year 12] and Certificate II" (vignette).
- Warriappendi School: "Certificate I-III in Business, Children's Services, Community Services, Construction, Horticulture, Hospitality, Automotive and Animal Studies" (vignette).
- Canberra College Cares: "Cert II: Business, Hairdressing and Beauty Services; and Cert III: Hospitality, Children's Services and Business Admin learned in a Virtual Enterprise environment" (vignette).

Such courses and certificates help to build the students' resume and are based not only on students' interests but also on "the likelihood of leading to employment" (Shirley, staff, Skills for Tomorrow).

In addition to the emphasis on making curriculum purposeful and relevant for work, flexible learning programs also emphasise making curriculum interesting, personally relevant and tailored to each individual student. A project-based approach is often adapted, integrating learning across various curriculum areas. This can be done as a group, for example, building sets for the annual school theatre production (Hands on Learning McClelland College, vignette) or servicing vehicles for community organisations (U-Turn Moonah). Individual projects drawing on a young person's interest are also common, such as the Research Based Learning in NETschool (vignette). Students may work on designing and constructing a skateboard (Blacktown Youth College, vignette) or creating a poster on "the results of smoking while you're pregnant" (Krystal, staff, SKYS).

"Tailored learning is facilitated through the use of personal learning plans for each student."

The opportunity to have choice and input in what they learn is appreciated by students. Simone (student, Beacon at Cressy) commented that she had "a real sense of freedom as in to pick what I really want to, what I'm interested in". At WAVE, Aden (student) told us: "here you will choose what you learn about and then they'll support you and find ways to make that help you in the long run". Individualised learning means allowing a measure of trust in students, as is evident in the example provided by Peter (community member, SEDA) whose organisation supports the students for their Certificate in Sport and Recreation:

> *I felt it was better if they came up with their own activities, as long as they were different activities and I provided feedback after the session on which ones went well and which ones didn't go so well and why they went well or not. It was to put the onus back onto them to come up with those activities and then to learn more through trial and error rather than us telling them that this is how we want it done.*

Tailored learning is facilitated through the use of personal learning plans. These are used to get to know the students' interests and learning styles, to plan their learning in the flexible learning program, and also to give credit for work already achieved:

We actually point out their past successes. A lot of them have come from a mainstream situation where they might have failed their last year or they've dropped out. So what Adrian does is he gets their SACE (South Australian Certificate of Education) pattern out and it shows that most of them got some credits. They might have done something in Year 10, they might have done a VET course, and they might have finished a PLP. And he can say 'Well actually, you did this course and you did this. You're already halfway to your Year 11', and they'd be quite surprised. (Hilary, staff, WAVE)

These individual plans and project-based learning approaches rely on the efforts of staff, to get to know each student and to map activities against the formal curriculum. David (staff, SKYS) proudly stated, "everything we do with the kids, we fit into the curriculum".

Provide Significant Support for Learning

In addition to providing curriculum content that is relevant and of interest to young people, flexible learning programs use processes that enable young people to achieve successful learning.

The experience that "a teacher will actually sit down with you" (Emma, student, St Luke's ESU) and support a student "until you actually understand" (Ethan, graduate, WAVE) is much appreciated by students. Such one-to-one attention is evident as a pedagogical strategy across many vignettes. Staff talk about using scaffolding and repetition to make sure students are mastering content before moving on. Students recognise and like these techniques:

They pushed you to a degree, but they didn't push you to where it would be too hard for you to do it. Because they're only working with one person per session they know your boundaries and they know how far they can push you. (Gareth, graduate, St Luke's ESU)

We can look at the big picture and then work out little things, one at a time, and that's how they do it. We always go one at a time by things. (Sophie, student, Key College)

The teachers, they don't dumb it down but they narrow it down so we all understand what they're talking about. (Maddie, student, Skills for Tomorrow)

"Both strong relationships and a supportive atmosphere empower students to also help each other."

The strong relationships and supportive atmosphere in flexible learning programs (see later in this section) also empower students to help each other. Macie (student, Townsville FLC) remembered: "If one person didn't know what to do on the computer the other person would come and help or show them what to do". Staff actively encourage such peer support but can also be pleasantly surprised to see it occur:

We had some students that were quite good at maths and numeracy tasks and they would be completed ahead of everyone else. But rather than sit there and do nothing they would, without me initiating anything, go and work with some of the students who are struggling, explain the task to them and help them through it. Not just giving them the answers, but actually like a mini tutoring system. (Simon, staff, SEDA)

Finally, staff use positive feedback, praise and acknowledgement of achievements to support students' learning. Student progress is measured against themselves rather than against a group norm: "where was I last year or two years ago, and have I moved on from that?" (Ashley, staff, SKYS).

Positive feedback can be simply in relation to a specific task: "they'll tell you that you're getting better" (Struan, student, St Luke's ESU). Or it can be more comprehensive: "There's a big focus too on students collecting presentation portfolios of all their certificates and awards" (Lucy, staff, Beacon at Cressy). As noted in Chapter 4.2, flexible learning programs also use ceremonies for public recognition of achievements by the community.

Build Genuine and Caring Relationships

The relational element of flexible learning programs is central to their success (see chapter 2.2). As Felicity (staff, St Luke's ESU) argued, "First and foremost number one priority is building a relationship, if you don't have that then forget it". The findings highlight relationships between staff and students, as well as among students, that are characterised by genuine and mutual respect, trust and care.

Relationships are built in many different ways: staff "know everyone so well" (Carl, student, Beacon at Cressy); "constantly doing those chats" and informal conversations (Wendy, staff, Townsville FLC); "are not going to judge you" (Cindi, student, WAVE); and "speak to us as a person" (Kenny, student, SKYS). Key strategies are to foster mutual respect and adult treatment:

> *We treat people here as adults. We give them the chance to have their word and to listen. I feel that a lot of young people haven't had that opportunity. They've been shut down very quickly. They've been dismissed. They've lost trust in adults. It's about nurturing that relationship again.* (Michelle, staff, SKYS)

Importantly, students need to feel that respect and care are genuine. They may test whether staff are for real: "we'd give them a hard time, and then the way they responded, that's what we like about them. They didn't respond with negativity" (Kenny, student, SKYS). Pippa (student, Skills for Tomorrow) pointed out that "they actually really care. [Conversely] You can tell when someone's like, 'Oh, how are you going?' but they don't really care".

"Relationships in these flexible learning programs are characterised by genuine and mutual respect, trust and care."

Positive relationships in flexible learning programs build an overall positive culture that is contributed to by students as well as by staff: "we don't go to school and bully each other. We just kind of all have each other's backs" (Danni, graduate, Key College). Jeff (staff, Townsville FLC) summed it up as follows:

> *We refer to ourselves as a community as much as possible as opposed to a school, and I think that's an important distinction to make. I mean we're a learning community or a community of learners rather than a school per se.*

Humour is also put to good use for building positive relationships. At St Luke's ESU (observation notes) this was evident in the headshots of staff featured on the 'real bucks' banknotes that are used as a reward system. Kenny (student, SKYS) pointed out teachers have fun too: "laughing back with us making jokes. So it wasn't just us bagging them. A lot of the time they were joking around with us as well".

Provide Practical Support for Living

In order to ensure that young people's life circumstances do not inhibit their opportunity to succeed, flexible learning programs provide a wide range of practical support. This includes support with housing, transport, legal issues, health, food, and childcare. Two examples are:

> *Many of our young people survive on absolutely nothing and you just wonder how they even do it, but they do survive on nothing. To help with that, we give bus tickets out and as you've seen, we've always got food, so they can come in and they can eat and once your tummy's full, you feel a little bit better about every else that's going on around you.* (Andy, staff, WAVE)

> *We were able to find suitable childcare for her after the baby had turned six weeks so that then she was able to fulfil her career desire of becoming a nurse. So she was able to continue in that course, finish it and then pathway into the nursing course that she really wanted to do.* (Dionne, staff, Skills for Tomorrow)

Programs are not necessarily able to deal with all issues themselves, but they act as the first port of call, adopting a 'no wrong door' approach: "They are told that they can come to anybody about anything at any time. There's nothing we can't do or sort out, and what we can't do, we get somebody to do it" (Wendy, staff, Townsville FLC). This means young people do not need to navigate a multitude of agencies and services themselves. Programs commonly use individual case management to offer appropriate support. Staff also may accompany students to an external agency: "They come with you too, and so if you've got interviews and meetings they will come with you and kind of support you" (Struan, St Luke's ESU).

"Although many programs cannot deal with all practical issues themselves, they act as the first port of call, adopting a 'no wrong door' approach."

Pastoral care within the program is a key ingredient of support for living, focussing on aspects such as "personal development, self-belief, well-being" (NETschool, vignette) and resilience building (BSL Frankston High Street Centre CVCAL, vignette). To provide practical support, it is common for flexible learning programs to employ not only teachers but also staff with a community or social work background. Warriappendi School "provides strong pastoral, behavioural, wellbeing and practical support to students, including access to Tirkandi youth workers, Aboriginal mentors" (vignette).

Finally, practical support is provided through a stable, safe and comfortable environment. Nicole (staff, WAVE) referred to "providing a safe haven, a secure base for these kids" and thereby strengthening their "attachment". Wendy (staff, Townsville FLC) told us "we show them that this is their community now" and David (staff, SKYS) explained:

It's all about being flexible and adaptable, but at the same time providing a stable environment for them, because a lot of them have got really chaotic lifestyles, so we try to have this as a safe space.

There is a shared understanding among flexible learning programs that these kinds of practical supports are not a digression or optional extra, but rather are a prerequisite for enabling young people to overcome barriers and engage with learning.

Engage with Community

Direct engagement with a wide range of community stakeholders is common among flexible learning programs. Some of this is collaboration in order to offer practical support and authentic learning opportunities (as outlined above). At Canberra College Cares (vignette) staff emphasised the one-stop shop of health and education service, and the collaboration with a range of community and training organisations. Kerry (community member, St Luke's ESU) appreciated that "they are always keeping us informed of what's going on". Kirsty (graduate, Beacon at Cressy) made clear how "what they're good at is that pro-activeness and that ability to engage external professional community members and parents".

"Partnerships with people and organisations in the community play a major role in the work of flexible learning programs."

Parents (and others important people in students' lives) are involved through individual communication as well as a variety of events. Beacon at Cressy has initiated information evenings bringing parents and staff from further education and employers together: "we had representatives from both Colleges, from the university and from different employment industries. They came in and they actually explained their role to the parents" (Jessica, staff). Hands on Learning (vignette) has family pizza nights, Warriappendi School (vignette) has family barbeques, and Blacktown Youth College (vignette) organises community lunches for parents and carers. Informal events are especially important for parents and carers whose previous encounters with schools have often not been positive. At St Luke's ESU (vignette) a grandparent commented, "Those people are great. He is learning things and I get along with them as well".

Partnerships with people and organisations in the community play a major role. This is taken up in more detail in Chapter 4.5, in relation to the conditions that enable the work and success of flexible learning programs.

Perform Reflection and Innovation

Ongoing reflection and innovation is a hallmark of flexible learning programs. Val (staff, Skills for Tomorrow) said that "we will continue to analyse the data" to inform future direction for the program. Emily (staff, Beacon at Cressy) argued that:

You have to look ahead. We need to look at the leaders and go 'right, this is what we're thinking for [this year], but what are the future learning needs of these children, and will the current model really meet them? How do we have to tweak it? How does it have to mould to be exciting and appropriate to that group of children?'. We've done that every year.

There is evident willingness in flexible learning programs to respond to student feedback. For example, Ashley (staff, SKYS) recalled a student telling her he didn't think an activity was relevant. She reflected that he made "a really fair point" and had "given me a very clear signal that this is not engaging him" and as a result she made the activity more work-related. Staff also respond to and work together with community partners:

> *It's really good to think though that even though there were some rocky times, stuff hasn't been brushed under the carpet. We have all sat down together, we have all tried to work out, 'look, what wasn't working, what can happen differently?'. And the fact is people have actually taken up the ball and run with it and it is happening differently and you don't always get that.* (Teresa, community member, Skills for Tomorrow)

"There is evident willingness in flexible learning programs to respond to student and community feedback and input."

The ability to try out new things and keep innovation is one of the attractions of working in a flexible learning program. David (staff, SKYS) remarked cheerfully, "to be honest, if we found the perfect way to deliver VCAL, we'd all be really bored. [...] We enjoy changing and doing different things". Lee (staff, St Luke's ESU) shared this sentiment:

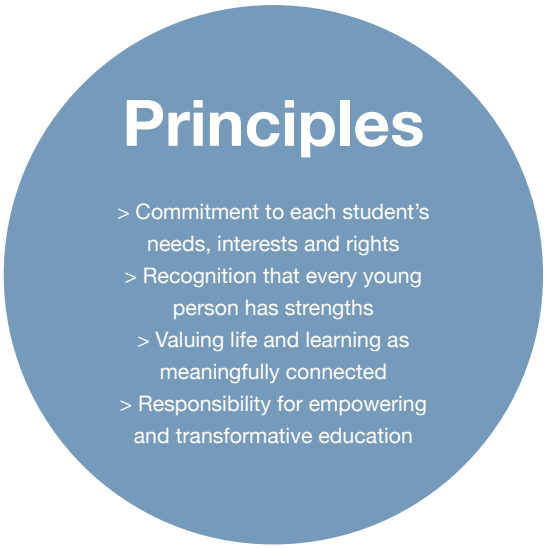
> *I've been here a long time and anytime I start to go a bit stale and I've mentioned that to [manager name], she'll say 'Well how do you want it to look? What's going to work? Change it, make it different, do something different'.*

At Townsville FLC (observation notes) staff development days were used for collaborative and reflexive curriculum review and planning, with staff working in teams. Young people's views were also actively sought, for example, through regular informal courtyard meetings.

4.4 Principles

The outcomes that are valued and the actions taken by flexible learning programs are underpinned by various principles that form the vision or philosophy of the program. Some programs have their own explicitly formulated principles. For example, the EREA Youth+ Flexible Learning Centres (vignette) all are founded on four principles: respect, participation, being safe and legal, and honesty. The John Berne School (vignette) has as its motto "hope always". The principles presented here, however, are based on all research data, that is, not only documentation but also interviews and observations. The analysis identified four major categories of principles that are relevant across programs in Phase 2 and 3. These four categories are listed in Figure 4.4 and discussed in detail below.

Figure 4.4: Principles[8]



Commitment to Each Student's Needs, Interests and Rights

Flexible learning programs operate from a deep-seated commitment to the education of each individual young person. This is based, in part, on the understanding that schools have not always served their students well:

> *[Staff name] is constantly saying, and she'll say it to parents when they come in, that 'we know school is not for everybody, but education is'. So it's a matter of finding an education system that fits these kids.* (Kerry, community member, St Luke's ESU)

Peter (community member, SEDA) agreed that it is unreasonable "to ask [students] to sit in a classroom for another two or three years" when that approach to education does not match their interests and needs.

"I have a very strong belief that all young people have the right to a good quality education." (James, staff, SKYS)

In addition, the commitment to each young person's education is connected to a rights-based perspective. Bill (staff, WAVE) insisted that "for young people in South Australia, the SACE is the core accreditation and not only should you do it, but it should be an entitlement". James (staff, SKYS) similarly highlighted that "I have a very strong belief that all young people have the right to a good quality education".

The stipulation that it must be a 'quality' education is important. Malcolm (student, Townsville FLC) explained how, "the staff here at Flexi support us young people in their endeavour to become the best that they possibly can". Teresa (community member, Skills for Tomorrow) was emphatic about how:

> *They're learning just the same as other people would be learning, they still have to meet certain competencies […]. That to me is important because it's not treating people like we're going to give*

[8] See note for Figure 4.1

people a lesser thing. It's just doing it in a different way. But you still end up with the same bit of paper that you would end up with should you perhaps have done it some other way.

Ensuring flexible learning education meets students' needs involves attention to both wellbeing and learning. Mark (community member, SKYS) argued, "You need that marriage of education – school-based stuff, and opportunities to apply their knowledge – married with the support". Bill (staff, WAVE) referred to this as wellbeing for learning:

Often a lot more investment goes into the wellbeing until a young person is ready for the connection with learning, but that connection is always implied or always an end point [...]. The WAVE program is about learning, has a big investment in the wellbeing of the kids, but it's still got to be around wellbeing for learning.

Since the commitment is to each young person, it also requires an individualised approach. Dave (staff, St Luke's ESU) said learning does not mean "being set the same task as everybody else" and Jayne (staff, WAVE) explained that staff "look at him or her on an individual level, as opposed to on a class level". This applies not only to students' needs but also to their interests:

It's completely student-centred, so we actually look at the kid, we look at what they're interested in, as much as we can gauge, where they're at right now and where they want to be or where they could be, and then we fit the curriculum in around all that. (David, staff, SKYS)

Staff demonstrate faith in young people: "having that patience and belief that, given enough time and space and support, they will move forward" (Hilary, staff, WAVE). Jeff (staff, Townsville FLC) emphasised how this is embedded in program practice and policy:

We often talk about radical acceptance, and that's written in our documentation, our strategic directions and those kinds of things. We also have, and I think it's really important, we have the word 'love' in our strategic plan.

Recognition that Every Young Person has Strengths

The commitment to each young person is connected to a fundamental belief that each person has strengths. Rather than looking at where young people may have failed in the past, flexible learning programs work to find young people's strengths and build on those. Sue (staff, Townsville FLC) stated, "These young people have such gifts to bring". Teachers in flexible learning programs suggest the reason these strengths may not have been recognised in mainstream schooling is because they are not the traditional academic measures of achievement. Dave (staff, St Luke's ESU) stated, "they definitely have strengths but perhaps it's not in the academic sense" and Peter (community member, SEDA) suggested students "might express themselves in a physical way rather than in an academic way and that's clearly their expertise".

"Rather than looking at where young people may have failed in the past, flexible learning programs work to find young people's strengths and build on those."

An important part of the strength-based approach is not only for staff to recognise young people's strengths, but also to support young people to recognise these themselves. Shirley (staff, Skills for Tomorrow) explained:

> *I do think you've got to come from that space and recognising that they've got strengths, so we did a fair bit about that in the initial stages, about their strengths and what they bring and so it became a positive place for them to be.*

Krystal (staff, SKYS) agreed, "something I can do for them is to help them realise that they have this fountain of experience, and they're developing a real wealth of experience". Helping students realise this "shows them that they can do things and not to be afraid of doing things" (Kris, staff, Key College). At WAVE the intention is that learning affirms their personal strengths and enables them to experience success (vignette).

Valuing Life and Learning as Meaningfully Connected

A further principle is that education and learning cannot be divorced from a young person's life. This approach to education is holistic, in the sense that it recognises that learning happens in real-life situations (in and outside of school) and also that schooling is part of life. As Dave (staff, St Luke's ESU) put it: "we don't deal with them in isolation as a school student. We deal with them as a person".

Young people's experiences that happen outside of school are given credit for generating valuable learning. A competency-based approach is useful for implementing this principle. At Tenison Woods FLP (vignette): "Activities such as employment, TAFE studies and volunteer or community work, are packaged as SACE Stage 1 and 2 Community Studies subjects". Jocelyn (staff, Skills for Tomorrow) explained:

> *All along the way the program recognises existing skills that they don't feel they have. They feel that they've left school at Year 9 or Year 10, and 'what would I know, and my literacy is not that good'. Yet they've been parents and they've gained skills, and then they start to realise that 'oh, actually I'm half way through this unit, because I do this every day at home with my child'.*

Sue (staff, Townsville FLC) described how they wrote units for English and social and community studies "organising a senior celebration" and around work experience, and argued, "It's about being smart about writing curriculum". Staff at WAVE are conscious that strengths can be derived from challenging life experiences, and use the music program to enable young people to reflect on their story through songs.

"Young people's experiences that happen outside of school are given credit for generating valuable learning."

In flexible learning programs, a wide variety of activities are recognised as having learning potential, such as cooking meals together, camps, and outdoor activities. For Jackson (student, SEDA), the kind of games and sporting activities he used to value at school simply because they were enjoyable, now have a deeper learning purpose: "It's not just sport for fun, it's sport that we're going to use tomorrow when we run it for the little kids" (that is, in a sports clinic for primary school students). Relevance is a key to engagement with learning, not only for flexible learning programs.

Young people spend a large amount of time within the flexible learning program, and this time is recognised as part of their life, not separate from it. A family-like atmosphere, opportunities to take responsibility, and homely physical spaces are all part of this. Sue (staff, Townsville FLC) argued, "everyone wants to feel like they're learning, contributing, belonging to a place, a community". Mark (community member, SKYS) agreed:

> *In my experience, I haven't met anybody who doesn't want to be successful. But it's just a matter of finding a place where you can feel a sense of connection, taking the time to understand who you are properly, so as a person you can begin to connect and bond, so socially you can get yourself back on track.*

Physical spaces can help to create a sense of community. Olivia (student, WAVE) commented on the homely atmosphere: "This is like our second family, we've got a kitchen and everything and you feel like you're at home doing schoolwork".

At Townsville FLC (observation notes) building the new garden and fire pit was initiated, in part, because the 'Yarning Tree' in an adjacent paddock had been removed. The tree had been an important place where young people would open up about personal experiences and ask questions about private issues such as sex and spirituality. For the new space, young people wrote: "This is our place, a yarn'n place, a safe place. We created this place – a grow'n place".

Responsibility for Empowering and Transformative Education

Finally, flexible learning programs are committed to an education that is genuinely enabling, not only leading to a better life but also empowering young people to steer that themselves. As Lee (staff, St Luke's ESU) told us: "It's all about 'is it effective in engaging and changing the lives of young people?'". Michelle (staff, SKYS) said the aim is "to help them flourish and grow".

The transformative effect of flexible learning programs is illustrated partly through comparison with typical experiences in mainstream schools. Simon (staff, SEDA) suggested that the kinds of young people he works with "would have got to the point of being post-compulsory, which is 17, and then the school would have asked them to leave". A specific example was provided by David (staff, SKYS):

> *I was telling you about the girl that sat here on the couch for three months putting her makeup on in the morning, and eventually started to do work. I've worked in mainstream schools and that just wouldn't happen. She'd have been out. She'd have gone through the whole rigmarole of being taken up, disciplined, suspended then expelled, and that would have reinforced her negative experience of school.*

Instead, after having decided that she could trust people in the program, this student successfully reconnected with learning. This is essential for enrolment in a flexible learning program to be empowering and transformative. James (staff, SKYS) argued that:

> *In these alternative settings, I think that achieving a certificate is really crucial. I've got sort of a philosophy that if you move young people one step closer to 20 or 21 without helping them get some kind of accreditation, then in lots of ways you're doing them a disservice.*

Moreover, the certificate itself needs to be worthwhile, rather than one "that is irrelevant so that we can tick a box and that doesn't contribute to their lifelong learning or their lifelong objectives" (Val, community member, Skills for Tomorrow).

While flexible learning programs take responsibility for enabling students to gain such credentials, they also support young people to make the choice to work towards this themselves. Kane (student, Key College) suggested "it's up to you to come to school […] if you want to learn and achieve your goals". Ricky (student, WAVE) elaborated:

> *The teachers show a sense of support and it puts the decision back on them [students]. 'What path do you want to go? We're here to support you whatever you want to'. But the other part then, 'we can only do so much. You've got to put in the other 50 percent. It can't just be us carrying you along'. And that's when the students snap into gear and go, 'I want to finish. I'm getting the help. This is a good opportunity' and they turn things around.*

The intention is to enable students to develop and assert their own independence and responsibility for learning and life "to participate fully in the community" (Townsville FLC, vignette). This means that staff in flexible learning programs avoid trying to solve issues for students but rather act to support students to develop the skills to solve problems themselves. Michelle (staff, SKYS) explained:

> *Because we're such an open and loving place, kids get connected with us quite quickly and form really valuable and honest relationships that can sometimes disable them from becoming that full independent person where they've got to open doors and go and fly. So what I think is very important is that our practice is that we're constantly informing our kids of their independence and responsibility and that the ownership is always on them and it isn't with us.*

"Flexible learning programs take responsibility for enabling students to gain credentials, but also support young people to make choices themselves."

Canberra College Cares (vignette) works to empower students to seek solutions. Dionne (staff, Skills for Tomorrow) said that rather than "take over for them" the idea is to develop students' skills so that "they can become independent and be able to overcome those barriers that are going to prevent them from continuing on in the course and then further in work".

4.5 Conditions

Several conditions enable (or constrain) the ability of staff in flexible learning programs to act on their principles in order to achieve valued outcomes. The analysis of the data collected for Putting the Jigsaw Together identified five main categories of conditions that impact on flexible learning programs. These categories are listed in Figure 4.5 and discussed in detail below.

Figure 4.5: Conditions[9]

Flexibility

The ability to be flexible underpins most actions in flexible learning programs, but especially the creation of meaningful learning opportunities. Certain formal curricular frameworks offer the necessary leeway to ensure content is relevant and interesting. Sue (staff, Townsville FLC) explained, "we work through the Australian Core Skills Framework and because that's so skill based, content wise you have quite a lot of freedom". In Victoria, the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) is an alternative curriculum for Years 10, 11 and 12 to the more traditionally academic Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). David (staff, SKYS) praised VCAL:

> *I taught lots of re-engagement curricula here, in the UK and as well in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, and VCAL's incredibly brilliant for it. It's such a good curriculum, because you can basically do what you want with it.*

Flexible curricula enable the creation of meaningful modules and the mapping of a wide range of learning against the syllabus. They also allow content to be adapted to respond to questions or issues as they occur. Joel (staff, SEDA) told us that "The day-by-day structure can vary. You're not bound by anything". His colleague Simon (staff, SEDA) appreciated that "not being in a [mainstream] school environment gives us the flexibility to do different things during the day".

"Flexible curricular frameworks enable the creation of meaningful modules and the mapping of a wide range of learning against the syllabus."

In addition, several curriculum frameworks offer the flexibility for students to achieve those certificates in a time period that better suits them. The South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) explicitly enables part-time completion. James (staff, SKYS) pointed out, "a good thing with the VCAL is you can do one certificate over three years, so there's not a need to move young people on if they're not passing".

[9] See note for Figure 4.1

Organisational regulations also facilitate flexibility. Kerry (community member, St Luke's ESU) suggested it is important that students are not forced to leave the ESU after a term or two, but can stay "until they are ready, so that could be after six months or it could be after three years". Approaches to discipline are also more flexible. This supports teachers: "You're not worrying – having worked in the mainstream – about people being late, and having to say 'Well, you can't enter the classroom'" (Ashley, staff, SKYS).

Most flexible learning programs do not have to use formal detention, suspension and expulsion regulations. Instead, they tend to deal with negative behaviours through communication and encouraging young people to take responsibility, for example, through a "restorative justice approach" (Key College, vignette). Flexibility (in curriculum, timetabling, regulations) is used by staff for students, but without jeopardising the safe and stable environment that is also important. Bill (staff, WAVE) pointed out that "at times alternative programs tend to think that kids who are most at risk or disengaged need flexibility, and they do, but they need flexibility within a clear structure".

Systemic Support and Resources

Support from governments, educational systems and umbrella organisations impact on the ability of flexible learning programs to do productive work and achieve valuable outcomes. Most programs offer courses and materials free of charge to the students. Hilary (staff, WAVE) appreciated how this was supported through the Innovative Community Action Networks (ICAN) and Flexible Learning Options (FLO) in South Australia:

> *Students with us can access training for free. A lot of families would never be able to afford that sort of input. So, they may have always wanted to do a VET course but their families couldn't afford it. And actually while they're still enrolled at school they wouldn't be eligible but there's a certain provision we've got through ICAN through the FLO 'Skills for All' agreement where Certificate I and II courses in lots and lots of areas are free for 16 year olds and over, and also the Certificate III and IV are greatly reduced [fee]. So through the FLO enrolment strategy [...] we've got access to more support for the students, so that helps build their success.*

The sustainability of funding is important. When funding depends on a snapshot of enrolments on a census date or on short-term tenders, programs find they are "under more regulatory pressure to seek other funding" (Jason, staff, SKYS). James (staff, SKYS) expanded:

> *Funding is always an issue. Funding is a killer. It's hard to run these programs financially. [...] even when it's at full tilt, you're still not receiving the same kind of funding a secondary school receives, while working with people who need much higher levels of resources. We do breakfasts and lunches and camps at no cost. We do not have student fees. We do everything to increase access and equity to education.*

Similarly, Townsville FLC provides young people with meals, transport, sometimes clothing and all their program requisites (such as stationery, use of iPads) and individual program costs (including driving lessons, licence tests, camps and outings). Many flexible learning programs are astute in making the most of their budgets. For example, in St Luke's ESU much of the food is provided through a FoodShare scheme, materials for the carpentry program are sourced from refuse yards and the carpentry program has made instruments for the music program.

Small class-sizes and low student-staff ratios are essential, and this relies heavily on funding support. Small size offers the "advantage of us knowing them really well. We're not just seeing them for 40 minutes maybe twice a week" (David, staff, SKYS). Jackson (student, SEDA) noted, "I'm with the same teacher all day, which helped me a lot more. I was seeing seven teachers a day at the other school". A low student-staff ratio also increases students' access to staff, including one-to-one time, so that "they could actually help you a lot more" (Cindi, student, WAVE). Shannon (staff, Key College) argued:

> *I think first and foremost it's the small size of the class and the individualised attention that they get, not only in the classroom but also through phone calls of a morning to get them out of bed, for breakfast when they get here, and lunch.*

Having access to the right physical spaces also supports programs to achieve their outcomes: "The environment is important so you've got to find the right space" (Jocelyn, staff, Skills for Tomorrow). What is considered the 'right' space depends on the program's purpose. Skills for Tomorrow uses community centres that have quality childcare provision on site as well a range of other local services and agencies that may be useful for the students and program. For SEDA Darwin using a sport club as the physical setting for the classroom is beneficial because it does not look like school and offers immediate access to a sport field. However, rental of this space is a major cost for the program.

Having moved into a new building, Lee (staff, St Luke's ESU) suggested that "having that shared site really, both physically and conceptually, makes it easier for us to co-ordinate what we're doing". Access to a kitchen where students can make themselves a drink or a sandwich provides an informal opportunity for some time out and can serve as a hub to bring people together.

"Having access to appropriate physical spaces also supports flexible learning programs to achieve their outcomes."

When a flexible learning program is part of a larger organisation or network, this can provide useful support and additional resources. For WAVE being co-located with, but still semi-autonomous from, a mainstream comprehensive high school (Wirreanda Secondary School) provides it with the benefits of shared student services, facilities, administration, resources and staff professional development opportunities. For the Beacon program at Cressy, the staff from the Beacon Foundation "help us so much and provide so many positive outcomes for our children" (Emily, staff).

The main organisation behind Skills for Tomorrow is Hunter TAFE. Being part of such a large organisation generates specific benefits. Hunter TAFE offers other similar programs, especially for jobseekers, which provides wider organisational knowledge about what works and gives Skills for Tomorrow access to services, such as Reaching Your Destination (mentoring). For Key College, having the support of its parent organisation Youth Off The Streets (YOTS), is crucial to Key College's long term support as young people 'age out' of supported accommodation and other youth programs: "Fortunately, Youth Off The Streets sees that the role doesn't finish when they're 18, it goes on" (Ingrid, community member).

Engaged and Knowledgeable Staff

The high quality of staff lies at the heart of flexible learning programs. This is partly about knowledge and skills. James (staff, SKYS) outlined his criteria for a teacher:

> *People who have their Cert IV training and assessment so they can deliver vocational training. People who know bits and pieces about media and music preferably, so they can do those sort of integrated bit. People who have got some demonstrated ability to work with disengaged young people. Primary [education] experience is really highly valued.*

Having not only teachers, but also youth workers, tradespeople and/or Indigenous workers, is a common and effective feature of flexible learning programs. Drawing on the complementary strengths of each staff member is useful: "we've all got different skills and we all do things in a different way" (Andy, staff, WAVE). Michelle (staff, SKYS) commented on the way teachers and youth workers collaborate, and argued:

> *The combination of the two makes it this power team. I don't mean power in a negative way. I mean it in a positive manner of professional backgrounds and developing people's different expertise. It's great to have the diversity within people's backgrounds in their education here.*

At least as important as such expertise, however, are the attitudes and dispositions of staff. Felicity (staff, St Luke's ESU) summed up the experience across flexible learning programs:

> *You've got to come here with a passion for these kids […] you have to want to see past the swearing, the carrying on, and the bravado. You've got to understand that they come with a history.*

Sophie (graduate, Key College) suggested that "If they [teachers] didn't really care about the kids we wouldn't build a connection with them and we wouldn't really care about coming in". Hierarchical attitudes will not work and staff need "to be able to remove what I call the 'mantle of the expert'" (Jason, staff, SKYS); that is, their professional privilege over knowledge. As Taliah (student, Skills for Tomorrow) proposed:

> *You don't want someone to come in who, not so much thinks that they're better, but gives off that vibe: 'I'm the teacher and this is how it is'. I think it's important to have someone that comes in on the same level as the girls.*

"Employing teachers as well as youth workers, tradespeople and/or Indigenous workers is a common and effective feature of flexible learning programs."

The necessity of being innovative and the practical supports required for young people often involves staff long working hours. Andy summed it up as "we're on tap" and elaborated: "I get phone calls on a night and on a weekend and in the holidays, because like I said to Adrian, their lives don't stop when we're on holiday". The commitment by staff to the students is high. James (staff, SKYS) pointed out that:

There might be a general feeling that teaching in these setting is sort of easier, but it's not. It's really challenging. So you usually get people who are very passionate around social justice issues.

James is concerned that programs at times rely on staff's "ethical commitment to working in these sorts of settings" in the face of challenging work and "earning less than if they were in the mainstream teaching setting". The high workload and the complex intellectual and emotional labour can be "very mentally exhausting" (Wendy, staff, Townsville FLC). Since staff are such a valuable resource for flexible learning programs, it is pragmatic and far-sighted to invest in supporting their daily work and longer-term professional development. James (staff, SKYS) argued,

It can be quite professionally isolating working in these sorts of settings, and that's often where I think they can fall over, where you don't have enough of that crossover and collegiate professional development opportunities. Where one or two teachers in a setting get burnt out and move on, all the professional knowledge is lost.

He suggested providing "an opportunity to debrief and to talk about complex cases" with each other and with program leadership is helpful. This is especially the case for teachers, rather than youth workers, because pre-service teacher education tends to prepare them for work in larger mainstream settings, where teachers can refer students to a welfare coordinator or deputy principal rather than having to engage in case management type work themselves.

"Staff are the most valuable resource for flexible learning programs, so it is worth investing in supporting their work and professional development."

Shared Vision

The common commitment to a set of principles (such as those outlined in 4.4 above) within a flexible program is a condition of success, as it means everyone works together to move in the same direction. Mathew (staff, WAVE) described how "One thing that makes WAVE extremely successful is the network of staff who are on the same page". This applies not only to staff but also to community partners. Gary (community member SEDA) declared, "I guess for me, the things that SEDA is delivering are things that I'm aligned to as a person". For Val (community member, Skills for Tomorrow) this meant "everybody's talking the same language and that is about participation in education".

Strong leadership by program managers helps to develop and maintain a shared vision. This is particularly relevant when a program employs staff from a diversity of professional backgrounds:

It's about skilling teachers up about welfare and youth work and it's about skilling youth workers up about education and teaching and trying to get on the same page – that we're working towards common outcomes from different professional backgrounds. (James, staff, SKYS)

Emily (staff, Beacon at Cressy) told us the development of shared vision is "strategic, it's not accidental" and added that "I couldn't speak strongly enough about the influence of having the leadership team". Bill (staff, WAVE) agreed:

It's just so important to have the right people, the right leader. Not that there's one model for that, but to have someone who is really credible, has a clear moral purpose on what they're doing, has a good vision that they're able to bring other people along with, but then also has the capacity to bring people in with different skills sets, with different approaches that can still be welded together into something that's purposeful.

"Strong leadership by program managers helps to develop and maintain a shared vision."

Productive Partnerships

Fruitful collaboration with suitable partner organisations enable the work of flexible learning programs. Local government can be a helpful partner. Jason (staff, SKYS) commented, "we are fortunate in having Port Phillip council, in that they have a very inclusive and supportive role and they take it very seriously". Emily (Beacon at Cressy) told us about the Mayor and declared admiringly that "we call her the 'champion' of the Inspiring Futures program".

Collaborations with local business and employers, for example, for work placements, and with inter-agency networks and service providers are also common. Many flexible learning programs collaborate with a large range of partners. As an illustration, for Townsville FLP (see case study) this includes Headspace, Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service, Dance North, The Northern Outlook, Queensland Composite Plastics (QCP), Townsville Permaculture Society, Indigenous Coordinating Council, Breakthru People Solutions, Education Queensland, James Cook University, Queensland Youth Services, Rotary and Townsville City Council.

Thinking through the criteria for suitable partners, Jocelyn (staff, Skills for Tomorrow) suggested that "You must have key stakeholders that bring a mixture of things to the table. […] an effective model is because of everybody's qualities, because of the mix of the stakeholders".

The benefits of productive partnerships are varied and many. Simone (student, Beacon at Cressy) said, "we wouldn't have the school we were today or the platinum status that we have with the Beacon Foundation if we didn't have the community's support behind us". Partnerships can also support professional learning:

> *I try to manage as much as I can to have a lot of engagement between the teachers from a range of programs and the youth workers from a range of programs. So partnerships is really key. So we've linked up strongly with Melbourne City Mission, we're linking up more closely with the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Salvation Army around that education and youth work sort of delivery. […] In terms of professional support within Victoria, VALA is brilliant, the Victoria Applied Learning Association. So we tend to have quite a lot to do with them. Caulfield Park Community School are quite good with this sort of thing and the community schools, so Lynall Hall and Kensington and so forth – they do a conference every two years.* (James, staff, SKYS)

At Townsville FLC (observation notes) the partnership with Queensland Composite Plastics (QCP) has introduced fibre glassing into the curriculum and, as a result, students and staff built two canoes for use in their outdoor education program.

"Productive partnerships have varied and many benefits. Building relationships with partners can have snowball effects in gaining additional support for a flexible learning program."

Partners can also provide resources to help run a program. Jocelyn (staff, Skills for Tomorrow) explained how they "try to look for partners who already have funding, because there seems to be a lot of duplication, or can be a lot of duplication of funding and activities". For example, "Wyong Child and Family Services are funded to provide mentoring and support and transition parents into childcare. […] So what we do is we try to utilise that partnership" (Jocelyn, staff, Skills for Tomorrow). As a community member, Peter (SEDA) considered the benefits of partnership very much as being mutual:

> *I think we can provide a lot towards each other. […] our biggest challenge is resources, like really hands on man hours. It's as simple as that. That's an issue we face a lot of the time and I think they [SEDA] have that and probably the assistance they need […] some feedback to their students about how they're going and also some clear objectives and some clear programs for their students to work on. So I think the partnership can be very advantageous to both of us.*

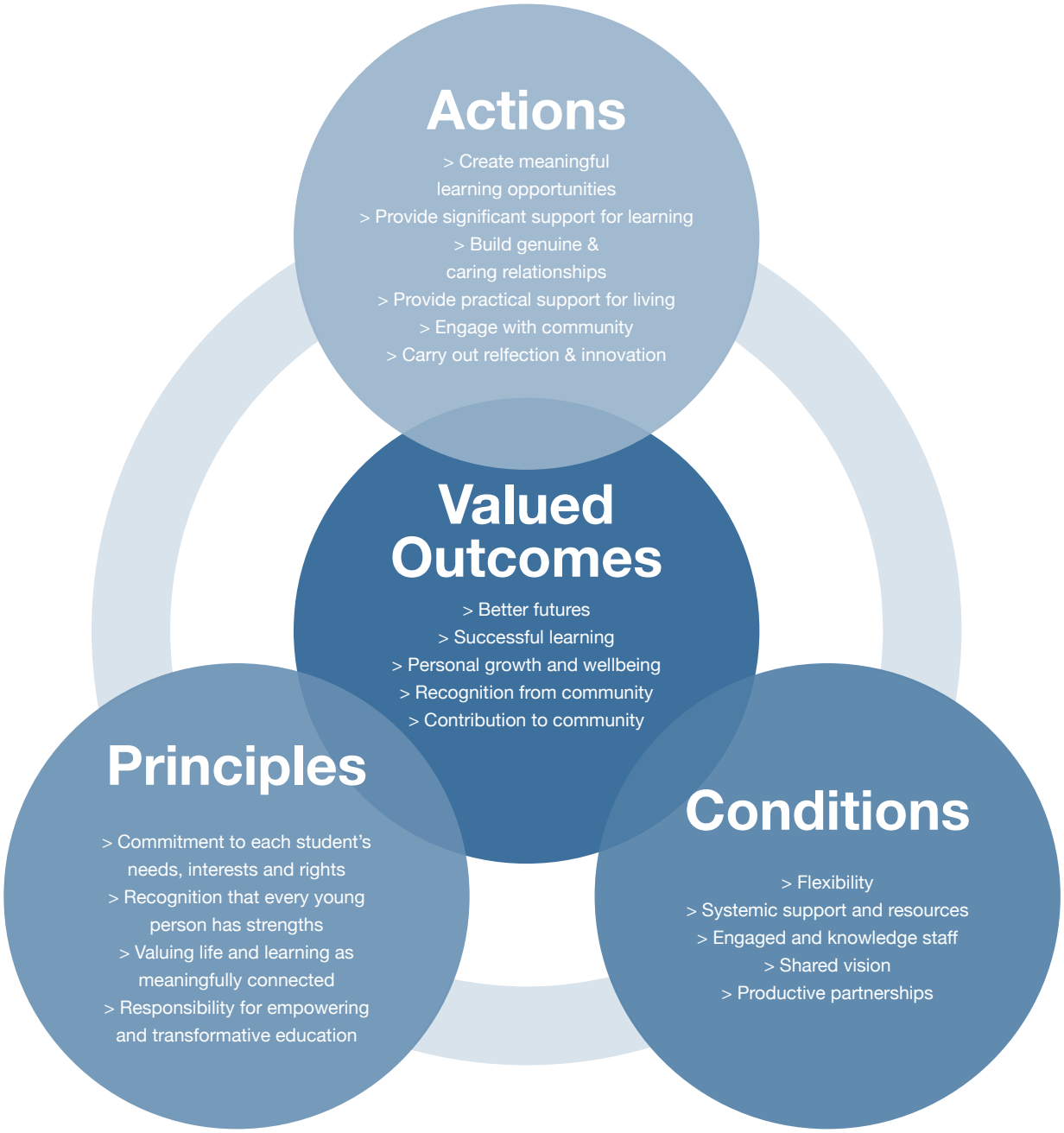
The focus on building relationships with partners can have snowball effects in gaining additional support for a flexible learning program; for example, when partners "become advocates and champions for the school" (Liz, community member, Townsville FLC).

4.6 The Framework of Quality in Flexible Learning Programs

As outlined in Chapter 4.1, the analysis of data from Phase 2 and Phase 3 led to the development of a model to understand flexible learning programs and support successful current and future flexible learning provision. Figure 4.6 provides a diagram of the full framework. The Framework of Quality in Flexible Learning Programs (FQFLP) is shaped around four interrelated dimensions:

1. Valued outcomes
2. Actions
3. Principle
4. Conditions

Figure 4.6: Framework of Quality Flexible Learning Programs (FQFLP): Full details



Note: This model was developed by Kitty te Riele as Chief Investigator of the project team.
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All the dimensions are of relevance across all flexible learning programs for marginalised young people. That is, all programs engage in specific actions, informed by their explicit or implicit principles aimed at achieving valued outcomes, and are enabled (or constrained) by certain conditions. Moreover, the specific aspects listed for each dimension apply to all programs examined through Phase 2 and 3, and are likely to apply to the vast majority of flexible learning programs. This does not, however, negate the diversity among flexible learning programs. This diversity is important, so that programs match the needs and interests of particular young people and communities.

"All dimensions, as well as all aspects within the dimensions, of the FQFLP are relevant to all flexible learning programs. However, programs can tailor the FQFLP to their context by emphasising specific aspects or operationalising aspects in different ways."

In the FQFLP, programs may place different weightings on the aspects listed under valued outcomes, actions, principles and conditions. For example, a program working with homeless young people may pay relatively more attention to the outcome of better futures, use actions to do with providing practical support for living, emphasise a commitment to each student's needs, interests and rights, and require flexibility as a condition. Whereas a program that operates within a school may emphasise successful learning (outcomes), providing significant support for learning (actions), recognition that each young person has strengths (principle) and systemic support (conditions). Both examples are valued and appropriate for the context, student cohort and staff expertise.

In addition, each of these aspects can be operationalised in many different ways. For example, creating meaningful learning opportunities (action) may entail finding a common interest for young people (such as sport, construction or art) or offering a wide diversity of options for individual students. Taking responsibility for an empowering and transformative education (principle) may focus on the provision of a credential that has the capacity to improve young people's futures or on the development of young people's independence and ability to make their own decisions.

Rather than mandating exactly what a flexible learning program should look like, the Framework for Quality Flexible Learning Programs enables programs to apply it to their own specific context and purposes. Successful flexible learning provision does not require each aspect to be implemented in a particular way. However, the FQFLP does encourage thoughtful consideration by program staff of how each dimension, and each aspect within a dimension, should be given shape within their own program.

A Final Observation

The findings presented here have explained the ways in which certain actions, principles and conditions support flexible learning programs to achieve valuable outcomes for young people and for the wider community. As a final observation, it is useful to consider the counterfactual – in other words, what outcomes would be achieved if there had not been a flexible learning program available? Powerful evidence about the barriers these young people experience (in life and in previous schools) indicates that it is unlikely

these benefits would have accrued without their flexible learning program. This is confirmed by young people themselves:

> *I wouldn't have gone anywhere if it wasn't for this place. I'm not even kidding, I wouldn't have finished school. I wouldn't have continued on to do further study. I would not have half the stuff I have in my life.* (Jenna, graduate, WAVE)

> *If it wasn't for the Youth Resource [the ESU] I probably wouldn't be in the job I'm doing today and I probably wouldn't have passed my TAFE course.* (Gareth, graduate, St Luke's ESU)
> *I had been to three high schools before coming to YOYO, I was depressed and lost all hope... now I have a chance to be a success.* (student, YOYO, vignette)

> *Our past is our past and because of our past most of the mainstream schools won't take us and SKYS is the only one that has taken me for the past two years and I find that pretty good. I asked so many mainstream schools to take me because I just want to finish my Year 12.* (Kayla, student, SKYS)

> *Teachers and staff are there step by step and helping you achieve what you want to achieve and helping you get where you want.* (Tara, graduate, TFLC)

> *Having this [HOL] one day a week means I can make it through school for the rest of the week.* (Year 8 student, Hands on Learning McClelland College, vignette)

> *Beacon gives us all the opportunities. They provide us with places to go. […] If we didn't have the Beacon Foundation, we probably would not have ended up going to those sort of places, or getting people to come to school to talk to us.* (Carl, student, Beacon at Cressy)

> *I know of a lot of kids that are really successful that have come through this school and I'm sure it's because of this school, 100 per cent is because of this school.* (Sophie, graduate, Key College)

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS 5

This chapter sums up the main findings from *Putting the Jigsaw Together* through seven core issues:

1. A flexible learning sector
2. Financial and social returns on investment
3. Overall coherence and alignment
4. Evidence for success
5. Young people's input and strengths
6. Staff as the greatest asset
7. Showcases for innovation

Each theme is followed by relevant implications for various stakeholders – such as flexible learning programs (FLPs), mainstream schooling, government, business and philanthropic organisations – as well as for further research. Appendix V collates the implications separately for each stakeholder.

5.1 A Flexible Learning Sector

The number of flexible learning programs (over 900 nationally) and the number of students they educate (over 70,000 per year) is substantial. Moreover, despite diversity in their structure, curriculum, and student populations, FLPs share a core mission: to enable young people for whom schooling previously has not worked well, to learn and to achieve valued credentials, improved wellbeing, and enhanced life opportunities. Together, the considerable size and shared mission are evidence for a substantial and significant flexible learning sector that deserves recognition through better-targeted policy, research and community support, including appropriate and secure funding and long-term commitment (also see 5.2).

"The number of programs and their shared mission are evidence for a significant flexible learning sector."

A distinctive collective identity and a discrete and better focused network will bring significant shared benefits to flexible learning programs. Working more closely together, like other sectors, FLPs can ensure that professional development opportunities are more directly suitable for their student clientele and various community contexts, and thus more applicable for supporting learning and teaching outcomes. Informal learning from each other is also supported through a sector-based network, giving FLP staff access to colleagues who understand their work and can share relevant insights; for example, about a useful curriculum resource or practical support strategy for students. Since no single program will suit every young person seeking more flexible learning than they have experienced in mainstream classrooms, a sector-like network allows programs to refer a potential student to another program that may work better for that particular young person, thus preventing anyone falling through the gap. Finally, in taking shape as a recognised sector, FLPs have more clout to advocate on behalf of such programs and of their students.

Implications

For flexible learning programs:

- To collaborate formally and informally through joining / establishing a local, state or national network with other flexible learning programs.
- To extend collaboration opportunities to other flexible learning programs within geographic proximity or with a similar vision, if already part of a specific umbrella organisation or network.
- To undertake more active ownership of information about their program as part of the database on the Dusseldorp Forum website, ensuring that it is up to date and accurate, in order to facilitate flexible learning programs nation-wide to learn about and from each other, and to build stronger or new networks to share knowledge and experience, and to celebrate successes.

For governments (local councils, state / territory governments), and for government and non-government education system authorities, and for local, state and national youth representative bodies, and for philanthropic organisations:

- To support the development of local and state networks of flexible learning programs, for example, through facilitating staff from different programs to meet, supporting communication among programs, and providing recognition of the status of a network.

For further research:

- To update the current database of programs, and to extend it to include programs that were outside the initial scope, for example, for younger cohorts of students.
- To further analyse the geographic spread of access to flexible learning programs in relation to student and community needs, especially in regional and rural areas.
- Analyse the ways in which various local, state and national flexible learning umbrella organisations and networks work, and the challenges and benefits of these networks and connections.

5.2 Financial and Social Returns on Investment

Flexible learning programs generate substantial benefits for individual young people as well as for their communities and broader Australian social and economic imperatives. Is it reasonable to ask what outcomes would have been achieved if there had not been an FLP available to those 70,000+ students each year? There is overwhelming evidence that most students previously had experienced a lack of success and support in education, often in several schools and over several years.

"Without the 900+ flexible learning programs there would be a substantial individual and societal cost and loss."

In Social Return on Investment (SROI) terms, it is unlikely the benefits generated for young people and society would have accrued without access to a flexible learning program (whether in a mainstream school or TAFE, or as a separate program). Without those 900 FLPs there would be a substantial individual and societal cost and loss, due to reduced earnings and productivity as well as increased unemployment, health, crime and welfare costs. In addition, there would be human and social loss to our nation through diminished social cohesion and reduced civic, social and democratic awareness, commitment and engagement.

In order to ensure that young people's life circumstances do not inhibit their opportunity to succeed, flexible learning programs provide a wide range of practical supports. This includes support with housing, transport, legal issues, health, and childcare. Most FLPs also provide free learning materials, meals, and excursions and do not charge any fees. Finally, low student-staff ratios are a key strategy. These provisions are all essential for generating the social and economic benefits for young people and society outlined above. They rely on productive partnerships with business, social and health agencies, and local government for expertise, referrals, and material resources. Moreover, they require adequate levels of funding that are secure, so that FLPs can count on the funding on an ongoing basis. A snapshot census of enrolments tends to be a poor indicator of the number of young people served by, and the financial requirements of, an FLP. Long term commitment to supporting existing successful FLPs is more cost-effective than sequences of short-term pilot programs and one-off tenders.

"Long term commitment to supporting existing successful flexible learning programs is more cost-effective than sequences of short-term pilot programs and one-off tenders."

Implications

For governments (local councils, state / territory governments, federal government), and for business, and for philanthropic organisations:

- To provide adequate and secure funding for flexible learning programs, because this pays dividends economically and socially, both for young people and for society.
- To provide expertise, referrals, and resources to enable flexible learning programs to offer practical supports to young people.
- To build productive, collaborative and long term partnerships with flexible learning programs in order to support their sustainability.

For flexible learning programs:

- To build productive, collaborative and long term partnerships with business, social and health agencies, and local government.
- To keep clear accounts of the real cost of providing a sound education to their students.

For further research:

- To collect nationally consistent data on the amount, sources and security of funding for, and cost of, various types of flexible learning programs.
- To generate further national data on the cost of not offering flexible learning programs and the economic and social benefits of young people raising their educational attainment through flexible learning programs.

5.3 Overall Coherence and Alignment

The Framework of Quality Flexible Learning Programs (FQFLP) is of relevance for all programs that aim to enable young people (especially those who have experienced marginalisation and disadvantage) to engage successfully with learning and attain valuable educational credentials. All FLPs engage in specific actions, informed by their explicit or implicit principles, aimed at achieving valued outcomes, and enabled (or constrained) by certain conditions. The diversity among FLPs (for example, due to their structure, location, or student population) means that programs may place different weightings on the aspects listed under valued outcomes, actions, principles and conditions in the FQFLP. Moreover, each of these aspects can be operationalised in many different ways. This is illustrated through the detailed case study reports (published separately) of eight specific sites across Australia (see Appendix I).

Of central importance is that within each FLP there is overall coherence – that is, there is alignment between the outcomes that are valued, the actions taken, and the principles that provide the foundation for the program. This need for alignment is also signalled by the enabling condition of having a shared vision. When all staff are 'on the same page' the program is more likely to successfully achieve the outcomes it is aiming for. A shared vision is supported by opportunities for carrying out ongoing reflection.

> **"Of central importance is alignment within each flexible learning program between the outcomes that are valued, the actions taken, and the principles that underpin the program."**

Implications

For flexible learning programs:

- To spend time to collaboratively reflect and agree on the vision and aims of the program, and the actions to be taken to achieve those aims.
- To explicitly work with newly appointed staff to maintain the overall coherence of the program and also to gain ideas for innovation and renewal.

For government and non-government education system authorities, and for philanthropic organisations:

- To support flexible learning programs to seek improved coherence, both through expert advice and though financial support, for taking the time required to engage in reflection.

For further research:

- To evaluate flexible learning programs in terms of coherence and alignment of their actions, principles and outcomes.
- To test the FQFLP in other flexible learning programs in Australia and internationally.
- To explore ways in which a shared vision gets enacted in programs, especially given the difficulties of developing a shared vision under conditions of insecurity and high workload.

5.4 Evidence for Success

Phase 2 and 3 of the research demonstrated the valuable outcomes achieved by flexible learning programs. However, it is not enough for program staff to know the program is successful – lasting and more powerful outcomes are possible when programs can demonstrate their success to outsiders. The research findings also highlight how there is variation in the depth and breadth of evidence that programs are able to provide for their successes. FLPs that have invested in external, independent evaluations were best placed to provide a convincing narrative about their work being productive and their outcomes being successful. Most programs do routinely collect evidence that could be used more effectively to showcase their outcomes – and to know where outcomes are not being achieved at the level expected in order to continuously improve.

"Lasting and more powerful outcomes are possible when programs can demonstrate their success to outsiders."

Investing in evaluative work means a flexible learning program can direct attention to those outcomes that are of highest importance for its vision and students. Providing evidence for outcomes empowers a FLP to address the conditions that enable it to continue its work, such as garnering systemic support and resources, reinforcing its shared vision, and strategically developing productive partnerships. Conducting evaluations collaboratively with other FLPs (also see 5.1 above), sharing data, and perhaps benchmarking with similar programs, can further enhance insights into what works, provide more evidence for success, and strengthen advocacy for further enhancements and innovations.

Implications

For flexible learning programs:

- To spend time to gather evidence for outcomes, and to collate that evidence into a convincing argument for success.
- To use such evidence to engage in improvements, where outcomes are less promising than expected.
- To engage an external organisation to conduct an independent evaluation, if feasible.

For governments (local councils, state / territory governments, federal government), and for business, and for philanthropic organisations:

- To provide expert advice on how to gather useful data for continuous improvement and for demonstrating successes.
- To recognise that for different flexible learning programs, different specific outcomes and different measures of outcomes are of most relevance and importance.
- To provide better targeted and supplementary funding for flexible learning programs to obtain an independent evaluation.

For further research:

- To conduct commissioned evaluation of flexible learning programs.
- To support flexible learning programs to strategically collect and use their own data and evidence for outcomes.

- To develop appropriate measures and evaluation strategies for gaining improved data in relation to outcomes and success.
- To gather longitudinal data tracking post-program destinations and experiences.

5.5 Young People's Input and Strengths

Young people are capable of having a say and actively contributing to the direction of their learning and life. Student feedback is a valuable source for program reflection and renewal. The research in Phase 3 found that young people (students and graduates) demonstrate great insight in what they want and need to learn as well as how this is best accomplished. Successful and meaningful learning occurs in flexible learning programs when appropriate insights from students are used to enhance the design of the curriculum to be even more purposeful, relevant and interesting. Deeper and more lasting learning occurs when curriculum is tailored to the student population, through personal learning plans or shared interests. Project-based learning and explicit links with students' lives are especially useful. Relevance is a key to engagement with learning.

"Deeper and more lasting learning occurs when curriculum is tailored to the student population, through personal learning plans or shared interests. Project-based learning and explicit links with students' lives are especially useful."

A common feature across FLPs in Phase 2 and 3 was that they recognise that each person has strengths, which further enables young people to be successful. In addition, facilitating young people to recognise their strengths themselves, and to take ownership of their learning, rather than staff doing everything for young people, is a feature of FLPs that supports the development of problem-solving skills and independence as long-lasting benefits to graduates of the program.

Implications

For flexible learning programs, and for mainstream schools:

- To recognise that every young person has strengths and interests, and to draw on these to develop successful and meaningful learning experiences.
- To invite and welcome young people's input in what and how to learn.
- To facilitate young people taking ownership of their learning experiences.
- To use young people's interests and life experiences to drive curriculum and learning.
- To share engaging and meaningful curriculum activities with other schools and flexible learning programs.

For government and non-government education system authorities:

- To allow flexibility in accreditation and syllabus requirements, in order to enable schools and flexible learning programs to adapt curriculum and pedagogy to respond to their students' needs and interests.

For business:

- To support access to meaningful and relevant learning, for example, by taking part in talks and expositions in flexible learning programs and by offering work experience opportunities.

For local, state and national youth representative bodies, and for philanthropic organisations:

- To bring students from flexible learning programs on board on advisory committees and representative councils.
- To offer leadership and networking opportunities to students from flexible learning programs.

For further research:

- To engage young people through participatory research methods.
- To explore the contributions flexible learning programs make to expanding young people's democratic citizenship.
- To investigate flexible learning programs that are actively chosen by young people as their preferred education provider.

5.6 Staff as the Greatest Asset

The high quality of staff lies at the heart of the success of flexible learning programs. Staff build the strong relationships that are the foundation of young people's engagement with learning in FLPs. Their expertise is essential for devising relevant and meaningful activities and mapping these onto formal curriculum requirements; for providing a wide range of learning and practical supports; and for fostering connections with families, business, other education providers, and local agencies. Employing a diversity of staff – including generalist and specialist teachers, youth workers, tradespeople and/or Indigenous workers – is a useful strategy commonly used in FLPs in Phase 2 and 3 for ensuring breadth of expertise.

"Staff build the strong relationships that are the foundation of young people's engagement with learning in flexible learning programs."

Staff are the most valuable asset of FLPs. The necessity of being innovative and the support required for young people, however, mean staff work long hours for (usually) lower pay and less secure employment conditions than in mainstream settings. Frequent staff turnover is costly in terms of the funding and time required for recruitment and induction, as well as due to loss of expertise and relationships built up over time. To keep staff on board and maintain their high level of commitment, despite challenging work conditions, requires recognition and appreciation for their work, investment in formal and informal professional learning, a collegial environment, and support from leadership in the FLP and governing organisations. In practical terms, this may involve providing suitable spaces for working with young people and with colleagues, equipment and materials, time for debriefing, availability of counselling, access to external professional learning opportunities, and autonomy to apply their expertise and be innovative.

Implications

For flexible learning programs:

- To recognise staff as their greatest asset, and invest time and effort in maintaining staff commitment and building a collegial culture.
- To create access to informal (collegial) and formal supports and professional learning.
- To collaborate with similar flexible learning programs to offer shared professional learning opportunities.

For government and non-government education system authorities:

- To allow flexibility in accreditation and syllabus requirements, in order to offer freedom for staff to act on their expertise for devising learning activities, providing support to students and building community links.
- To facilitate the best possible working conditions, in terms of equipment, spaces, workload, and contracts.
- To offer support for, and recognition of, the work of staff.

For governments (local councils, state / territory governments, federal government), and for business, and for philanthropic organisations:

- To facilitate access to relevant external professional learning opportunities.
- To recognise outstanding staff contributions to students, flexible learning programs and the community, through awards and prizes.

For further research:

- To investigate the professional learning available for staff in flexible learning programs, and analyse the professional learning needs of staff and the most appropriate ways of meeting these needs.
- To examine the ways in which the expertise of staff from different professional backgrounds (such as teaching, youth work and trades) contributes to successful learning outcomes.
- To investigate the working conditions in flexible learning programs and their impact on attracting and retaining high quality staff.
- To study flexible learning programs with low staff turnover and high staff satisfaction in order to develop advice for other flexible learning programs.

5.7 Showcases of Innovation

Ongoing reflection and innovation is a hallmark of flexible learning programs. Moreover, FLPs demonstrate success – in terms of learning, gaining qualifications, personal development and community contributions – with students who frequently had been given up on, or perceived as 'too hard', in mainstream settings. The ways in which FLPs work, and the actions they take to achieve these successes, can serve to inform change in mainstream education. This is already occurring, especially through FLPs that operate within schools, or when the FLP is an annex to a mainstream school. Proximity between an FLP and mainstream setting makes it easier to perceive successes, share ideas, and offer inspiration. The database on the Dusseldorp Forum website enables mainstream schools to find nearby FLPs for such collaboration.

FLPs often are able to be innovative due to their smaller size and mandate to offer different curriculum and pedagogical approaches. Moreover, staff in these programs have a willingness, indeed an obligation, to change default schooling practices in order to support their students' learning and achievement. The innovations that make schooling work better for marginalised students in FLPs can improve schooling for many students in mainstream schools as well.

"The ways in which flexible learning programs work, and the actions they take to achieve their successes, can serve to inform change in mainstream education."

This could reduce the necessity for young people to transfer from a mainstream to a flexible setting. This does not mean that everything FLPs do is applicable to mainstream settings, or that all schools should become like FLPs. Rather, the flexible learning sector highlights the benefit of diversity, by tailoring education to the particular interests, capacities and experiences of the students an FLP or school serves. Recognition of the success and innovation of FLPs can facilitate system-wide improvements to enhance the educational experiences and attainments for all young Australians.

Implications

For flexible learning programs:

- To collaborate with mainstream school settings to offer insights into what works for creating successful learning for flexible learning program students and share ideas about how this can inform change and innovation in mainstream classes and schools.

For mainstream schools, and for government and non-government education system authorities:

- To recognise flexible learning programs as incubators of change and showcases of innovation.
- To seek out flexible learning programs to learn about ways of supporting the learning of marginalised young people.

For philanthropic organisations:

- To facilitate flexible learning programs to develop and run professional learning opportunities for staff in mainstream school settings.
- To fund exemplars of innovation to make them sustainable and to act as champions for this emerging and vital sector in Australian education and training.

For further research:

- To investigate instances where mainstream schools have worked productively with flexible learning programs in order to achieve innovation and improved learning for disadvantaged students within the mainstream setting.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I

Table of vignette and case study sites

Program names in blue are sites that were included both for the short vignette and for the detailed case study.

Program Name	Location & State	Regional or Metropolitan	Structure Type	Number of students (year of data)	Qualifications Offered	Vignette URL
Bankstown Senior College	Bankstown, NSW	Metro	Separate	435 (2011)	NSW Higher School Certificate (HSC); Cert II in General and Vocational Education; Cert II in Spoken and Written English	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/bankstown-senior-college/
Beacon Program at Cressy High School	Cressy, TAS	Regional	Within school	388 (2013)	Tasmanian Year 10 Certificate of Education; various VET Certificates	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/beacon-program-cressy-district-high-school-tas/
Bendigo NETschool	Bendigo, VIC	Regional	Separate	Up to 70 students at a time (2013)	Commence study on the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and/or VET certificates.	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/bendigo-senior-secondary-college-netschool/
Blacktown Youth College	Bidwell; Broken Hill; Lawson, NSW	Metro and Regional	Separate	130 at Bidwell Campus (2013)	Record of School Achievement Certificate (ROSA); White Card (construction)	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/blacktown-youth-college/
Brotherhood of St Laurence Frankston High St Centre CVCAL	Frankston, VIC	Metro	Separate	67 (2012)	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL - Foundation, Intermediate, Senior)	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/bsl-frankston-high-street-centre/
Canberra College Cares (CCCares)	Stirling, ACT	Metro	Separate	152 (February 2013)	ACT Year 12 Certificate; Cert II in Business, Hairdressing and Beauty Services; Cert III: Hospitality, Children's Services and Business Admin; White Card (construction); Senior First Aid Certificate.	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/canberra-college-cares-cccares/
EREA Youth+ Townsville Flexible Learning Centre	Townsville, QLD	Regional	Separate	107 (2012)	Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE); Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA); nationally accredited Certificate I-III vocational courses	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/erea-youth-townsville-flexible-learning-centre/
Hands on Learning McClelland College	Frankston, VIC	Metro	Within school	50 (2013)	Forms part of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) or the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL)	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/hands-learning-mcclelland-college/
Hunter Institute – Skills for Tomorrow	Blue Haven, NSW	Regional	Within TAFE	50 students over 4 cohorts (2012-2013)	Cert II in Skills for Work and Training or Community Services; units towards Cert III Certificates for Children's Services, Health Services and Hospitality	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/skills-tomorrow/
Illawarra Senior College	Port Kembla, NSW	Regional	Separate	412 (2013)	Higher School Certificate (HSC); VET Cert II courses	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/illawarra-senior-college/
Macleay Vocational College	Kempsey, NSW	Regional	Separate	90 (2013)	Higher School Certificate (HSC); Record of School Achievement (ROSA); Human Services Certificate II-III	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/macleay-vocational-college/
Northern Sydney Institute – Youth Options Youth Outcomes (YOYO)	Hornsby, NSW	Metro	Within TAFE	100 (2012)	Record of School Achievement (ROSA)	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/northern-sydney-institute-tafe-youth-options-youth-outcomes-yoyo/

Program Name	Location & State	Regional or Metropolitan	Structure Type	Number of students (year of data)	Qualifications Offered	Vignette URL
The Pavilion School	Preston, VIC	Metro	Separate	195 across 2 campuses (2013)	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL); First Aid Certificate	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/the-pavilion-school/ (TBC)
SEDA Sports Development Program Darwin	Brinkin, NT	Metro	Separate	22 (2013)	Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET); Cert II, III and/or IV in Sport and Recreation; Level 2 First Aid; Level 1-2 Coaching Accreditations; Umpiring/Refereeing Certification	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/seda-sports-development-program-darwin/
St Kilda Youth Services SKYS Education: 2Faze and Young Parents	Port Melbourne, VIC	Metro	Separate	90 (2013)	Combines the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL – Foundation, Intermediate or Senior), VET Certificate and the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA)	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/st-kilda-youth-services-skys-education-2faze-young-parents/
St Luke's Educational Services Unit	Bendigo, VIC	Regional	Separate	45 (2012)	Passes in relevant high school year level; VET Certificates	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/st-lukes-educational-services-unit/
Tenison Woods College Flexible Learning Program	Mount Gambier, SA	Regional	Within school	119 (2011)	Combines TAFE, employment and volunteers studies with the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE)	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/tenison-woods-college-flexible-learning-program/
The John Berne School	Lewisham, NSW	Metro	Separate	53 (2012)	Record of School Achievement (ROSA)	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/john-berne-school/
U-Turn Program Moonah	Moonah, TAS	Metro	Separate	80 (2012)	Introduction to Automotive and Mechanical fields, post-program support for Certificate II in Automotive	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/u-turn-program-moonah/
Warriappendi School	Marleston, SA	Metro	Separate	45 (2013)	South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE); Certificate I-III in Business, Children's Services, Community Services, Construction, Horticulture, Hospitality, Automotive and Animal Studies; short training courses in Learner License, White Card (construction), Metal Fabrication, Tyre Fitting, Port Power Health Program, Labs For Life.	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/warriappendi-school/
Western Bulldogs Fresh Program	Footscray, VIC	Metro	Separate	45 (2013)	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL)	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/western-bulldogs-fresh-program/
Wirreanda Adaptive Vocational Education (WAVE)	Morphett Vale, SA	Metro	Within school	130 (2013)	South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE); Certificate I-IV courses such as Hospitality, Hair and Beauty, Aged Care, Business Administration; Doorways 2 Construction; The Duke of Edinburgh Award.	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/wirreanda-adaptive-vocational-education-wave/
Youth Futures WA COMET	Clarkson, WA	Metro	Separate	Up to 70 students per year (2013)	Cert I, II and III in General Education (CGEA); Cert I in Information Technology and Digital Media; other individually relevant VET courses.	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/youth-futures-wa-comet (TBC)
Youth Off The Streets Key College	Redfern, NSW	Metro	Separate	27 (2012)	Higher School Certificate (HSC); Record of School Achievement (ROSA); TAFE Certificate of Attainment; White Card (construction); Senior First Aid Certificate	http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/case-studies/youth-streets-key-college/

Appendix II

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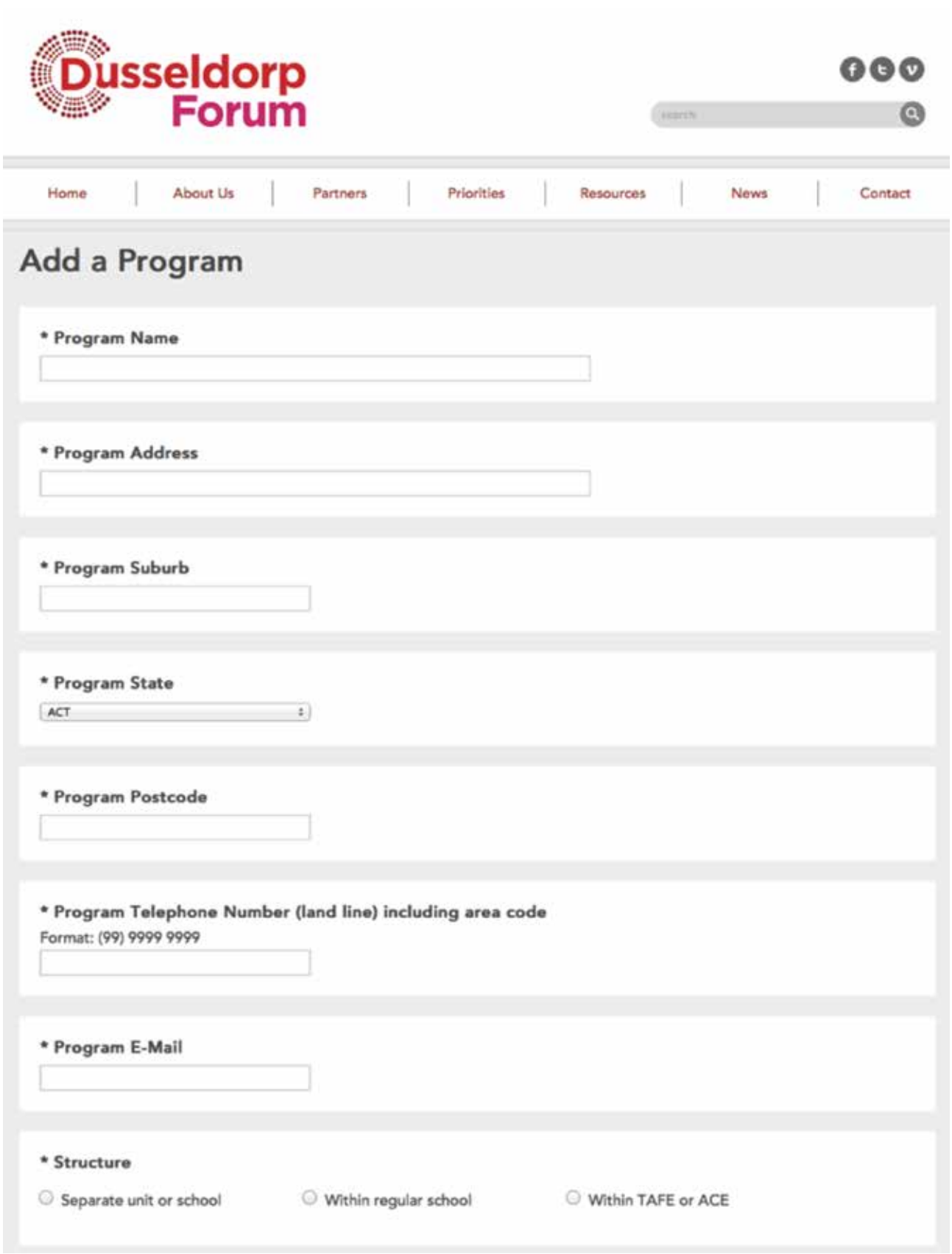
Appendix III

Database questions on the Dusseldorp Forum website



*** Credential Levels**

- ☐ Cert I / II
- ☐ Cert III / IV
- ☐ Statement of Attainment
- ☐ Year 10 or equivalent (CGEA etc)
- ☐ Year 11
- ☐ Year 12 or equivalent (TPC etc)
- ☐ Year 9

*** Duration**

- ☐ 20 weeks or less
- ☐ 21-40 weeks
- ☐ Full year or more

*** Time In Program**

- ☐ Equal to 2-3 day per week
- ☐ Equal to 4-5 day per week
- ☐ less than or equal to 1 day per week

*** Age Group**

- ☐ 11-14
- ☐ 15-19
- ☐ 20+

*** Gender**

- ○ Male Only
- ○ Female Only
- ○ Both

These questions are optional and if you choose to answer them, they will be publicly displayed on the website with your profile. It is helpful if you provide as much information as possible for those searching for programs.

Program Description and Purpose

Please indicate which activities are conducted as part of the program (You may choose more than one)

- ☐ Computer / IT skills / Digital / Media Skills
- ☐ Creative
- ☐ Homework Support
- ☐ Job seeking
- ☐ Life skills
- ☐ Literacy/numeracy activities
- ☐ Mentoring
- ☐ Non accredited vocational training
- ☐ Outdoor Education /Environmental
- ☐ Parenting
- ☐ Cultural Activities
- ☐ Formal/accredited VET
- ☐ Other

Referral

- ☐ Formal referral
- ☐ Self / informal

Program Target Group

- ☐ At risk of non-completion
- ☐ Caring for Parent/s
- ☐ Disability/illness
- ☐ Early school leaver
- ☐ Homeless
- ☐ Indigenous Skills
- ☐ Juvenile Justice
- ☐ Mental health
- ☐ New migrants
- ☐ Non English Speaking Background (NESB/LOTE/CALD)
- ☐ Out of home care
- ☐ Pregnant/Parenting
- ☐ Refugee
- ☐ Suspended/expelled from school
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Other

Program Destinations

- ☐ Basic Further Study (up to Year 12 / Cert II)
- ☐ Employment / Labour Market
- ☐ Further Study Bachelor Degree (University)
- ☐ Further Study Cert III / IV / Diploma (TAFE / RTO)

Program Logo

File formats allowed jpg and gif; File Size cannot exceed 5MB

Choose File no file selected

Program Photos (Optional)

File formats allowed jpg and gif; File Size cannot exceed 5MB

Choose File no file selected Choose File no file selected Choose File no file selected

Choose File no file selected

Video Embed (Optional)

Sample from Youtube using Share tab: <iframe width="560" height="315" src="http://www.youtube.com/embed/5ypwtqjGq48" frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>

Program Website Address

Use comma (,) to seperate more than one website URL ex: http://www.google.com, http://www.dsf.org.au

These questions are optional and are for assisting us to understand your program and the information you enter will not be publicly available.

Program Contact Person

Contact Person's Mobile Phone Number

Contact Person's E-Mail

Does program operate across multiple locations?

If so - How many locations?
Note - since each location is added separately to the map, we encourage you to enter data separately for each program location.

Number of students enrolled at the commencement of each program?

How many students enrolled over the course of a year? (For example if the program takes 10 students each term, then 40 students would be enrolled over a year)

Do you have waiting list for enrollment?

Yes

If yes, how many on the waiting list?

Is your program part of a local, state or national network?

- Yes, Local
- Yes, State
- Yes, National
- No

Add Program

Appendix IV

Example of a complete vignette

Hands on Learning McClelland College

Belar Avenue, Frankston, VIC, 3199

Established in 1999, Hands On Learning (HOL) is a one-day a week in-school engagement program that supports middle years students at risk of disengaging from school. HOL operated in 29 schools in Victoria in 2013, with most schools funding this from within their existing budgets. Approximately 660 students took part in HOL in Victorian Schools in 2013. Students work in small groups on *creative building projects* that help students *develop confidence* and *a sense of personal achievement*. HOL was implemented at McClelland Secondary College (McCC) in 2009, running four days per week, with four different cohorts of students in 2013. Located in Frankston, McCC is a government funded school with 862 students (450 male, 412 female, 3% Indigenous students, 12% language background other than English in 2012) offering VCE and VCAL programs. Students involved in HOL have typically experienced barriers to schooling due to: numeracy/literacy issues, risk taking and disruptive behaviour, health/mental health issues, abuse and home violence, and alcohol/drug misuse. In 2013, 50 students (38 male and 12 female) took part in HOL at McCC.

How this program works

HOL aims to *build self-esteem, confidence* and a *culture of success* to help students *at risk* of becoming early school leavers *to achieve* and *get the most out of school.* HOL is a *targeted early intervention* program working with small groups of students from across Years 7-10. Students attend HOL voluntarily. Ten students work with two adults (who are Education Support Staff but referred to as *artisan-teachers*), one day a week, in an applied learning environment on construction projects that benefit the school and local community. All HOL teams begin by building and fitting out a hut that then serves as their base. At McCC further projects include: a chicken coop for the science faculty, sets for the annual school production, work on the Frankston Community Garden and a renovation of the Balnarring foreshore rotunda. By engaging, as a team, in real and relevant projects, students develop *intra and inter-personal* skills*, self-management, basic literacy and numeracy,* and *school attachment.* Parental involvement is encouraged through family pizza nights and volunteer opportunities e.g. in the vegetable garden and patchwork quilt making.

Core to HOL is the formation of *positive, productive* and *meaningful relationships* based on *trust* and *respect* with other students and adult role models. This is facilitated by using a 'first name basis' for staff and not wearing school uniform on HOL days. Students are well-supported within a *safe* and *friendly environment* where *healthy life skills* are modeled in a practical way, for example by preparing and eating lunch together. Students are helped to set goals, given opportunities to lead, explore their own interests, and the space to make and learn from their mistakes. All HOL students have a *focus plan,* which is used to help students identify and develop key social skills and behaviours with the support of their teachers and peers. HOL is an integral part of McCC's whole school approach of supporting students to discover and develop their *passions* and *talents* through *flexible learning environments* and *personalised learning programs*. The HOL and school staff work with each other to connect student experiences in HOL to their learning and development during their other 4 days at school. The HOL team at MCSC also support students in the program to do their VCAL placements at HOL.

Outcomes

Positive outcomes are of three types: explicitly related to the HOL program at McCC; overall HOL program outcomes that are likely to be relevant to McCC; and overall McCC outcomes to which the HOL activities are likely to have contributed:

Program wide achievements: Across all schools, HOL delivers *net positive socioeconomic outcomes* (estimated at a $12 return to every $1 of investment in ensuring year 12 completions (DA Economics 2012) *representing a sound economic and social investment in improving the outcomes for disengaged, disadvantaged students.* Results from a HOL Literacy and Numeracy Knowledge pilot program at another school showed improvements for the 18 students involved from pre-test average scores of 52% to post-test average scores of 84% and is indicative of the impact HOL can have (2008).

Destinations and pathways: Five Year 10 McCC-HOL students, who previously wanted to leave school, successfully moved into VCAL (2010). Across HOL, 92% of students move into apprenticeships or further study and the overall HOL alumni unemployment rate is 2.2% compared to 10.8% for all Australian youth (HOL website 2013).

Engagement and participation in learning: Across HOL, students show a 54% decrease in unexplained absences; 83% decrease in behavioural detentions and have a 98% attendance rate (2013). Across HOL schools, teachers report HOL students *are more willing to attempt academic tasks that they previously could see no point in, and many have become more cooperative and less disruptive to other students* and that the *self-esteem boost* students receive through HOL *helps them perform significantly better when they return to the classroom environment for the rest of the week* (2013). A Year 8 McCC HOL student states - *having this* [HOL] *one day a week means I can make it through school for the rest of the week* (2013).

Health and well-being: Across HOL, students show a 24% increase in intra-personal and inter-personals skills; 28% increase in self-management skills (2013). Feedback from HOL students at various schools indicates HOL has positive impacts on confidence, self-esteem, behaviours, social interactions, friendships and ability to deal with bullying.

Civic/community participation: HOL students built a chicken coop for the science faculty, sets for the annual school production, worked on the Frankston Community Garden and renovated the Balnarring foreshore rotunda.

Engagement with families: HOL has increased parent engagement and positive involvement with the school through family pizza nights and parents volunteering in the vegetable garden and patchwork quilt making.

External recognition: In 2013, HOL was showcased in the academic books *The Self-Transforming School* and *Expansive Education.* HOL also features as a case study in the DEECD's 2010 paper on flexible learning options.

Why this program is successful

The founder of HOL highlights the importance of offering something different to students within the school environment that *freshens up their spirit and gives them a desire to come back in [to the classroom] and go on with school*. At McCC, the HOL team's success is attributed, in part, to their ability to be a *vital link* between 'at risk' students and the rest of the school, keeping teachers and coordinators updated on student successes, working closely with family members to keep them positively involved in the school and to ensuring that students see HOL as an integral part of their schooling, connected to the rest of their week at school - *not a bolt on external program.*

Want to know more?

http://www.learningchoices.org.au/programs/475/Hands-on-Learning-McClelland-Secondary-College.php
http://mcclellandcollege.vic.edu.au/beyond-the-classroom/hands-on-learning.html
http://www.handsonlearning.org.au

Sources of information

ACARA My School Website, McClelland Secondary College School Profile 2012 (Accessed 09.12.13)
DEECD (2010) Pathways to re-engagement through flexible learning options. DEECD Student Wellbeing Division.
Deloitte Access Economics (2012) The socio-economic benefits of investing in the prevention of early school leaving.
Hands on Learning Website (Accessed 06.12.2013), HOLA Newsletter May 2013 and DVD 2011
Hands on Learning Australia, Snapshot of Barriers impacting the delivery of Hands on Learning in Victoria, May 2010
McCarthy, E. (2011) Evaluation report of the HOLA/Anglicare Partnership at McClelland Secondary College.
McClelland College Website (Accessed 06.12.2013) and McClelland Secondary College 2012 Annual Report
McClelland College Application 2013

Please note, where possible and appropriate, we have adopted the language and terminology used by the program sources (*italic fonts*) and referred to the most recent publicly available information.

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Appendix V

Implications for Different Stakeholders

(i) Flexible learning programs

5.1 A Flexible Learning Sector

- To collaborate formally and informally through joining / establishing a local, state or national network with other flexible learning programs.
- To extend collaboration opportunities to other flexible learning programs within geographic proximity or with a similar vision, if already part of a specific umbrella organisation or network.
- To undertake more active ownership of information about their program as part of the database on the Dusseldorp Forum website, ensuring that it is up to date and accurate, in order to facilitate flexible learning programs nation-wide to learn about and from each other, and to build stronger or new networks to share knowledge and experience, and to celebrate successes.

5.2 Financial and Social Returns on Investment

- To build productive, collaborative and long term partnerships with business, social and health agencies, and local government.
- To keep clear accounts of the real cost of providing a sound education to their students.

5.3 Overall Coherence and Alignment

- To spend time to collaboratively reflect and agree on the vision and aims of the program, and the actions to be taken to achieve those aims.
- To explicitly work with newly appointed staff to maintain the overall coherence of the program and also to gain ideas for innovation and renewal.

5.4 Evidence for Success

- To spend time to gather evidence for outcomes, and to collate that evidence into a convincing argument for success.
- To use such evidence to engage in improvements, where outcomes are less promising than expected.
- To engage an external organisation to conduct an independent evaluation, if feasible.

5.5 Young People's Input and Strengths

- To recognise that every young person has strengths and interests, and to draw on these to develop successful and meaningful learning experiences.
- To invite and welcome young people's input in what and how to learn.
- To facilitate young people taking ownership of their learning experiences.
- To use young people's interests and life experiences to drive curriculum and learning.
- To share engaging and meaningful curriculum activities with other schools and flexible learning programs.

5.6 Staff as the Greatest Asset

- To recognise staff as their greatest asset, and invest time and effort in maintaining staff commitment and building a collegial culture.
- To create access to informal (collegial) and formal supports and professional learning.
- To collaborate with similar flexible learning programs to offer shared professional learning opportunities.

5.7 Showcases of Innovation

- To collaborate with mainstream school settings to offer insights into what works for creating successful learning for flexible learning program students and share ideas about how this can inform change and innovation in mainstream classes and schools.

(ii) Governments (local councils, state / territory governments, federal government)

5.1 A Flexible Learning Sector

- To support the development of local and state networks of flexible learning programs, for example, through facilitating staff from different programs to meet, supporting communication among programs, and providing recognition of the status of a network.

5.2 Financial and Social Returns on Investment

- To provide adequate and secure funding for flexible learning programs, because this pays dividends economically and socially, both for young people and for society.
- To provide expertise, referrals, and resources to enable flexible learning programs to offer practical supports to young people.
- To build productive, collaborative and long term partnerships with flexible learning programs in order to support their sustainability.

5.4 Evidence for Success

- To provide expert advice on how to gather useful data for continuous improvement and for demonstrating successes.
- To recognise that for different flexible learning programs, different specific outcomes and different measures of outcomes are of most relevance and importance.
- To provide better targeted and supplementary funding for flexible learning programs to obtain an independent evaluation.

5.6 Staff as the Greatest Asset

- To facilitate access to relevant external professional learning opportunities.
- To recognise outstanding staff contributions to students, flexible learning programs and the community, through awards and prizes.

(iii) Business and employers

5.2 Financial and Social Returns on Investment

- To provide adequate and secure funding for flexible learning programs, because this pays dividends economically and socially, both for young people and for society.
- To provide expertise, referrals, and resources to enable flexible learning programs to offer practical supports to young people.
- To build productive, collaborative and long term partnerships with flexible learning programs in order to support their sustainability.

5.4 Evidence for Success

- To provide expert advice on how to gather useful data for continuous improvement and for demonstrating successes.
- To recognise that for different flexible learning programs, different specific outcomes and different measures of outcomes are of most relevance and importance.
- To provide better targeted and supplementary funding for flexible learning programs to obtain an independent evaluation.

5.5 Young People's Input and Strengths

- To support access to meaningful and relevant learning, for example, by taking part in talks and expositions in flexible learning programs and by offering work experience opportunities.

5.6 Staff as the Greatest Asset

- To facilitate access to relevant external professional learning opportunities.
- To recognise outstanding staff contributions to students, flexible learning programs and the community, through awards and prizes.

(iv) Philanthropic organisations

5.1 A Flexible Learning Sector

- To support the development of local and state networks of flexible learning programs, for example, through facilitating staff from different programs to meet, supporting communication among programs, and providing recognition of the status of a network.

5.2 Financial and Social Returns on Investment

- To provide adequate and secure funding for flexible learning programs, because this pays dividends economically and socially, both for young people and for society.
- To provide expertise, referrals, and resources to enable flexible learning programs to offer practical supports to young people.
- To build productive, collaborative and long term partnerships with flexible learning programs in order to support their sustainability.

5.3 Overall Coherence and Alignment

- To support flexible learning programs to seek improved coherence, both through expert advice and though financial support, for taking the time required to engage in reflection.

5.4 Evidence for Success

- To provide expert advice on how to gather useful data for continuous improvement and for demonstrating successes.

- To recognise that for different flexible learning programs, different specific outcomes and different measures of outcomes are of most relevance and importance.
- To provide better targeted and supplementary funding for flexible learning programs to obtain an independent evaluation.

5.5 Young People's Input and Strengths

- To bring students from flexible learning programs on board on advisory committees.
- To offer leadership and networking opportunities to students from flexible learning programs.

5.6 Staff as the Greatest Asset

- To facilitate access to relevant external professional learning opportunities.
- To recognise outstanding staff contributions to students, flexible learning programs and the community, through awards and prizes.

5.7 Showcases of Innovation

- To facilitate flexible learning programs to develop and run professional learning opportunities for staff in mainstream school settings.
- To fund exemplars of innovation to make them sustainable and to act as champions for this emerging and vital sector in Australian education and training.

(v) Youth representative bodies (local, state/territory and national)

5.1 A Flexible Learning Sector

- To support the development of local and state networks of flexible learning programs, for example, through facilitating staff from different programs to meet, supporting communication among programs, and providing recognition of the status of a network.

5.5 Young People's Input and Strengths

- To bring students from flexible learning programs on board on advisory committees and representative councils.
- To offer leadership and networking opportunities to students from flexible learning programs.

(vi) Education system authorities (government and non-government)

5.1 A Flexible Learning Sector

- To support the development of local and state networks of flexible learning programs, for example, through facilitating staff from different programs to meet, supporting communication among programs, and providing recognition of the status of a network.

5.3 Overall Coherence and Alignment

- To support flexible learning programs to seek improved coherence, both through expert advice and though financial support, for taking the time required to engage in reflection.

5.5 Young People's Input and Strengths

- To allow flexibility in accreditation and syllabus requirements, in order to enable schools and flexible learning programs to adapt curriculum and pedagogy to respond to their students' needs and interests.

5.6 Staff as the Greatest Asset

- To allow flexibility in accreditation and syllabus requirements, in order to offer freedom for staff to act on their expertise for devising learning activities, providing support to students and building community links.
- To facilitate the best possible working conditions, in terms of equipment, spaces, workload, and contracts.
- To offer support for, and recognition of, the work of staff.

5.7 Showcases of Innovation

- To recognise flexible learning programs as incubators of change and showcases of innovation.
- To seek out flexible learning programs to learn about ways of supporting the learning of marginalised young people.

(vii) Mainstream schools

5.5 Young People's Input and Strengths

- To recognise that every young person has strengths and interests, and to draw on these to develop successful and meaningful learning experiences.
- To invite and welcome young people's input in what and how to learn.
- To facilitate young people taking ownership of their learning experiences.

- To use young people's interests and life experiences to drive curriculum and learning.
- To share engaging and meaningful curriculum activities with other schools and flexible learning programs.

5.7 Showcases of Innovation

- To recognise flexible learning programs as incubators of change and showcases of innovation.
- To seek out flexible learning programs to learn about ways of supporting the learning of marginalised young

(viii) Further research

5.1 A Flexible Learning Sector

- To update the current database of programs, and to extend it to include programs that were outside the initial scope, for example, for younger cohorts of students.
- To further analyse the geographic spread of access to flexible learning programs in relation to student and community needs, especially in regional and rural areas.
- Analyse the ways in which various local, state and national flexible learning umbrella organisations and networks work, and the challenges and benefits of these networks and connections.

5.2 Financial and Social Returns on Investment

- To collect nationally consistent data on the amount, sources and security of funding for, and cost of, various types of flexible learning programs.
- To generate further national data on the cost of not offering flexible learning programs and the economic and social benefits of young people raising their educational attainment through flexible learning programs.

5.3 Overall Coherence and Alignment

- To evaluate flexible learning programs in terms of coherence and alignment of their actions, principles and outcomes.
- To test the FQFLP in other flexible learning programs in Australia and internationally.
- To explore ways in which a shared vision gets enacted in programs, especially given the difficulties of developing a shared vision under conditions of insecurity and high workload.

5.4 Evidence for Success

- To conduct commissioned evaluation of flexible learning programs.
- To support flexible learning programs to strategically collect and use their own data and evidence for outcomes.
- To develop appropriate measures and evaluation strategies for gaining improved data in relation to outcomes and success.
- To gather longitudinal data tracking post-program destinations and experiences.

5.5 Young People's Input and Strengths

- To engage young people through participatory research methods.
- To explore the contributions flexible learning programs make to expanding young people's democratic citizenship.
- To investigate flexible learning programs that are actively chosen by young people as their preferred education provider.

5.6 Staff as the Greatest Asset

- To investigate the professional learning available for staff in flexible learning programs, and analyse the professional learning needs of staff and the most appropriate ways of meeting these needs.
- To examine the ways in which the expertise of staff from different professional backgrounds (such as teaching, youth work and trades) contributes to successful learning outcomes.
- To investigate the working conditions in flexible learning programs and their impact on attracting and retaining high quality staff.
- To study flexible learning programs with low staff turnover and high staff satisfaction in order to develop advice for other flexible learning programs.

5.7 Showcases of Innovation

- To investigate instances where mainstream schools have worked productively with flexible learning programs in order to achieve innovation and improved learning for disadvantaged students within the mainstream setting.