THE RISE AND FALL OF THE KEY COMPETENCIES:

A study of education policy making with specific reference to vocational
education and training in Australia

Paul Comyn

Doctor of Philosophy

2005

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP / ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

Production Note:
Signature removed prior to publication.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND TABLES

Abstract

This study of education policy making opens a fascinating window into the contested terrain of education at the end of the 20th century, one that sheds light on the challenges that society faces in determining the purposes and responsibilities presumed of education for the future. The thesis analyses the policy trajectory of generic skills within Australian VET, and considers a range of policy contexts at the micro, meso and macro levels in order to consider the implications for our understanding of policy making. It involves a critical assessment of the development, trailing and implementation of the Key Competencies and an analysis of the emerging Employability Skills framework.

The research shows that the Key Competencies emerged as a result of various key policy drivers at the end of the 1980's, forces that continued to exert influence to varying degrees across the policy trajectory of generic skills and Australian VET from 1986-2005. Whilst industrial indifference, educational federalism and conceptual uncertainties came close to scuttling the initiative, key policy actors and supplementary funding ensured that the Key Competencies featured in one of the country's largest ever educational trials. Despite this platform, the Key Competencies were a policy initiative that came to be overlooked and bypassed, relegated to a second order priority by more pressing policy concerns and the inherent conceptual and operational difficulties they posed as a reform initiative. Whilst the emergence of Employability Skills has reinvigorated interest in generic skills, their progress to date illustrates that generic skills no longer hold the promise of being a vehicle for cross-sectoral articulation, nor the passport for entrée into high performance workplaces.

This study has illustrated how educational federalism, policy actors and policy institutions play a major role in shaping the policy process, and has suggested a new force-field model of policy making in vocational education that warrants further examination.

Introduction

The story of the Key Competencies is a complex tale, one that does more than trace the fortunes of a few individuals or tell a story of policy reform.

The Key Competencies open a fascinating window into the contested terrain of education at the end of the 20th century, one that sheds light on the challenges that society faces in determining the purposes and responsibilities presumed of education for the future.

My association with Key Competencies arose from the time when I was employed by the New South Wales State training agency as a project manager responsible for the industry training component of its Key Competencies program. From that point, I became interested in how generic skills policies and practices evolved in Australia's vocational education and training system, and it was that interest that led me to undertake this research.

This thesis therefore, is a case study of the introduction of generic skills to Australian VET, one that provides an opportunity to analyse the Key Competencies policy process and consider the place of generic skills in contemporary education systems.

In doing so, the research not only weaves a fascinating tale of Australian VET policy, but goes so far as to propose a new model of VET policy in federal systems.

The Economic Foundations of Generic Skills Policy

Consistent with similar policy initiatives in other Western nations, generic skills arose in Australia at a time when changing labour markets and new industrial conditions emerged at the end of the 1970s.

'In the mid-1970s, after 30 years of rapid growth and unprecedented prosperity for the major Western economies, the prospects for continued economic growth became much less favourable. The main cause was the remarkable increase in the price of oil in 1973 and again in 1979, a fuel on which Western economies had become heavily dependent. This produced a strong burst of inflation and gave rise to an unprecedented balance of payments problem and world recession' (Cook 2004, F5).

These conditions generated new industrial imperatives as the world adapted to new industrial conditions. These new imperatives included 'increasing globalisation of national economies, rapidly changing markets, increased global competition for goods and labour, new technological innovations and the movement from mass production to flexible specialisation in the productive process' (Castells 1993: 15-18).

These significant industrial shifts led to a fundamental reappraisal of national education systems and their role in society.[1] The emergence of higher levels of structural unemployment among young people gave added urgency to the reconsideration of training and education in the post-compulsory years of schooling, and existing systems of general education were reviewed to see whether they made an adequate contribution to national goals in a rapidly changing work environment (Rowland and Young 1996).

This reappraisal occurred in many Western countries including Australia.

'Australian moves to examine the workplace relevance of school learning took place against the backdrop of a worldwide movement in the same direction, at least in most OECD countries. During the 1980s, profound changes in the economic circumstances of most industrialised societies,

---

[1] The international Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for example, generated a number of influential reports during this period including *Education and Working Life in Modern Society* (OECD 1975), *Becoming Adult in a Changing Society* (OECD 1985), *Education and Economy in a Changing Society* (OECD 1989) and *Linkages in Vocational-Technical Education and Training* (OECD 1991). These reports emphasised the changing role of education in the emerging social and economic systems of the time.

including accelerated technological change and an accompanying shift in policy sentiment, led to a universal focus on the potential contribution of education to national well-being and in particular, economic well-being.' (Rowland and Young 1996: 11).

The development of the Key Competencies in Australia was one outcome of the wide-ranging reforms that Australia's economy and systems of government experienced from the late 1980s. Amongst other goals, the reforms sought to include education within a broad micro-economic framework that reoriented education policy towards its role and significance in national economic development. This approach significantly challenged the traditional role of education, and established clearer distinctions between vocational and general education. These distinctions ensured that much of education's role was realigned from a liberal democratic value oriented purpose, to one that saw education viewed by government and industry as a policy solution to a wide range of social and economic challenges.

This new vocationalist discourse came to dominate the way in which education was viewed, and demonstrated how the discourse of training came to increasingly colonise education at the post compulsory level (Dudely and Vidovich 1995).

Under the title 'Putting General Education to Work', the report of the Mayer Committee identified the impetus for its recommendations as being the pressure on Australian workplaces to 'improve productivity and compete with world's best practice in international markets' (Mayer 1992: *viii*). These pressures were seen to create the need for new skills amongst workers, skills that required improved creativity, initiative and problem solving ability. The demand for these new skills evolved from dissatisfaction amongst employers over the ability of new employees to adapt to the workplace and make better use of new technical skills.

The Key Competencies then, were a clear demonstration of education's emergent economic dimension, as they were conceived as a device to deliver

the skills and attributes required by industry and employers in the new industrial world order.

The Key Competencies

A specific focus on employment related generic skills within contemporary Australian vocational education and training (VET) can be traced in the first instance to the committee work of Karmel in the late 1980's and later Finn, Carmichael and Mayer committees in the early 1990's. These influential committees had a major role in shaping the development of Australia's VET system from that time, and led to the introduction of Australia's Key Competencies. They also signalled new approaches to the development of policy that involved unprecedented alliances between government, industry and unions.

Over a decade from 1990-2000, the Key Competencies were a controversial element of the training reform agenda, reaching their peak during a program of field trials or pilots during the period 1994 – 1997. These trials saw $20M of pilot projects across Australia, involving work that sought to determine the most appropriate way for Key Competencies to be integrated within general and vocational education and training.

The Key Competencies Pilot Phase was one of the largest educational trialing exercises ever undertaken in Australia (Rowland and Young et al 1996).

Many project staff working within VET at the time envisaged that at the end of the pilot phase, Commonwealth, State and Territory governments would make substantive policy decisions as to how generic skills should be delivered, assessed and reported within schools, TAFEs and workplaces. Supporters within State and Commonwealth bureaucracies hoped that the Key Competencies would provide much needed structural unity between the three sectors of education, schools, TAFE and universities. Others saw in them a wide range of outcomes: as a means to introduce a system of national reporting

of school performance; to broadly improve the quality of teaching and learning; to develop enterprise and entrepreneurialism amongst students; to make school reports more meaningful and to facilitate entry into mainstream VET for those youth at risk in our community.

Whilst the Key Competencies created wide-ranging expectations, the Key Competencies agenda was not without detractors. Critics argued that the initiative represented the worst aspects of education policy, that it was based on ill-founded conceptual assumptions, and that it represented the beginning of the end for of a traditional broad-based liberal education.

Whilst the Key Competencies themselves came to mean different things to different people during their time in the policy limelight, the path of the Key Competencies policy initiative provides insights into the nature of policy making and the way that policy is constructed by the institutions, policy actors and policy system that is involved. The research also shows that the Key Competencies policy process provides new perspectives on policy making within a federal system.

Since their inception, the Key Competencies have been interpreted and reinterpreted through the various communities of practice within Australian VET.

Despite this, during the years since the trial projects were completed, there has been only limited evidence of change at a systemic level, with many of the original plans for the Key Competencies failing to be realised. There is however, evidence of some change amongst the States, with Tasmania and Queensland in particular adopting some aspects of the original concept. Overall however, there is a fragmented and diverse picture of implementation.

This research outlines this fragmented response and considers it in the light of ongoing calls for the development of Employability Skills, the new version of generic skills that replaced the Key Competencies in 2001.

Aims of the Research

Working on the Key Competency trials led me, like others, to see value within the Key Competencies proposal that was piloted during 1994 - 1997. School and VET sector professionals across the country were involved in varying ways through 75 pilot projects, and the research shows that they created a small cadre of committed activists who built on these experiences and continued to champion the Key Competencies in varying ways.

My own experience led to disillusionment about why the Key Competencies were abandoned once the trials were over. In effect, as suggested by a senior project manager for the Commonwealth government, 'there was a lot of good work and everyone got really excited, but then it ended and everyone went home' (APMA42). From 1997 onwards I became interested in why there appeared to be limited impact from the initiative, how $20M of public money came to be spent without more explicit outcomes in both policy and practice. Having completed the research however, it is clear that there were substantive outcomes in policy and practice and that these outcomes might also provide new insights into how education policy operates within a federal system.

The initial aim of the research then was to answer the following broad questions:

- What were the outcomes of the Key Competencies initiative?
- What was the policy process that produced these outcomes? and
- What does the process and outcomes of the Key Competencies initiative tell us about current models of education policy?

Whilst these questions were refined as my thesis developed, they laid the foundation for a critical assessment of the development, trailing and implementation of the Key Competencies and an assessment of whether that policy process supports a new model for VET policy making in Australia.

Whilst characterised by Ministerial support at the outset, the trialing and implementation of the Key Competencies was also subject to the politics and challenges of Australia's federal system, where education remains the responsibility of the States despite the significant financial input of the Commonwealth.

Perhaps in recognition of their inherent value however, the Key Competencies have affected the teaching, learning and reporting of student achievement in both Australia's general and vocational education classrooms. Despite not being implemented to the extent of original intentions, the Key Competencies have also provided a solid base for the implementation of VET in schools more broadly, influenced the national goals for schooling, and provided some basis for the development of an Employability Skills agenda that continues to shape policy and practice today. In this way, the Key Competencies can be considered a necessary and important initiative that played a key role in broadening the goals of schooling and improving the pathways of students from school to the world of work.

The Research Approach

The research project was undertaken on a part time basis during 1999-2005 whilst I was employed in different roles in Australia's VET system.

The research involves a case study approach to VET policy making by using the Key Competencies as the 'case'.

It involved personal reflections on my experience of the Key Competencies project, and required the collection of information and data from a number of sources, including semi-structured interviews with policy actors, and the textual analysis of research reports, minutes, journal articles, discussion papers, submissions and policy papers.

Interviews of varying length were conducted with 60 different policy actors, with supplementary discussions and exchanges also conducted with various other individuals in the course of the research. These policy actors were, in one way or another, directly involved in the development, piloting and implementation of the Key Competencies, or the subsequent development of a broader Employability Skills agenda within Australia's VET system.

The policy actors involved included:

- school teachers, policy and program staff (independent, public, catholic);
- Technical and Further Education (TAFE) college teachers;
- TAFE policy and program staff;
- national and State representatives of industry organisations;
- policy and program staff within State and Commonwealth departments of education and training;
- policy and program staff within government agencies such as the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA);
- academics and university researchers;
- project contractors and consultants; and
- various other stakeholders.

By telling their story, these policy actors have provided a picture of why the Key Competencies have taken the policy trajectory they have.[2]

The teachers, bureaucrats, industry activists, consultants, academics and politicians interviewed during this research all had some involvement with the Key Competencies policy process. Some have passionately championed them in their work, becoming activists for their more explicit treatment and integration within mainstream programs. Others have dealt with them simply as another project within a large and increasingly complex VET system.

---

[2] The study of education policy development and implementation involves tensions between analytic frameworks that emphasise State control of policy (eg: Dale 1989) and those that emphasise micro-political agency (eg: Ball 1994). The term 'policy trajectory' (Maguire and Ball 1994) was developed to bridge the gap between these positions. It refers to the study of policy and practice at the macro, meso and micro levels.

However, the reliance on policy actors can be methodologically problematic. The direct involvement of policy actors can lead to a lack of perspective and reinterpretation in order to justify decisions made. These potential problems have been addressed however, by using transcripts of interviews and cross checking accounts with those from other actors. When combined with the other data sources referred to earlier, it provides for triangulation of evidence.

Clearly, the Key Competencies agenda encapsulates a number of significant themes that relate to quite distinct bodies of literature. The research thus draws on three identifiable literature streams, being:

- Generic Skills:
  As they relate to learning, transfer and the development of expertise; how they relate to the skill needs of high performance workplaces, and literature on international developments in generic skills eg: SCANS, Key Qualifications, Core Skills etc;

- Policy and Policy Making
  Incorporating literature on competing perspectives of policy and the policy process; literature on policy making and policy analysis; and literature on the relationship between research and policy; and

- Australian Educational Policy:
  Incorporating literature on the local effects of federalism, economic rationalism and corporate managerialism; literature on the transition from school to work, new vocationalism and competency based training; and literature on the development of the Key Competencies in Australia.

These three literatures provide the basis from which the Key Competencies initiative was analysed and assessed from a policy perspective. This led me to examine the case of the Key Competencies with an emphasis on policy texts, contexts and consequences, drawing particularly on Ball (1990, 1993, 1994), Yeatman (1990, 1998) and Taylor et al (1997), who have all applied post-

structuralist perspectives to the policy process at the level of systems, organisations and individuals.

It is worth noting here that contemporary social research has entered a period of uncertainty as a result of the qualified claims surrounding the usefulness of traditional research perspectives. Consequently, three major research perspectives have shaped my research.

One is the critical tradition, drawing on the work of the social theorists known collectively as the Frankfurt School and more recently including the work of Habermas. The second is the interpretive method, which draws on a number of research traditions including social phenomenology and Weberian social theory. Thirdly, post-modernism and discourse analysis of contemporary education and training texts has been applied in this thesis. This, and other aspects of method are more fully addressed in Chapter 3.

Why Do This Study?

This study has been conducted because the research questions and their outcomes are considered significant.

I believe the research is significant because it analysed a major educational initiative in detail, provided new insights into contemporary Australian VET policy making and generated different perspectives to current understandings of the policy process. As a result, it has developed a detailed record of the complex processes involved in contemporary education policy making, a record which is often missing from the VET sector, and in doing so, suggests a new model for education policy making in a federal system.

The development, trialing and patchwork implementation of the Key Competencies has taken place amidst ongoing change to policy and practice within Australian VET. The rise of VET in schools, shifting political priorities and other aspects of reform are concurrent developments that are also analysed as

part of the Key Competencies policy process. This analysis provides additional insights into important policy outcomes and their links to wider international developments.

These outcomes are also considered significant because of the continuing focus by policy makers and other stakeholders on the transition from school to work and the associated challenge of developing skills that best prepare students for the world of work. As the research analyses generic skills policy, it also provides further insights into the potential and future of educational approaches that seek to support the new workplace and its demands on the future.

Important Definitions

A shared understanding of two key terms is central to this thesis. They are 'vocational education and training', often noted as the acronym VET, and 'generic skills'. Both are contested terms and can suggest a range of different practices and constructs. In order to provide some coherence to their use in this thesis, a working definition of each term follows.

VET

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the history of VET in Australia. In doing so, it illustrates the different roles of vocational education through the use of varying terms including technical education, technical and further education, TAFE, vocational training and vocational education and training. Whilst these terms are to some extent related to different periods of history, the notion that there was a discrete vocational education sector is a fairly recent development, one that seems likely to be further revised as a result of the ongoing growth of VET in schools and continued adjustments to the nature and scope of vocational education and training itself.

Contemporary VET incorporates schools, TAFE colleges, private providers, workplaces and universities as sites of delivery. Maglen (1996) defines contemporary VET as:

> 'all educational and instructional experiences, be they formal or informal, pre-employment or employment related, off-the-job or on-the-job that are designed to directly enhance the skills, knowledge, competencies and capabilities of individuals, required in undertaking gainful employment, and irrespective of whether these experiences are designed and provided by schools, TAFE or higher education institutions, by private training providers or by employers in industry and commerce' (1996: 3).

This definition defines well the purpose and scope of VET activity. It is also important to note because of the tensions that surround the delivery of VET in schools and universities, and because of the historical and socio cultural demarcations that have been created around these sectors in terms of policy and practice.

Generic Skills

The term generic skills is used in this research in order to overcome the ambiguous and disparate array of terms applied to employment related skills that are general in nature.

Chapter 1 of this thesis considers the practical and conceptual dimensions of generic skills within VET.[3] It shows that the notion of generic skills itself is situated at the confluence of debates surrounding VET, skill formation and the labour market, being consistent with discourses surrounding neo liberal human capitalism. Generic skills have been conceptualised differently by different national and international organisations, variously known for example as:

- Key Competencies – Australia;

---

[3] The development of a generic skills agenda in universities and other tertiary education providers is not included in this analysis.

- Essential Skills – New Zealand;
- Necessary Skills (ie: SCANS) – USA;
- Core Skills / Key Skills – United Kingdom;
- Transferable Competencies – France;
- Key Qualifications – Germany;
- Core Competencies – Netherlands;
- Transversal Competencies – Italy; and
- Key Competencies – OECD DeSeCo Project.

The definition of generic skills used in this thesis draws on a range of sources including Mayer (1992) and Kamarainen and Cheallaigh (2000). The definition is that:

> generic skills apply to work generally rather than work in specific occupations or industries. They are the skills required to participate effectively in emerging forms of work and work organisation as they give people the capacity to manage themselves and undertake complex actions in personal and workplace contexts.

This definition includes both a public and private dimension, connecting both with the workplace and outside it. By omitting reference to the contentious issue of transferability, it also seeks to retain the potential for generic skills to improve teaching and learning when integrated in education and training programs.

Chapter 1: Australian Vocational Education and Training

Introduction

This chapter examines the development of Australia's system for vocational education and training (VET). It provides an overview of key events leading to the establishment of colleges of technical and further education (TAFE), traces the major drivers of reform that fundamentally changed the VET landscape in the 1990's, and considers the emergence of generic skills as a policy initiative.

In doing so, the chapter examines a range of VET literature, including substantive policy texts, reports, minutes of meetings by ANTA MINCO[4] and MCEETYA[5] and a growing body of critical literature on Australian and international VET. Against this backdrop, the chapter also considers in more detail the emergence of generic skills as a policy initiative in the early 1990's, and concludes by identifying initial research questions that emerge from the literature.

Background to VET

Whilst there is relatively limited research dealing with the history of technical education (Anderson 1998), it is clear that the underpinnings of contemporary VET in Australia were established during the nineteenth century, as the policies and structures relating to adult education, technical education and apprenticeships were first developed.

In its brief overview of the antecedents of VET, the Australian Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee noted that:

> 'mechanics institutes, primarily concerned with adult education, were first established in the early nineteenth century and the schools of mines,

---

[4] Australian National Training Authority Ministerial Council (ANTA MINCO).

agricultural institutes, working men's colleges and technical colleges, providing various forms of technical education were established in the later part of that century' (2000: 21).

Goozee (1993), in her comprehensive history of TAFE, notes that after the creation of a federation of Australian states in 1901, 'State technical education systems developed their own individual structures as a result of their distinct social, economic, demographic, geographic and political characteristics' (1993: 3). The work of Batrouney (1985) supports this analysis by tracing the various traditions that shaped TAFE to varying degrees in each State and territory.[6]

The history of vocational education in Australia can thus be broadly read as a history of TAFE until the reforms of the 1990's when the development of training markets and an increasing role for industry diluted TAFE's previously dominant position in VET.

Chappell (1999) notes that for the most part, technical education was 'discursively framed as an institution responsible for industrial training', quite distinct and inferior to 'the broad educational goals articulated within the discourses of school and university education' (1999: 69). However, a key driver of Australia's VET system in the nineteenth century was the English educational ideal of the liberally educated person. This ideal, as noted by Foley and Morris (1995), sought not to provide a vocational focus but to develop the 'cultured adult' (1995: 108). Marginson suggests that this was reinforced by Australia's 'utilitarian approach to education' (1993: 146), one that offered a 'fair go for all'. However, by the early twentieth century, a 'liberal meritocratic settlement' (Taylor et al 1997: 102) came to resolve these different drivers and shape VET's future path.[7]

---

[5] Ministerial Council for Employment, Education Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).
[6] The term technical education was originally used to describe public vocational education in Australia up to 1974, when the acronym TAFE appeared after the publication of the Kangan Report (Murray-Smith 1966).
[7] For a more detailed critical analysis of the concept of 'settlement', see Seddon (1992).

Whilst Seddon (1992) argues that this settlement was 'imbued with liberal democratic commitments to public service and the public good' (1992: 3), Taylor et al (1997) also suggest that it 'filtered and stratified students ostensibly on the basis of merit' (1997: 102). As a result of this stratification, a dual approach which distinguished academic education from vocational training evolved both in the structure of education systems and in the curriculum' (1997: 102).[8]

Marginson (1993), in differentiating between academic and vocational curriculum, argues that whilst a fundamentally mechanistic approach to vocational learning developed in Australia from foundations laid by the American armed forces in 1949,[9] a binary system emerged with academic schooling and universities on one side and vocational schooling and industry training on another. In his history of TAFE in NSW, Scott (1990) notes that because technical education initially concerned itself with the transmission of techniques, moves by TAFE in that State to deliver para-professional training were stymied by universities because they were responsible for the broader educational goals required by the professions.

Whilst a range of social traditions and historical precedents influenced the evolution of vocational education and training in Australia, the Commonwealth government's involvement in VET was minimal in the first fifty years of federation.

Fooks (1994) notes that 'the Commonwealth first provided financial assistance of any substance to the States for technical education in 1964' (1994: 35). This assistance arose from the Martin Report (1964), which had major consequences for the ongoing demarcation of Australian post compulsory education. As Anderson (1998) notes, whilst 'the Martin Report recommended that trade, certificate-level technician, and recreational courses should remain the preserve of technical colleges, it also recommended that 'they should nevertheless receive additional support to assist them to raise their educational

---

[8] Taylor et al (1997) note that more critical accounts of education 'challenge the meritocratic ideal, arguing in effect that a schooling system divided along practical and academic lines served to lock individuals into class strata rather than to promote social mobility' (1997: 102).

status and standards' (1998: 8-9). Whilst the Martin report recommended the development of the sector, Jakupec and Roantree (1993) note that as a result of its findings, the technical education sector further 'relinquished a major component of its technology courses to the universities, colleges of advanced education and institutes of technology' (1993: 155)

The first major Commonwealth commitment to technical education came in 1972 when the Labour government established the Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education, chaired by Myer Kangan (Ramsey 1994). Goozee (1993) believes that prior to Kangan, 'technical education did not appear to be part of the education sector', being 'consistently undervalued and under resourced' (1993:4). Indeed, the Senate (2000) suggests that Kangan should be credited with being the first to 'define a role and purpose for technical and further education and training' (2000: 22). Anderson (1998) goes further to suggest that the Kangan Report 'provided the philosophical and policy basis for the development of a distinctive sector of technical and further education in Australia' (1998: 10).

The recommendations of the Kangan Report (1974) resulted in the appropriation of significant funds in the 1974 budget, which contributed to the development of the TAFE network. Many writers have stressed that Kangan was a watershed in Australian vocational education and training. In particular, they highlight the role that Kangan played in foregrounding individual learners and their needs within the broader social role of a publicly funded TAFE system. Chappell (1995) argues that Kangan 'articulated a view that the Australian vocational education sector should be mindful of the needs of individuals and be committed to access and equity for all learners' (1995: 182). This challenge to some traditional perceptions of vocational education and training was noted by Schofield (1994), who suggested that 'the positioning of technical education as a narrow training institution responsible for providing industry with a suitably qualified workforce was challenged by the release of the Kangan report' (1994: 57-60).

---

[9] See Kinsman (1992: 6).

As the TAFE system developed post-Kangan, Kinsman (1992) suggests that the mechanistic tradition of vocational training, referenced to Marginson (1993) earlier, had been modified by what she calls the 'adult learner / negotiated curriculum approach' (1992: *x*), as teachers implemented new programs and developed local colleges. Indeed, the Senate (2000) observed that 'Kangan's approach gave professional educators a leading role in how, when, where and what VET was provided' (2000:22).

However, despite the clearer demarcation of TAFE as a discrete sector, Chappell (1999) suggests that 'universities continued to be constructed as the sites of knowledge creation, with other institutions of education as the sites of knowledge use' (1999: 72). This period of TAFE's evolution occurred across 'contested terrain' (Edwards 1979), which Hattam and Smyth (1998) argue involved ongoing negotiation and contest over whether 'the nature of the desired outcome of vocational education and training was a competent worker, competent learner or competent citizen' (1998: 139).

In recognising the constant change of direction and charter that vocational education has experienced over its history, Stevenson (1998) identified a wide range of purposes for VET including:

- providing alternate advanced courses to university;
- providing full time prevocational courses to address labour market cycles;
- providing an alternative to schooling;
- developing the whole person through vocational education;
- redressing social inequities;
- providing skills required by workplaces; and
- providing personal development and leisure courses' (Stevenson 1998: 135)

Taylor et al (1997) note these tensions became particularly acute during the mid-1980s, when the dual system of separate vocational and general education was 'significantly eroded by a changing economic and labour market context' (1997: 104). Indeed, the Senate (1995) suggested that 'by the early 1990's the VET system had become moribund, receiving few additional resources and

students at time when the schools and higher education were experiencing significant increases in both' (1995: 1).

Seddon (1992) refers to this as the context for 'economic reductionist modernisation' (1992: 3), where there was a 'major shift in education policy making in Australia' (Dudley and Vidovitch 1995: 35), as 'new strategies and methods of government were developed in education' (Marginson 1997: 151). Whilst these policy shifts reflect many of the issues apparent from the earlier history of VET, the reform agenda that commenced in the late 1980's was more fundamental and significant than at any other time in the history of that sector, where the needs of the learner come to be subsumed by industrial and economic priorities.

Key Drivers of VET Reform

A complex mix of policy antecedents and shifting policy drivers influenced the incidence and nature of VET policy during the 1980s. The key elements of this shift in Australian VET were the rise of what has been called economic rationalism within Australian public policy, the development of a market in education, changes to youth labour markets, the rise of new vocationalism and the operation of federalism within Australia's education system.

Economic Rationalism and Australian Public Policy

The term 'economic rationalism' (Pusey 1991) came to define a driving force within Australian public policy during the 1990s. Marginson (1992) defined economic rationalism as a 'form of political rationality in which the market economy is substituted for democratic politics and public planning as the system of production and coordination' (1992: 1).

However, prior to the emergence of this new driver of policy activity, education policy in Australia was the product of a very different policy system.

The delivery of national reports from committees of enquiry such as Martin (1964) and Kangan (1974) featured significantly in education policy making prior to the early 1990's. Dudley and Vidovitch (1995) note that 'between 1945 and 1987, there were approximately fifty national committees of enquiry into various aspects of education' (1995: 34). They go on to suggest that the committee of enquiry and advisory committee models of policy making were 'based on education as a professional rather than a political concern', and that 'education was a relatively autonomous policy domain in which the criteria for policy decisions were principally educational rather than economic' (1995: 35). Consequently, Dudley and Vidovitch (1995) also note that during the period of 1972 to 1985, 'the conventional wisdom was that Commonwealth education policy and funding was best managed by independent statutory commissions staffed by experts in the field' (1995: 179).

However, from the May Economic statement of 1987 until late in the 1990's, what Australians know as economic rationalism came to dominate the macro policy agenda of the federal government, fundamentally changing the way education policy was perceived and created in Australia. Dudley and Vidovitch (1985) suggest that the new economic rationalist view prevalent within the bureaucracy 'supported a corporate model of direct control, administered by experts in management who were guided by economic priorities rather than substantive education issues' (1995: 179).

Pusey (1991) captured the essence of what was happening at this time when he characterised the newly appointed departmental managers as 'economic rationalists'. Whilst government rhetoric of the day argued that the reforms were an attempt to improve the provision of social services, Pusey (1991) argues that the changes represented a paradigm shift in public policy in Australia from one that focussed on nation building, to one that focussed more on managing the scarce resources of the state. Other views suggest that the restructuring was more a response to the forces of globalisation and the subsequent de-powering of the nation state (see for example Walters 1997, Brown 1999).

Regardless, economic rationalism first came to impact on education through a program of restructuring the Commonwealth bureaucracy, which aimed to reduce the plethora of government departments to sixteen mega departments. Only days after the election in 1987, then Prime Minister Hawke announced the creation of the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) and a review of departmental advisory arrangements which resulted in the creation of the National Board for Employment, Education and Training (NBEET), which was established to replace the previously constituted independent statutory commissions.

In discussing the bureaucratic restructuring in Canberra at that time, Vickers (1995) noted that 'when these men moved out from the central departments to take over the service departments, they were intent on rolling back social democratic or welfarist currents in public administration in favour of corporatism, minimal government and market forces' (1995: 58). Yeatman (1990) noted that 'scientific management became the ruling paradigm in Australian bureaucracies' (1987: 351), with Luke (1997) suggesting that these developments represented a 'shift from a focus on issues of value and ideology to issues of institutional, systemic and economic performativity' (1997: 3).

In concert with this economically rational agenda, changes also occurred to the way management operated and was constituted within the bureaucracy. Yeatman (1990) identified this as 'corporate managerialism', and argued that it involved 'the replacement of public policy objectives couched in terms of social goods, by public policy objectives couched in terms of economic goods' (1990: xii). Taylor et al (1997) suggest that corporate managerialism was unlike older bureaucratic arrangements because it stressed outputs and outcomes rather than correct processes and rule orientation, as was the case previously.

The effects of corporate managerialism within the Australian state were varied. In their analysis of Yeatman's work, McIntyre and Wickert (2000) identified numerous features of corporate managerialism, noting that it:

- 'flattens authority structures but exercises management prerogatives;

- opens decision making to value led debate but subordinates values to technical / administrative concerns;
- professionalises bureaucratic work but subjects it management control; and
- in the absence of firm value commitments, produces technocratic managers indifferent to the social ends of their work' (2000: 166).

Taylor et al (1997) suggest that as economic rationalism changed the nature of the public service, the political leadership also took a greater role in policy making than had occurred in the past, creating a 'reconstituted relationship between ministers and their public service bureaucracies' (1997: 81). Lingard et al (1995) argue that the increasing ministerialisation of policy formation within the Australian Education Council (AEC) led to a 'change from teacher-professional Directors General, to managerial Chief Executive Officers within State bureaucracies' a change that reinforced the 'predominance of generic managers and economists in the new mega federal department of DEET' (1995: 43).

During this period, the agencies and service models of the state itself were also influenced by the micro economic reform agenda. Taylor et al (1997) note that as a result of economic rationalism, 'central administrations were devolved to ensure greater efficiency and effectiveness of policy delivery' (1997: 80). Consequently, bureaucracies became more focussed on performance measures and program outcomes and targets as the means to move the policy agenda forward. These changes to the educational bureaucracy were not confined to the federal sphere, with Yeatman (1987) noting that these trends were also a feature of State bureaucracies. Indeed, Seddon (1995) argued that 'changes in public administration emptied State government education authorities of their educational capacity leaving a managerial husk' (1995: 4).

Whilst this dire analysis may be arguable, it is clear that the restructuring of the Australian state during the 1980's impacted substantially upon the character of educational policy and the structures of policy production and practice (Taylor et al 1997), making it a key driver of VET policy reform during this period.

Education and the Market

Another key shift influencing VET policy during this period was the relationship between education and the market. Marginson (1997) suggests that the 'new policies in education were above all economic policies shaped by the market liberal reading of neoclassical economics' (1997: 151), with Seddon (1992) observing that since the late 1980s, 'education has been positioned more centrally within a market rather than a public sector setting' (1992: 8).

In his study of quasi markets in Australian VET, Anderson (2000) notes that the development of a market for publicly financed and recognised training has its 'origins in the 1986 balance of payments crisis and the rise of economic rationalism in government during the 1980's' (2000: 109). Whilst Chappell (1999) notes that there is considerable debate over the meaning of the term economic rationalism and its impact on policy development, he cites Neville (1993) in suggesting that it can be interpreted to mean that 'the market is the best way of deciding what is to be produced and how it is to be produced' (1993: 3). Consequently, the language in which educational policy is expressed is premised on market considerations and borrowed from the commercial world. Kenway et al (1993) observed that 'the market metaphor heads up a new policy and administration lexicon in education' in which 'educational purposes, languages and practices are being subsumed by marketing purposes, languages and practices' (1993: 4).

Accordingly, Anderson (2000) notes that during the 1980's 'the pursuit of efficiency in a context of government budgetary restraint, led to a search for new modes of resource allocation and income generation in TAFE' (2000: 109). In 1990, the Deveson Committee produced its report on training costs and identified a new role for the private sector and industry to play in improving the quality and relevance of education and training. The committee concluded that market forces should be encouraged in certain areas of training and that 'private sector training institutions had an important role to play in training alongside TAFE institutions' (1990: 24). Anderson (2000) suggests that the Deveson Report in effect 'proposed the de-regulation of fee-charging in TAFE, increased

commercialisation of TAFE provision, and diversification of training supply through the creation of a national recognition system for private and industry providers and their courses' (2000: 1109).

As a result, Seddon (2000) suggests that 'public education which was State funded, orchestrated through a centralised educational bureaucracy and operationalised through a largely State employed, trained and regulated teaching force was subject to diversification on an enterprise basis' (2000: 247). Whilst the effects of this enterprise and market orientation have been more greatly felt in the 1990's, as Anderson (2000) notes, the developments in the 1980's represented 'unprecedented experiments in market oriented resource allocation and foreshadowed the future direction of VET policy' (2000: 109).

Educational Federalism

Taylor et al (1997) observed that the relationship between the Commonwealth and the States was also restructured as part of the process of creating a national economic infrastructure and single economic market. Lingard (1991) argues that since 1986, a 'corporate federalism' has evolved, where educational leadership and policy formulation moved from State bureaucracies to Federal forums, reshaping the nature of educational federalism in Australia.

The nature and operation of federalism in Australia has a major impact on educational policy and practice, with the political complexions of State, Territory and Commonwealth governments at any one time acting as a significant determinant of the level of cooperation between the different educational jurisdictions. Whilst the Commonwealth in the main has the financial resources that fund education as a result of its revenue rasing capacity, the States retain administrative control pursuant to Australia's constitution.

Since the 1970s however, Lingard et al (1995) have identified the working of different forms of federalism as they apply to school, VET and universities. Taylor et al (1997) note that the differing Commonwealth / State funding arrangements in each of these sectors have been important determinants of the

way in which federalism has worked in each case, suggesting that whilst there has been 'some agreement on the need for a national approach for VET and universities, the 'schools domain is most jealously protected by the States as their responsibility' (1997: 94).

Lingard et al (1995) argue that as the Commonwealth's wide ranging reforms were pursued, 'the politics of the AEC and MOVEET, the very structure of federalism itself and attempts to reconstitute it, together with the changing political complexion of governments at the State level, have in varying degrees mediated the achievement this agenda' (1995: 44).

The creation of ANTA for example, can be viewed as the result of the failure of the then Keating government to achieve a Commonwealth takeover of TAFE in the same way that his predecessor Whitlam had achieved with universities in 1974. Lingard et al (1995) argue that a factor influencing this outcome was the State's concern over 'the appropriate boundary between TAFE and schools if TAFE funding was to be taken over by the Commonwealth' (1995: 54). The Commonwealth's bid failed in the VET sector because in part the States were highly resistant to 'the clammy hands of Canberra' (*The Australian* 1991), and as noted by the Senate (1995), 'the compromise eventually reached on VET meant that the Commonwealth would provide growth funds ... providing the States and Territories maintained their own effort'. Consequently, the States and Territories could continue to manage VET but that 'the national context within which they were now to operate would be determined by advice given by ANTA' (1995: 2).

The operation of federalism in Australia's education system is a major influence on education policy and practice. Indeed, Lingard et al (1995) have argued that there is not a unified and coherent agenda for the long term integration of schooling, VET and universities across the nation, because of the 'different federalisms operating in each sector and the internal complexities of the state' (1995: 46).

The operation of the different forms of federalism across education can thus be seen as part of the complex policy context from which the reform agenda of the late 1980s evolved. However, whilst there were calls for vocational education and training to change, the demands came 'without an overarching philosophy of the nature and role of vocational education in society' (Stevenson 1998: 161).

Changing Labour Markets

Another major policy driver of VET reform during this period was the changing youth labour market. Welch (1996) observed that government policies of the 1970s and 1980s did not accept that unemployment and the labour market itself were the major determinant of employment outcomes from VET programs. Marginson (1993) suggests that recent 'relations between education and work have been shaped by the long-term decline in the full time labour market for teenagers' (1993: 148). Marginson (1997) also suggests that after 1975 there were three important changes in the labour markets that shaped the development of education in Australia. These were: 'the end of full employment; the blurring of boundaries between labour market programs and education programs, and the development of the services sector that demanded new and more generic skills' (1997: 169-170).

Labour market shifts that signalled the collapse of the youth labour market in Australia and abroad came to a head in the late seventies. Whilst efforts were subsequently made to increase participation in years eleven and twelve (Ruby 1992), Taylor et al (1997) suggest that 'the phenomena was originally interpreted as a failure of education to prepare young people for work' (1997: 108). Welch (1996) supports this analysis, suggesting that a common response of Australian industry and government to rising levels of youth unemployment has been to 'blame the schools', a response little different to equally critical responses in environments such as the UK (Ball 1990), New Zealand (Codd et al 1990) and the USA during the 1980s (Apple 1993). Welch (1996) also suggests that this anti-educational sentiment had three main elements, 'that teachers have an anti-industry and anti-business stance; that the curriculum

concentrated on irrelevant subjects; and that attitudes in schools were undermining the work ethic' (Welch 1996: 60-61).

However, Taylor et al (1997) note that as youth unemployment rose, politicians and policy makers were challenged by 'what to do with reluctant school stayers, whose job prospects were increasingly likely to depend on educational qualifications' (1997: 108). Borthwick (1993) suggests that the 'problem' of post compulsory education and training at that time involved 'grappling with the dramatic growth in student numbers in Year 11 and 12 and the changes of expectation of purposes of this phase of schooling' (1993: 21). The Commonwealth government itself observed that there was a 'growing realisation on the part of teenage youth and their parents that because the teenage labour market offered increasingly limited job opportunities, it was an unattractive proposition compared with participating in post-compulsory secondary schooling' (DETYA 2000a: 24).

The influential Williams report on the relationship between employment, education and training called for more relevant vocational education in schools (Williams 1979), a call that saw 'post compulsory schooling and training policy move to centre stage of the Commonwealth's employment agenda in the early 1990's'[10] (Dudley and Vidovitch 1995).

The then Minister for Education Dawkins declared in his first statement on higher education that 'the government has made clear its determination that our education and training system should play a central role in responding to the major economic challenges still confronting us' (Dawkins 1987: 1). Consequently, with the formation of the mega Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) in 1987, labour market and education policies became more closely integrated, a trend that Vickers (1995) notes was similar to developments throughout the OECD world which recast the function of education as principally related to the needs of the labour market.

---

[10] Dudley and Vidovitch (1995) suggest that the term post compulsory schooling is loosely aligned with the OECD statistical category for education of 15-19 year olds, and that in Australia it refers to Years 11 and 12 of school, TAFE and private providers offering non degree courses.

Schofield (1994) observed that that the emergence of this new policy agenda in the 1980's 'diminished the role of individual needs and asserted the primacy of labour market orientation relative to an educational and social one' (1994: 61). Indeed, in a 1985 Commonwealth report into labour market programs, the Kirby committee argued that education programs and labour market programs should both be directed towards ensuring that all Australians could participate in the labour markets (Kirby 1985).

Shifts in the labour market created conditions in which education came to serve the labour market through value added human capital and improved employment options, especially for young people excluded from the traditional academic pathways between school and university. Labour market reform however was not restricted to school to work pathways, with Karmel (1994) suggesting that the basis for the introduction of competency based standards, training and assessment for specific skilled vocations was linked to the reform of Australian industrial arrangements (Karmel 1994).

The restructuring of awards included provisions for skill related career paths (Curtain and Mathews 1990) and ensured that competency standards were a 'central mechanism to the industrial relations agendas of both businesses and trade unions' (Garrick 1996: 72). Whilst concerns were expressed that industrial relations matters should determine what people learn for work (Mayer 1992b), there is evidence to suggest that these changes facilitated considerable innovation in training practices in many Australian enterprises (CEDA 1994). As a result of these developments, there was much effort put into involving employers in decision-making and in measures to ensure that VET met the needs of employers and the new labour market (Senate 2000).

Human Capital and New Vocationalism:

Marginson (1997) observed that by the early 1980's, there had been a loss of faith within key economic departments of the Commonwealth government over the capacity for education to effectively be both an investment in human capital

and a means to achieve equality of opportunity.[11] The preference that emerged for its role in developing human capital was also apparent in broader international policy texts, most notably those of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which strongly argued that the skills and qualifications of workers were 'critical determinants of effective performance of enterprises and economies' (1989: 18). In its publication on the proceedings of the 1988 Intergovernmental Conference, the OECD noted the convergence of education and the economy, and suggested three dimensions to education's essential role:

1. 'contributing to a flexible labour force;
2. providing the stable general and vocational foundation of skills and competencies; and
3. providing the trained, adaptable and flexible labour forces in regions hit by structural change and unemployment' (1989: 3).

Whilst Karmel (1995) noted that 'the reforms relating to higher education and vocational education were based on the premise that more education and training will lead to improved economic performance' (1995: 44), he also highlighted the view that 'economic performance is affected by other than cognitive and industrial skills, and that an undue reliance on education as an instrument for economic success may not only distort the purposes of education but lead to an erroneous diagnosis of the barriers to economic growth' (1994: 1). Despite views such as these however, the discourse of human capital was reinvigorated by 'new vocationalist' calls for VET reform.

Seddon (1994) defines vocationalism as a tendency to see the task of education as being to 'increase individuals' skills in order to increase their capacity for action, that is, for work, and so enhance national levels of workforce skills' (1994: 70).

---

11 Human capital is a way of defining and categorizing skills and abilities used in employment and that otherwise contribute to the economy. In this view, human capital is similar to the physical means of production (see in particular (Becker 1976).

Taylor et al (1997) noted that whilst interest in human capital was not new, what was different about new vocationalism 'was its location in economic rather than education policy and the greater direct involvement of business, industry and unions in vocational education and training' (1997: 104). As Lingard et al (1995) noted so clearly:

> 'whereas the focus of the earlier Labour government under Gough Whitlam (1972-1975) in education was on equality and increasing resources for schooling, the focus under Hawke / Keating was upon outcomes from all levels of education. Education was now reconceptualized as part of the broader micro economic reform agenda, with a central intent being to produce a multiskilled and flexible workforce as part of the non-tariff protected integration of the Australian economy with the global one' (1995: 44).

The Senate (2000) suggests that Commonwealth policy initiatives in this arena can be linked to the adverse trade balance figures during the middle 1980's when it became 'clear that any restructuring of the economy would require a more highly skilled, flexible and adaptable workforce' (2000: 23). As Marginson (1997) notes, the objectives of the new policies were 'not so much the broad development of the skills and talents of the nation as in the late Keynesian period, but the development of those specific aspects of education and research that assisted national economic competitiveness' (1997: 151).

This new vocationalist discourse came to dominate the way in which education was viewed, and as noted by Dudely and Vidovich (1995), demonstrated how the discourse of training came to increasingly colonise education at the post compulsory level. Taylor et al (1997) suggest that one of the key reasons why the new vocationalists called for changes to existing educational arrangements and curricula was their belief that the nature of work and work organisation had changed (1997: 105). The Finn Committee provide a local example of this approach:

'international economic competitiveness, as well as domestic social well-being, is increasingly dependent on a nation's ability to produce both a well trained, flexible work force and to develop enterprises which enable employees at all levels to contribute to their full potential' (Finn 1991:13).

Beven (1994) notes that the rise of generic skills in policy and education practice was a reflection of the power of employers in the labour market and their growing role in education policy. Various authors (Wolf 1991, Marginson 1994, Hyland and Johnson 1998) have claimed that the notion of generic transferable skills is consistent with human capital theory as a form of 'liberal individualism, where the characteristics of the individual are abstracted from social context and become essentialised as private property' (Marginson 1994: 11).

Not surprisingly, the proposal for incorporating generic skills into general and vocational education that arose at this time generally received support from employers (Rumsey 1995; Moy 1999). However, given that all generic skills policy initiatives are borne out of similar concerns about economic productivity and competitiveness, Hyland (1993) claims that the generic skills movement has provided a new ideology with irresistible appeal to those seeking accountability and input-output efficiency within a new economic realism.

The influence of new vocationalism and other key forces in Australian VET reform during this period represent a unique confluence of policy drivers. This policy context, with its altered labour market and emergent economic and new vocationalist voices, provided the right environment for the emergence of generic skills agenda in Australian VET.

The Emergence of Generic Skills

Briggs and Kittay (2000) note that the flexible specialisation, or post Fordist thesis 'about the necessity for Western economies to restructure towards high skill, value added activity if they were to survive was highly influential in

Australia during the late 1980s and early 1990s' (2000: 5).[12] The basic rationale for generic skills typically includes the following elements, that the:

- world of work is changing, with new forms of production and work organisation being affected by rapidly changing technology that is applied within a global market economy; that
- these new times require workers to deploy new more generic skills in order to maintain the viability of industry and national economies; and that
- the education system should therefore focus on developing these skills as part of its role in society.

The rise of generic skills is thus linked to debate on the future of work and the nature of change in the workplace. Many projections about the future of work and jobs are made, and in many of the stories foretelling the future of work, technology is assumed to be the irresistible driver of change (Marginson 2000). However, in citing the curiously named Committee for Techniques to Enhance Human Performance (CTEHP 1999), Kerka (2000) notes that 'both ends of a spectrum are foreseen', with technology either creating new jobs and transforming existing workers to higher skill levels, or destroying jobs and degrading them into less skilled, more routine work' (2000: 2). Whilst, evidence for both sides can be found in the literature, Australian data shows that between 1976 and 1995 the mean cognitive and interactive skills of workers associated with new technologies increased and use of motor skills decreased (Marginson 2000). However Marginson also suggested that 'the long-term net employment effects of the current wave of technological change remain an open question' (2000: 8).

In addition to technological change, another major assumption underpinning a call for generic skills has been that the post – Fordist workplaces of the 21st century are organised in different ways and require employees with different skills.

---

[12] Fordism involved the rational ordering of the production process in a rigidly bureaucratic and hierarchical system of relationships. Post-Fordism, on the other hand, involves the application of a variety of different production systems including co-operative working and just-in-time manufacturing (Sociology Central 2005).

Post Fordist theorists, including advocates of 'flexible specialisation' (Piore and Sabel 1984), argue that it is necessary for Western economies to restructure towards high skill, value added activity if they are to remain high-wage economies.

As industrial restructuring proceeded amongst Western economies in the 1980s, changes to industrial practice did appear. Contemporary high performance workplaces were noted as requiring a new behaviour and orientation towards work that went beyond step-by-step task performance (Field 1995). Employees at all levels were expected to solve problems, create ways to improve the methods they use, and engage effectively with their co-workers (Bailey 1997; Packer 1998). The emergence of 'high performance workplaces' and 'learning organisations' pointed to the need for skill formation practices that addressed other than technical skill needs. When practices such as job rotation, team based work, devolved responsibility and flattened management structures were set in motion, Green found that the use of different workplace competencies increased (Green et al 2000). Applebaum and Batt (1994), Field (1995) and Winchester and Sheridan (1997) all argue that employees require additional skills and training to support high performance work systems.

In such an environment, job-specific technical skills in a given field were no longer deemed adequate as employers sought to fill an increasing number of interdependent jobs (Askov and Gordon 1999; Murnane and Levy 1996). Consequently, skilled work became increasingly seen as 'strategic', requiring an ability to perform in different work situations and deal with uncertainty and change (Smith and Marsiske 1997). In such workplaces, employers came to recognise that employees who demonstrate this highly skilled, adaptive blend of technical and human relations ability were their primary competitive edge (Capelli et al 1997).

Studies undertaken for the British National Skills Task Force showed that the increased demand for generic skills and for higher skill levels 'was associated with changes in the organisation of work and jobs, the impact of new technologies, and competitive pressures resulting from globalisation' (NSTF

2000b: 36-46). Similarly, Moy (1999) found that international catalysts for a focus on generic skills included:

- an increasingly competitive global market;
- rapid technological change;
- new forms of work and work organisation; and
- the evolution of knowledge intensive economies, characterised by an increased focus on the service sector and the customisation of products and services (1999: 5).

In tune with these developments, Green (1999) noted that work sociologists and economists were also reporting that identifiable generic skills acquired special importance in the context of current technical changes and rising global competitiveness. Many U.S. and international authors point out the importance of continuously developing skills beyond those required for a specific job, and have identified sets of employability skills, key skills, core skills that enable individuals to prove their value to an organization and ensure their survival in changing labour markets.

Whilst there clearly exists a wealth of literature spanning a number of years that identifies the need and advantages of developing creative, critical and self-monitoring learners (Stevenson 1995; Down 1997), Capelli et al (1997) suggest that as a result of the changing work environment and raised skill requirements, all individuals came under pressure to acquire the competencies and qualities previously associated with 'more highly educated individuals' (1997: 165). Analysing data from 56,000 production jobs in the USA between 1978 and 1986, Cappelli and Rogovsky (1994) demonstrated that over time, there was increased demand for considerably higher skills 'especially behavioural ones involving communication, negotiation and group dynamics' (1994: 212). A study by the Allen Consulting Group of 350 Australian companies also showed demand for higher skill levels in the workforce (AIG 2000).

Claims about growth in high skilled employment however are not conclusive. Crouch et al (1999) argue that as 'very highly skilled sectors continue to

represent small shares of total trade that employ relatively few people, it remains important to separate the mass of developments in employment from potentials for export growth' (1999: 108). Finegold's (1999) work on high skill ecosystems reflects these arguments as does Williams' et al (1987) critique of flexible specialisation, that highlights counter trends such as the growth of low skill casualised employment. Cutler (1992), in critiquing a major British study in this area, also suggests that management, and influences beyond the point of production, are often excluded from the scope of studies that focus on skill levels and other factors of production in the workplace. In building on this theme, Briggs and Kittay (2000) argue that in a profit oriented environment, 'the provision of large numbers of state supplied skilled workers is unlikely to have any impact on the competitive strategies of local enterprises' (2000: 11).

Despite the inconclusive evidence regarding the link between skill formation policies and workplace productivity, many contemporary analyses of skill needs continue to be referenced to notions of 'the knowledge economy' or the 'new economy'. Kearns (2000) suggests that whilst the new economy has been defined in various ways (see for example Carnevale 1991, OECD 2000a), there is broad agreement that knowledge processes and products are central to success in the competitive environment of the new economy, and thus as the OECD (2000b) notes, 'the ability to produce and use information effectively is thus a vital source of skills for many individuals' (2000b: I). Reich's (1991) definition of 'knowledge workers' foregrounds abilities related to defining and solving problems along with strategic brokering capabilities, skills that have featured in many generic skills frameworks.

Regardless, Livingston (1999) argues that 'it is not so much increasing the supply of knowledge workers but finding ways of getting employers to utilise the existing knowledge and skills of the labour force' (1999: 165). Indeed, Briggs and Kittay (2000) go so far as to suggest that flexible specialisation / post Fordist theorists, like policy makers and practitioners, mistakenly proceed on the basis that better VET performance will produce skilled workers and higher productivity and quality.

Clearly, there is a link between generic skills policy initiatives and the reality of the workplace. Briggs and Kittay (2000) assert that calls for a knowledge economy have influenced debates on skill needs and have become a driver of economic policy. They also suggest that 'the way the international economy and the conditions for economic success are viewed underpinned the focus on skills by policy makers (2000: 4).

In addition to these industrial imperatives, some commentators also suggest that the emergence of generic skills can be linked to the transformation of the general studies movement. Reflecting on the British experience, Lawson (1992) argues that the contemporary emphasis on core skills can be interpreted as a logical development of national curriculum, which 'vindicates the idea that there ought to be a core educational experience' (1992: 85). Hyland (1998) suggests that in Britain, conceptions of common learning and core experience were gradually transformed into the notion of core skills in Britain through a range of vocational initiatives.

The development of generic skills agendas can also be considered a consequence of the recent return of the lifelong education movement, which itself sits well with fashionable economic agendas (Hager 1995).

In first calling for a focus on generic skills within Australian VET, the Finn committee explicitly linked its recommendations to the 'areas related to a young person's initial and lifelong employability' (Finn 1991: 54). This strong industrial imperative draws parallels to a precursor of lifelong education known as recurrent education (OECD 1973). Recurrent education was described as including a desire to secure closer integration or linkage between the education and economic systems (Duke 1982). However, whilst recurrent education was considered an alternative strategy for educational provision which spread educational opportunities through a person's lifetime instead of increasing the period of initial full-time education prior to work (Duke 1982), the guiding principles of the generic skills agenda did not fully reflect these aspects.

However, the theme of developing individual and communal agency was reflected in the work of Australia's Mayer Committee who suggested that any initiative should equip individuals to participate effectively in a wide range of social settings, including workplaces and adult life more generally (Mayer 1992). This view clearly resonates with assumptions identified in Knowles' (1991) lifelong learning resource system, 'that learning in a world of accelerating change must be a lifelong process' with the purpose of education being 'to facilitate the development of the competencies required for performance in life situations' (1991: 72). However, as noted by Duke (1982), it is not clear conceptually whether lifelong education was merely a means of reinterpreting what was already occurring, or of creating a new paradigm. In that sense, he mirrors Cropley (1979), who suggested that the intense interest in lifelong education has been an after-the-fact realisation of existing educational trends.

Regardless, whilst the notion of generic skills is consistent with lifelong learning and resonates with a developmental approach to the acquisition of life skills, they are predominantly driven by industrial imperatives anchored by the real world needs of employers and the demands of contemporary workplaces.

A Decade of VET Reform

Whilst the emergence of generic skills during this period was linked to a number of policy drivers, the policy reforms of the period can be traced to the release of the watershed report *Australia Reconstructed* (ACTU / TDC 1987), which laid out the rationale and key principles of a revised national training strategy (Welch 1996). That strategy became known as the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA) and went on to lay the foundation for the current VET system in Australia. Taylor et al (1997) note that the NTRA embraced a number of developments, including 'the establishment of a National Training Board to develop a national framework for competency based training across all industries; the restructuring of the TAFE sector and the creation of an open training market' (1997: 109).

In 1990 the Ministerial Council of Vocational Education, Employment and Training (MOVEET) was created, and from October 1991 met jointly with the previously constituted Australian Education Council. Lingard et al (1995) suggest that 'this structural rearrangement was intended to integrate policy across all sectors of education with a greater emphasis on training and the needs of industry' (1995: 44). This realignment of the structures of government in the two years preceding the establishment of ANTA in 1992 saw the production of four significant reports to the government addressing the role of VET and the skilling of Australia's workforce.[13]

The 1990 Deveson Report into training costs was followed by the report of the Finn committee (Finn 1991) which examined educational preparation for work. Marginson (1997) suggests that Finn 'examined the whole of post compulsory education and training from a perspective of employability' (1997: 175). The Senate References Committee (2000) suggest that the Finn Report 'pointed out that general and vocational education, and work and learning, were too sharply divided in traditional Australian attitudes and practice' and that 'a convergence of general and vocational education was needed, with both schools and TAFE institutes becoming more concerned about issues of employability' (2000: 24).

The Finn committee recommended a series of national targets for student participation and outlined scenarios that suggested continued growth in the higher education system, with TAFE growing at an even faster rate. Its recommendations also emphasised the need for pathways for students through the education system with improved articulation between schools, TAFE and higher education. These recommendations were accepted by the government and included in the Commonwealth's *Higher Education Policy Statement* in 1991 (Baldwin 1991).

In Baldwin's policy statement, consideration was given to the 'appropriate sectoral balance in participation in post-school education and training which was emerging out of the changing pattern of participation in higher education in

_____

[13] Deveson (1990), Finn (1991), Carmichael (1992), Mayer (1992).

the 1990s, and in particular, the need for lifelong learning' (1991: 1). Consequently, in order to foster mobility between the TAFE and higher education sectors and cater for changing participation rates, the Federal Government proposed that the status of TAFE needed to be enhanced.

Arising from the work of the Finn Committee, the Mayer Committee was established to further define and develop competency standards in six areas of general competence that had been proposed by Finn (Mayer 1992)[14], and finally, in 1992 the Carmichael report was released, proposing a new integrated entry level training system, subsequently known as the Australian Vocational Training System (AVTS) (Carmichael 1992). As noted by Taylor et al (1997), 'these documents laid the basis for a good deal of subsequent policy development and associated restructuring of education and training arrangements' (1997: 108).

The AVTS itself sought to merge apprenticeships and traineeships,[15] and was intended to offer a broad range of education and training pathways leading either to a qualification, another training pathway, or a career step.

The AVTS was to be supported by a range of reforms under the NTRA including the adoption of competency based training throughout the VET system, the establishment of the Australian Standards Framework (ASF), the development of industry competency standards, the development of the National Framework for the Recognition of Training (NFROT), the development of national core curriculum for both on and off the job training, and the development of a training market (Senate 2000). In June 1992 State and Commonwealth Ministers agreed to the introduction of AVTS pilot program, which by the beginning of 1995 had funded over 200 separate projects (CEDA 1995).

---

[14] The work of the Finn and Mayer committees as it relates to the development of generic skills within Australian VET will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.
[15] The Australian Traineeship System was introduced in 1985 following recommendations of the 1984 Committee of Enquiry into Labour Market Programs (Kirby 1985). They were developed at the time as a key strategy to deal with youth unemployment.

These policy developments contributed to significant debate, and as suggested by Taylor et al (1997), 'aroused considerable controversy, especially among the educational establishment which had largely been excluded from the committees writing the reports and who saw in the new proposals a dangerous potential for narrow instrumentalism being applied to education' (1997: 104). Debate also occurred in relation to the nature of competence, competencies and competency based training, with 'the views of both camps being strongly defended in the education literature' (Dudley and Vidovitch 1995: 166). The debate was complex and varied, given that different interpretations of those terms could be applied to the policies, with issues around equity, the value of liberal education, assessment and vocational streaming featuring in the debate.[16] Indeed Jackson (1991) argues that important underlying questions about 'why we have to have competency standards and whether they are necessary at all' were neglected at the time (1991: 19). David Pennington, a leading academic at the time, claimed that the competencies movement sought to 'control all education and training in terms of work related competencies and to bring all within a seamless web of control through a network of tripartite committees of union, industry and government representatives' (The Australian 1992).

The Senate References Committee (2000) observed that 'from 1987 the Commonwealth became more active in bringing TAFE within the ambit of Commonwealth influence' (2000: 23). Indeed, as the reform process gathered momentum, the Commonwealth attempted to assume full financial responsibility for VET through an offer to the States in October 1991 that sought to remove all but administrative control to the Commonwealth. The 'cautious response by States and Territories' (Senate 1995) in effect led to 'considerable wrangling' (Taylor et al (1997), and efforts to reach a compromise in 1992 led to the establishment of ANTA and agreement by the States and Territories to work toward a national VET system.

---

[16] A more complete analysis of the arguments both for and against can be found in Dudley and Vidovitch (1995) and Taylor et al (1997).

As noted by Chappell (1999), one of the more remarkable aspects of Australian reforms of that time was the similarity to initiatives introduced in other countries during the same period. He cites the Canadian Ministry of Education, Skills and Training (MEST) that identified a range of measures introduced in a number of countries to achieve a more vocational focus for education:[17]

- work competency standards development;
- competency based education and training;
- the development of modularised curricula;
- increased quality assurance and accountability in education;
- reformed apprenticeship and credit transfer arrangements;
- increased industry involvement in education;
- increased school to work programs; and
- increased focus on the quality of teachers and teaching' (MEST 1995: 7).

Whilst considerable policy activity surrounded the NTRA, its implementation was inconsistent and contested. The Committee for the Economic Development of Australia noted that 'the general consensus amongst both industry and the VET sector is that whilst the NTRA is headed in the right direction, progress has been slow and the new training structures are too bureaucratic, overly complex and irrelevant to the needs of many enterprises' (CEDA 1995: 16). These views were shared by others, including ANTA's CEO (Moran 1993), and an influential team of independent reviewers (Allen Consulting 1994).

The developments considered briefly here were particularly significant for VET in Australia, and whilst the reforms sought to address vocational education in different contexts, the introduction of VET programs into schools appears to have provided the greatest challenge to educators and administrators alike.

---

[17] Whilst initially related to reforms that have taken place in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Scotland and Canada, Chappell (1999) indicates that more recently some of these measures have also been adopted by other countries including Mexico, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam.

Given that this thesis will examine the role of generic skills and in schools based VET, some specific attention will now be paid to the development of this policy agenda.

The Emergence of VET in Schools

Whilst Taylor et al (1997) note that the vocationalist emphasis in school education extends further back into Australian history, aspects of the later work of the Schools Commission (1973 -1988) can be interpreted as seeking to address inequity produced by the traditional liberal meritocratic ideal of separate academic and vocational curriculum. In particular, the Participation and Equity program of 1984 placed on the policy agenda the total reform of the secondary school curriculum in order to cater for the needs of a broader group of students (Taylor et al 1997). Indeed, Freedland (1992) suggests that that program represented the 'capturing of the vocational relevance argument by progressive educators who hijacked the instrumental and conservative push for vocational and attitudinal training and converted it to an agenda more consistent with comprehensive post-compulsory education reform' (1992: 73). Despite the development of a national agenda for vocational education and training, the responsibility for school education was strongly defended by the States who had a history of resisting Commonwealth initiatives to control the content and delivery of school education.

With the abolition of the Schools Commission in 1987, the broader micro-economic reforms of the Hawke labour government also came to affect the schooling system. In his 1988 statement *Strengthening Australian Schools* (Dawkins 1998), Dawkins invited co-operation from all education systems in undertaking a more concerted national effort to strengthen the capacity of Australian schools. The Minister's statement noted that 'schools are the starting point of an integrated education and training structure in the economy...they also form the basis of a more highly skilled, adaptive and flexible workforce (1989: 1). With these statements, it is clear that school education, as with VET, was being framed within an economic perspective.

In this context, the challenge of vocational preparation in Australia was widely discussed in the school sector.

Citing Sweet (1995) and others, the Committee for the Economic Development of Australia (CEDA 1995) noted that in the mid 1980's 'only 20 per cent of young Australians were getting a vocational ie: non university education compared with an OECD average of 50 per cent and 80 per cent in West Germany' (1995: 5). Peter Karmel, in a lecture on economics and education, articulated a series of questions that reflected concerns held by schools at that time:

- can or should school curricula be expressed in terms of competencies, especially the so-called employment related key competencies;
- should schools take responsibility for entry level work force training of the vast majority of 16 to 19 year olds;
- should post-compulsory schooling be organised in more sharply differentiated ways;
- does vocational education and training have any role beyond the inculcation of vocational competencies; and
- do post-school education/training opportunities need to be further diversified to take account of rising participation in formal education and falling employment opportunities for the young?' (Karmel 1995: 45).

In one policy response to these challenges, Ministers for Education across the country signed an agreement in 1989 which set common and agreed national goals of schooling and commenced work to develop a national school curriculum (AEC 1989).[18] The agreed national goals for schooling were also embraced by the Finn Committee (1991), whose recommendations caused some concern amongst State schooling systems who feared vocational streaming of students and the introduction of national targets for schooling (Lingard et al 1995).

---

[18] referred to as the Hobart declaration.

As a result of the Hobart declaration, Ministers 'approved the undertaking of extensive curriculum initiatives at a national level with a view to exploring a possible common curriculum framework' (Eltis 1995: 7).

In early 1990, the AEC also established a working party reporting on student achievement that went on to advocate the use of student profiles.

The development of these profiles commenced in April 1991 when the AEC launched curriculum projects in eight areas of study and approved the development of Statements and Profiles for each of these areas. Whilst this work was expected to be completed within two years, criticism at the time (see for example Scarino 1994, Broughton 1994) led the AEC to refer the documents back to the States and Territories for 'further work involving consultation with their own educational communities, so that each State and Territory can determine if the initiatives should be proceeded with' (Eltis 1995: 7).

Lingard et al (1995) view this development as having the effect of 'slowing the work on national collaboration in curriculum and Statements and Profiles by returning power over the agenda to the States' (1995: 48), an outcome that reflected the developing and ongoing tensions between the Commonwealth and the States over school and VET sector reform. As the Commonwealth continued its reform agenda, Lingard et al (1995) note that the ongoing State commitment to the development of the Statements and Profiles 'was partially an important defence mechanism to obviate the possibility of rigid national testing and the possibility of the Finn and Carmichael agenda dominating schooling' (1995: 50). Consequently, whilst the shifting policy priorities had less immediate impact in schools than in the VET sector, schools were under pressure to respond to the same key policy drivers that triggered VET reform and saw the emergence of a generic skills agenda. The challenge to schools thus emerged on two main fronts, one linked to the Commonwealth's desire for a national curriculum in schools, and the other driven by the major VET sector reform reports which focussed on vocational preparation, student pathways and the development of generic skills.

Conceptualising Generic Skills

In countries where competency based training has been part of the debate surrounding vocational education and training, generic skills have been a consistent approach used by policy makers and educators to identify core skills that underpin effective functioning in work situations.

The literature indicates that debate over the nature of generic skills, how they are defined and how they work in practice; reflect inadequate conceptualisation within generic skills policy frameworks.

Whilst generic skills in Australia came to refer to employment related skills that apply in more than one context, there is clear evidence that challenges exist for those attempting to define what a generic skill is and which skills should or should not be included on any list. The OECD's DeSeCo Project[19] found for example, that whilst the lack of an agreed definition of competence can be overcome, considerable disagreement remains about which competencies should be designated as key (Weinert 2001).

Whilst frameworks for employment related generic competencies have been identified in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, South Africa and the United States (Werner 1994), other countries have placed greater emphasis on the broader social relevance of generic skills, or linked the debate to qualifications frameworks included in the mainstream concepts of curriculum development or assessment.[20] As noted by Kamarainen and Cheallaigh (2000), these variations reflect parallel concepts and the fact that seemingly identical concepts have different meanings in different contexts. Table 1 overleaf gives an indication of the international scope of generic skill frameworks.

---

[19] Definition and Selection of (key) Competencies

Country	Framework
Australia	Key Competencies / Employability Skills
New Zealand	Essential Skills
USA	Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS)
UK	Core Skills / Key Skills
France	Transferable Competencies
Germany	Key Qualifications
Denmark	Process Independent Qualifications
Italy	Transversal Competencies
Netherlands	Core Competencies
Canada	Strategy for Prosperity
South Africa	Critical Cross Field Outcomes
Singapore	Critical Enabling Skills Training (CREST)
OECD	Key Competencies

Table 1: Examples of International Generic Skills Initiatives

The British National Skills Task Force for example, defined their set of generic skills to be 'those transferable skills, essential for employability which are relevant at different levels for most' (NSTF 2000: 27). Australia's Mayer Committee defined their set as being 'essential for effective participation in the emerging patterns of work and work organisation'. Australia's Key Competencies were also seen to 'focus on the capacity to apply knowledge and skills in an integrated way in work situations' and be 'generic in that they apply to work generally rather than being specific to work in particular occupations or industries' (Mayer 1992: 5).

By comparison, the OECD's DeSeCo project positioned their approach to key competencies by suggesting they were 'competencies and skills relevant for an individual to lead a successful and responsible life and for society to face the challenges of the present and future' (2001: 2).

Nijhof (1998) suggests that whilst the relevance of generic skills for life, work and employability is evident, there is no established and validated 'taxonomy or system of qualifications' (1998: 33). The resultant shortcomings in policy responses are in part related to the difficulties associated with defining a set of

---

[20] The development of Key Qualifications and Key Competencies has had recent favour amongst the European Union and member States of the OECD (DeSeCo). See for example

generic skills, and in part to a range of educational issues that need to be resolved during the development of any policy framework. Unlike the OECD's DeSeCo project, many conceptualisations of generic skills have proceeded without clear conceptual and theoretical foundations.

The development of such foundations involves a number of issues, which the OECD have identified as including:

- 'whether a normative, philosophical or socially critical frame of reference is adopted or whether they are based simply on the observation of practices;
- the level of abstraction and generality with which key competencies are defined;
- the hypothetical structure underlying key competencies;
- the extent to which psychological features can be modified through learning; and
- how they can be acquired through planned instructional programs' (Rychen 2001: 8).

The literature suggests that in many cases, the development of generic competencies has been a process involving groups of stakeholders from the fields of industry, government and education. Given the varying ideologies and values involved, it is not surprising that issues of definition and taxonomy relating to generic skills have been underpinned by debates surrounding the purposes of education in a changing world, and in this way, they have been dominated by economic discourses connecting education with the economy. It also appears that most of these taxonomies have used normative models that were not empirically validated, to the extent that they can be (Nijhof 1998). Whilst generic skills agendas can be linked to different policy drivers, Kearns (2000) identified from the literature two broad policy responses that have resulted, namely:

Nijhof and Streumer (1998) and Rychen and Salganik (2001).

- 'an American model which involves a broad, flexible, and holistic set of generic skills, which include basic skills, personal attributes, values and ethics, learning to learn, as well as workplace competencies of the Mayer type; and
- an Anglo/Australian model, which involves a relatively narrow and instrumental set of key skills/key competencies which are broadly similar. In both countries personal attributes and values have been excluded from the identified key competencies' (2000: 2)

By comparison, Kamarainen and Cheallaigh (2000) have identified a broad framework of three parallel policy approaches with different scopes and focuses. These are:

- 'the atomistic approach ("key skills") with a focus on skill bases of individual learners;
- the non-formal holistic approach ("key competences" or "transversal competences") with a focus on competence within work-related groups and organisational settings; and
- the institutionally oriented holistic approach ("key qualifications") with a focus on the renewal of established qualification frameworks and promoting a capacity for related lifelong learning and/or for mobility towards new qualifications' (2000: 3).

Clearly, generic skills taxonomies are as complex and varied as the socio-economic justifications for their development, a conclusion that presents significant implications for the work of policy makers and educationalists that try to apply such frameworks to practice. Table 2 overleaf is drawn from the work of Mayer (1992) and provides some comparison between different national approaches in terms of the emphasis given to particular competencies. However, after comparing a set of definitions like basic, core, common, generic and generalisable skills, the main conclusion Thomson and Murphy (1987) could draw was that the main common feature of employment related competencies, was that they were 'the skills and abilities which individuals bring with them from job to job, and which apply in each job' (1987: 1).

Key Competencies	UK (NCVQ) Core Skills	US (SCANS) Workplace Know How	NZ Essential Skills
• Collecting, Analysing and Organising Information	• Communication	• Information • Foundation Skills: Basic Skills	• Information Skills
•	• Communication • Personal Skills: Improving own learning and performance	• Information • Foundation Skills: Basic Skills	• Communication Skills
• Planning and Organising Activities	• Personal Skills: Improving own learning and performance	• Resources • Foundation Skills: Personal qualities	• Self-management Skills • Work and Study Skills
• Working With Others and in Teams	• Personal Skills: Working with others	• Interpersonal Skills	• Social Skills • Work and Study Skills
• Using Mathematical Ideas and Techniques	• Numeracy: Application of number	• Foundation Skills: Basic skills	• Numeracy Skills
• Solving Problems	• Problem Solving	• Foundation Skills: Thinking skills	• Problem-solving and Decision-making
• Using Technology	• Information Technology • Foreign language	• Technology • Systems	• Information Skills • Communication
Note: Where the UK Core Skills, US Workplace Know-How and NZ Essential Skills are comparable with more than one Key Competency they have been repeated.			

Table 2: Examples of National Approaches to Generic Skills (source: Mayer 1992: 11)

Another aspect of generic skills conceptualisations involves the relationship between generic skills and the concept of competence. In Australia, competency was defined as comprising the specification of knowledge and skill and the application of that knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in employment (DEET 1994).

This approach however has not been without its detractors, and Hyland (1993), in his review of literature spanning a number of VET systems, argued that there is no common understanding of the term competence, with uncertainty as to whether competence is a personal attribute, an act, or an outcome of behaviour.

Whilst the discourse of competency based training (CBT) seeks to include knowledge and understanding in any definition of competence, Hyland also argues that the type of knowledge and its specific relationship to competence remains unclear.

The confusion surrounding the precise nature of competence itself is compounded by the determination to pick out only those items of knowledge thought to be directly related to elements of competence, and Hyland argues further that the resulting position 'is epistemologically equivocal and theoretically suspect' (Hyland 1993: 169), a position that is supported to some extent by the recent high level review of training packages (ANTA 2004).

Whilst seeking to provide a broad base for its approach to generic skills, the definition of competence adopted by Australia's Mayer reflects some of this ambiguity in noting that:

> 'performance is underpinned not only by skill but also by knowledge and understanding, and that competence involves both the ability to perform in a given context and the capacity to transfer knowledge and skills new tasks and situations' (1992: 4).

Dearden (1984) suggests that a common error in conceptualisations of generic skills involves making the false move from identifying features common to different skills and, from this, inferring the existence of a common skill.
As Wolf (1991) notes, 'it is one thing to remark that two contexts seem to demand much the same problem solving skills, yet quite another to confidently ascribe marks and levels to problem solving within major public examinations whose prime function is selection for higher education' (1991: 99).

Considering further the relationship between knowledge and competence, Resnick (1987) notes that specific content and knowledge play a central role in reasoning, thinking and learning of all kinds. She also argues that 'the importance of specific knowledge about similar problems is inexorably linked to any description of competent behaviour', and raises questions about 'the wisdom of attempting to develop competence outside the context of specific knowledge domains in a generic way' (1987: 3).

Clearly, competence is a contested concept, whose definition has fundamental implications for generic skill frameworks. Whilst behaviourist conceptions of competence have been the focus of CBT critics, more holistic interpretations (see for example Hager and Gonczi 1993), seek to integrate attributes and performance into a single conceptual framework. Fairclough (1992) however argues that the generalisation of competence models across curricula also entails the generalisation of assumptions about knowledge, behaviour and learning which make less sense in some parts of programs than others.

Whilst holistic and integrated approaches to assessment are offered as a way of addressing different knowledge content (see for example Hager 1998), Hyland (1993) argues that the upshot of CBT systems is 'a conception of knowledge, understanding and human behaviour which is not just viciously reductionist but also naive and simplistic' (1993: x).

Clearly, the notion of generic skills within the context of competency based training leaves many issues unresolved. Issues related to the type of skills included, the conceptual underpinnings of skill taxonomies, and issues related to the nature of competence itself. These issues were manifest in Australia also, with McDonald (2000) noting that at the end of the Key Competencies initiative, there was still no agreement on the best term to describe:

- skills which apply to work generally rather than being specific to particular occupations or industries;
- a capacity to solve problems and exercise judgement; and
- characteristics such as creativity, flair and imagination (2000: 1).

Whilst not necessarily an issue for policy makers, the lack of shared understanding is clearly a factor that will influence the practical outcomes of any generic skills initiative. As noted by Stasz (1998), 'the lack of a clear and common conceptual framework for defining and assessing skills has been especially problematic for school reformers' (1998: 189). We can see then that whilst key policy drivers created demand for a generic skills agenda, the challenge of conceptualisation lay ahead for school and VET reformers as they pursued that particular policy initiative.

VET Literature as a Framework for Analysis

This chapter has examined the development of Australia's system for vocational education and training (VET) and outlined the major drivers of reform and review that fundamentally changed the VET landscape in the 1990's. In particular, it has examined the rationale and complex nature of generic skills, which emerged as a policy initiative across a number of western industrial economies in the early 1990s. In examining the VET literature in this area, a number of questions emerge in relation to the Key Competencies:

1. What were the outcomes of the Key Competencies initiative in Australia? Did they achieve their stated aims, and if not, why not?
2. What were the major policy drivers that influenced the Key Competencies? How were the Key Competencies affected by ongoing policy reforms?
3. Was the conceptualisation of the Key Competencies a barrier to successful implementation? Did the complex and disputed nature of generic skills influence the process and outcomes of the Key Competency initiative?
4. What does the Key Competencies initiative tell us about the nature of policy making in Australian education?

These initial questions have emerged from the VET literature and will be reviewed and refined after the literature on policy and policy making is examined in the next Chapter.

Chapter 2: Policy and Policy Making

Introduction

This chapter considers the literature on policy, policy making and policy analysis. In doing so, it identifies competing models of policy and considers their relevance to this research. It then uses this analysis to propose a new model for VET policy that might explain Australia's Key Competencies generic skills initiative.

What Is Policy?

There is a vast literature that attempts to define policy across a number of disciplines, including political science, public administration and policy sociology. The varying approaches reflect a range of views spanning the epistemological continuum from functionalist assumptions about how society works to studies of power, politics and discourse within society.

As a result of this variety, what constitutes a 'policy' has no standard usage (Prunty 1985). Policy is not a simple concept. As Cunningham suggests, 'policy is a bit like an elephant – you recognise one when you see it, but it is somewhat more difficult to define (1963: 229). Edwards believes that it is often difficult to identify analytically what a policy is and what it is intended to achieve (Edwards 1989). Understandings of what policy is are partly shaped by the different types of policy that can be identified. Anderson (1979) differentiates between substantive and procedural policies, distributive policies, redistributive and regulatory policies and material and symbolic policies. In making such distinctions however, one might argue, as has Dye, that policy might simply be 'whatever governments choose to do or not do' (Dye 1978: 3).

By this definition however, much of the complexity of policy and policy making is ignored. Policy is now generally considered to be more than the substantive

actions, products or texts of a particular administration or government. In identifying policy as both text and discourse, Ball (1994) warns against 'making unexamined assumptions about policy as things; policies are also processes and outcomes' (1994: 15). The ambiguity inherent in such a claim is acknowledged by Ball himself who concedes his 'own theoretical uncertainties about the meaning of policy', and suggests that 'one of the conceptual problems lurking within much policy research and policy sociology is that more often than not analysts fail to define conceptually what they mean by policy' (1994: 15).

Taylor et al (1997) have attempted to clarify some of these uncertainties by making some general observations about policy. They suggest that:

- policy is more than the text;
- policy is multi dimensional;
- policy is value laden;
- policies exist in context;
- policy making is a state activity;
- policies in different fields interact;
- policy implementation is never straightforward; and
- policies result in unintended as well as intended consequences (1997: 15).

Whilst these generalisations are of use in establishing some boundaries around the concept of policy, they also demonstrate that policy is not a static entity and that the scope of any definition of policy is necessarily broad. For example, Ball (1994), believes that we can see policies as 'representations which are encoded in complex ways (via struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and reinterpretations) and decoded in complex ways (via actors' interpretations and meanings in relation to their history, experiences, skills, resources and context' (1994: 16).

Taylor et al (1997) have highlighted the politics of policy. They suggest that 'politics is involved in the recognition of a problem which requires a policy response, through the formulation and implementation stages, including changes made along the way' (1997: 24).

On occasion, political conflicts embedded in policy statements can 'drive disputes to lower levels and result in a myriad of adjustments, compromises, and continued periodic conflicts' (Yeatman 1998: 25). The politics of the policy process also plays itself out through the practical consequences of particular policies being less important to policymakers than articulating positions and building alliances (Edelman 1967; Elder and Cobb 1983). Stronach and MacLure (1997) suggest that what counts as a 'policy solution' is increasingly a desire to be seen to be acting symbolically, and thus 'a need to dramatise a political response' rather than solve a problem (1997: 88). Similarly, Yeatman (1990) has noted that social policies 'are not responses to actual problems already formed and "out there", but that social policies 'constitute the problems to which they seem to be responses'. Often by working with assumptions about certain social arrangements, they create the need for a particular policy response. In this way Yeatman believes they 'are involved in problem setting, the setting of agendas' (1990: 158).

These views stand in stark contrast to more prescriptive approaches to policy evident in the fields of political science and public administration, which have traditionally applied rational and technical perspectives to policy. Harman (1984) for example defines policy as:

> 'the implicit or explicit specification of courses of purposive action being followed, or to be followed, in dealing with a recognised problem or matter of concern, and directed towards the accomplishment of some intended or desired set of goals. Policy can also be thought of as a position or stance developed in response to a problem or issue of conflict, and directed towards a particular objective (1984: 13).

Carley (1980) also advocates a rational approach to policy making, and similarly, Davis et al (1993) conceive of policy as the product of a linear feedback-loop planning model. Such static conceptions presuppose a calm and ordered policy environment (McIntyre and Wickert 2000) that allows for rational straightforward and unproblematic outcomes (Taylor et al 1997).

Clearly, positivistic assumptions about knowledge and the centrality of the scientific model underpin these approaches. In doing so however, they fail to acknowledge that most policies are 'ramshackle, compromise, hit and miss affairs made on the run' (Ball 1998: 26) which become part of the 'moving mosaic of the post-modern performance' (Hargreaves 1996: 120).

Yeatman (1998) argues that traditional approaches to policy are inherently undemocratic. Classic bureaucratic models, such as those developed by Weber (1978), presume that sound decisions based on expert knowledge will lead to a self-fulfilling course of action. Within such models, Yeatman argues that the targets of a particular policy can be 'effectively commanded, manipulated or induced to do what the decision requires them to do, without being positively engaged in the carrying out of the policy in question. *There is no policy process, there is only policy*' (Yeatman 1998: 23, emphasis added). Prunty (1985) claims that the oversimplification of policy reflected in rational models is partially responsible for the 'serious lack of attention to the issues of power, control, legitimacy, privilege, equity, justice and above all values that are inextricably embedded in the concept of policy' (1985: 133), a perspective that supports the view of policy as process.

It is clear from the literature that policy is far too complex to be defined and achieved in simple technicist ways. Yeatman (1998) notes however, that 'whilst paternalistic and control-oriented models of policy have by no means disappeared, they have lost legitimacy' (1998: 24).

If one moves away from technicist approaches, policy becomes more than a substantive text or document. As noted by Ball (1994), 'policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended. Policies are always incomplete insofar as they relate or map on to the wild profusion of local practice' (Ball 1994: 10). Whilst policies are 'textual interventions into practice' (Ball 1994: 16), 'policy involves the production of the text, the text itself, ongoing modifications to the text and processes of implementation into practice' (Taylor et al 1997: 25).

Such post-structuralist perspectives eschew policy rationality and consider policy to be rearticulated and recontextualised across the policy cycle (Fulcher 1989) where knowledge from practice can feed into ongoing modifications to the policy text (Taylor et al 1997). Consequently, understanding policy is often complicated because policy processes are occurring in a number of different domains (Fulcher 1989) and a number of different levels.

Policy can thus be seen as both a product and a process, one that has been variously described as complex, interactive and layered. Considine (1994) reflects these understandings by suggesting that 'policy has more to do with recipes rather than blueprints', with 'cooking rather than engineering' (1994: 3).

Thus whilst there remain differences of interpretation of what constitutes policy and how the politics of policy and the contestation of values and power shape policies as product, it appears evident from the literature that it is more helpful to consider policy as a process as opposed simply to texts, rules or judgements.

When considering policy as a process, the role of individuals within that process is highlighted. Yeatman (1998) suggests that to operationalise policy as a policy process, the work of the state administration has to be conceived democratically. In that way, the personal agency of individuals at all stages of the process is forgrounded. Ball (1993) has noted that when the delivery of policy is 'seen to be contingent on the culture and practice of the providers and service deliverers', it is possible to see them as 'central to ensuring that policy gets delivered in ways which make sense to those who use it' (1993: 67). The question of agency is clearly important here, and has perhaps been developed the most by Yeatman in her concept of policy activism. Yeatman (1998) suggests that policy is reconceived as the policy process when 'the distinctive contributions to policy of public officials, direct deliverers and clients are accorded visibility and valued' (1998: 31). She also notes that whilst this conception is emergent in public policy and management discourse, it still has to 'vie with establishment models of policy oriented in terms of the efforts of rational decision makers who control those who do the work of carrying out those decisions' (Yeatman 1998: 35).

In addition to this issue of individual agency within the policy process, there is also the question of context. Where does the policy process begin and end? Within their conception of the policy cycle, Bowe et al (1992) refer to three inter-related contexts: the context of policy text production, the context of practice and the context of influence (1992: 20). Ball (1994) extends this framework by adding the context of outcomes and the context of political strategy. Clearly then, a richer understanding of policy recognises that there are multiple contexts of policy (Ball 1994) involving participation by 'all those involved in policy all the way through points of conception, operational formulation, implementation, delivery on the ground, consumption and evaluation' (Yeatman 1998: 43). Given this, the policy process also includes 'the production of policy at the point of contact with the user or client being understood as a co-productive relationship' (Ball 1993: 13). Thus as noted by McIntyre and Wickert (2000), 'policy is a dynamic process that engages multiple participants in a range of contexts' (2000: 163).

The literature also identifies the state as a factor in the policy process. Taylor et al (1997) suggest that in order to consider the influence of power in the policy process, 'we need to recognise the importance of the state, which consists of political, judicial and administrative institutions which have a complex relationship with the government of the day' (1997: 29). In doing so, policy becomes inseparable from the state, a fact that further complicates analysis, as the state is not a single entity. Dale (1989) has summarised the state as being:

> 'not a monolith, or the same as government, or merely the government's executive committee. It is a set of publicly funded institutions, neither separately nor collectively necessarily in harmony, confronted by certain basic problems deriving from its relationship with capital' (1989: x).

Whilst the role of nation states is under scrutiny as a result of the effects of globalisation (see for example Brown 1999), it is clear from the literature that the state is partly accorded varying degrees of significance depending on the way that power is conceived within society.

Drawing on Foucault (1980), power can be seen as diffuse and productive rather than centralised and oppressive as is the case in more traditional views of the state. Accordingly, in a decentralised concept of state, the exercise of power by individuals takes many forms, including those involving state actors who struggle over policy texts and processes (Jessop 1990). Apple (1989) notes that 'as the state itself is an arena of conflict where groups with decidedly different interests struggle over policies, goals, procedures and personnel; state policy is always the result of multiple levels of conflicts and compromises that stem from and lead to contradictory outcomes' (1989: 13). Offe (1984) however, argues that state structures mediate the policy process, determining to some extent what issues get onto the policy agenda, how possible policy options become available and what results as policy outcomes.

The state then involves both organisations and individuals who have influence on policy, and in the view of Taylor et al (1997), 'both state structures and state policy workers rearticulate policy pressures in the move from the articulation of a problem on to the policy agenda to the generation of a policy text' (1997: 31).

Different accounts of policy and policy making also position values and interests in different ways. They are summarised below.

- Pluralist approaches argue that governments attempt to please as many interest groups in the policy process as possible (eg: Rein 1983);
- Elitist approaches see governments acting in relation to the values and interests of dominant groups (eg: Apple 1993);
- Neo Marxist approaches take this further with reference to those that control the economy (eg: Dale 1989); and
- Feminist approaches may be pluralist, elitist or neo Marxist but all see the state as operating to reproduce male interests and power (eg: Yates 1993); whilst
- Other post structuralist approaches see policy making as an arena of struggle over meaning, or as the politics of discourse (eg: Ball 1994, Yeatman 1994).

Clearly, due to its dynamic nature and contested meaning, a definition of policy is not easily constructed. This is particularly the case if policy is viewed as a process, involving a range of contexts, stakeholders and values, including those of the state. Consequently, the views of Yeatman and Ball in particular have shaped my approach to working with the Key Competencies as a case study of education policy making in Australia. The Key Competencies are not simply the result of the Mayer Committee's endeavours. The Key Competencies are part of a complex policy process spanning a range of contexts and involving a number of policy actors and institutions with different values. Viewing policy as a dynamic process in this way raises the issue of what constitutes policy making per se, and it is to this aspect of the literature that we now turn.

Policy Making

Whilst the process of policy making is understood to be complex and multi dimensional, numerous writers have identified discrete stages or features of the policy process. Palmer and Short (1994) for example, have argued that there are five stages in the policy-making process:

- problem identification and agenda setting;
- policy formation;
- adoption of the policy;
- policy implementation; and
- program and policy evaluation (1994: 21).

Rist (1994) however, identifies three phases within the policy cycle: policy formulation, policy implementation and policy accountability, each of which 'has its own order and logic; its own information requirements and its own policy actors' (1994:114). Rist concludes that there is only a limited degree of overlap among these phases, with some analysts suggesting that they merit individual analysis and investigation (see for example Selby Smith et al 1998).

In identifying common features from across a number of models of the policy cycle, Taylor et al (1997) suggest that identifiable stages include:

- setting the policy agenda;
- policy development;
- policy formulation;
- policy implementation;
- policy delivery;
- policy evaluation; and
- policy monitoring (1997: 30).

Whilst the relationship between these stages no doubt varies according to the particular mix of actors and contexts involved in the policy process, it should be understood that policy making is more complex than a simple linear-circular sequence of feedback loops based on the stages identified above.

Policy making thus encompasses that which occurs before the point of policy formulation to the point of its delivery, when and if it occurs. Policy processes thus accrue both prior to the production of a policy text and afterwards, through the stages of implementation and reinterpretation (Taylor et al 1997:35).

It is also worth noting that in the last decade in particular, policy activity has increased markedly. Yeatman (1998) notes that 'the areas of social life which are subject to "policy" have grown extraordinarily' (1998: 18). McIntyre and Wickert (2000) have identified similar sentiments in the literature reflecting policy 'hysteria' (Stronach and Morris 1994); 'policy turbulence' or 'epidemic' (Levin 1998); 'waves of reform' (Stronach and MacLure 1997) and 'policy rage' (Silver 1990). McIntyre and Wickert see this intensification of policy activity as reflecting 'the challenges of post modernity' (2000: 162), where public policy is presumed to keep pace with the demands of complex contemporary societies.

Clearly then, both policy and policy making are difficult to define, as they are complex social phenomena that can be interpreted in various ways.

These interpretations vary as a result of different analytical approaches and appear to be shaped to some extent by the relative importance of different policy contexts and the significance attributed to personal agency. Models that rely on a linear approach to policy often deny the interdependency of different policy contexts and understate the role of individuals in shaping policy through personal agency.

Models of Policy

The literature on political science, public administration and policy sociology abounds with references to policy and policy making. Whilst various models of policy making exist, the four models discussed below have been identified from the literature as providing some relevance to vocational education and training policy in Australia's federal system, relevant because to varying degrees they address the issues of context and agency identified above. These models are:

- a policy flow model (Kingdon 1984);
- a policy systems model (Considine 1994);
- a policy cycle model (Ball 1990, 1994); and
- a policy activism model (Yeatman 1998).

Whilst the authors themselves do not use these descriptions, the given titles have been applied in an attempt to capture the distinguishing features articulated by them. The models have also been chosen because in general terms they focus on different dimensions of policy making: at the level of individuals (Yeatman), of organisations (Ball) and systems (Considine and Kingdon).

Other examples could have been chosen, but a number were excluded on the basis of their rationality, given that they presuppose a set of chronological steps in policy development. As Taylor et al (1997) suggest, 'whilst this might be a useful way to work through policy processes... in reality most policy is

developed in a more disjointed, less rational and more political in fashion'
(1997: 25).

The four models are now considered in more detail.

A Policy Flow Model

Kingdon (1984) suggests that policy making is composed of three process
streams. These streams are:

- *Problem Recognition*:
  This stream is where various problems come to capture the attention of
  people in and around government;

- *Forming and Refining Policy Proposals*:
  This stream is where there is a policy community of specialists - bureaucrats
  (planners, evaluators, budget analysis, legislative staff), academics, interest
  groups and researchers that concentrate on generating proposals. 'They
  each have their pet ideas or axes to grind; they float their ideas up and the
  ideas bubble around in these policy communities' (1984: 92); and

- *Politics:*
  The political stream is 'composed of things like swings of national mood,
  vagaries of public opinion, election results, changes of administration, shifts
  in partisan or ideological distributions [of decision makers], shifts in partisan
  or ideological distributions [of decision makers], and interest group pressure
  campaigns' (1984: 93).

Kingdon suggests that these three process streams operate more or less
independently of one another:

> 'Problems sometimes emerge without obvious solutions, solutions are
> argued without reference to particular problems, the policy community
> converges on particular problems or solutions independently of key
> political actors, or key political actors articulate interests and ideologies
> that are attached to no particular policy solutions' (1984: 93).

He notes that this:

> 'policy primeval soup of problems, solutions, advocates, decision makers, and resources work to form agendas of ideas in good currency, which, coupled with some set of precipitating events, creates an occasion for decision making. Problems and solutions get joined together in often unpredictable and opportunistic ways, and policies are set in motion' (1984: 93).

Thus Kingdon characterises policy making as being a constant flow of problems, solutions, participants, resources, and outcomes. He notes that the process is not a rational one, rejecting notions that 'problems arise and solutions are deployed through the purposive actions of participants using their resources to produce desired outcomes' (1984: 94).

Rather, he suggests that problems and solutions flow in more or less independent streams, and that they converge, often in random ways, around critical events. This notion of randomness highlights the issue of timing. Kingdon notes that 'an item can suddenly get hot. Something is done about it, or nothing, but in either case, policy makers soon turn their attention to something else' (1984: 94). In that way there is a 'policy window', but one that is only open for a set time before it shuts.

It could be argued that Kingdon's model emphasises the politics of policy whilst downplaying the contestation and negotiation that can occur over longer time frames. It also has a limited view of the range of contexts involved in the policy process and in a sense retains a hierarchical top down approach that does not account for the actions of those who implement and mediate policies. In related work that also focussed on the policy process in the USA, McLaughlin (1987) also noted that bargaining and negotiation are involved at all stages rather than at a particular window of opportunity as claimed by Kingdon. Notwithstanding these limitations, Kingdon's model emphasises the opportunistic and political dimensions of state and individual agency, and in doing so, enhances the understanding of policy flow applied in this research.

A Systems Based Policy Model

Considine's (1994) central claim is that policy emerges from identifiable patterns of interdependence between key social actors such as political parties, corporations, unions, professions and citizens (1994: 2).

His model of policy systems proposes that these key participants in a policy system are linked through institutions, groups, networks and other continuing relationships. His conceptualisation of a policy system is different from traditional applications of systems theory to policy (see for example Easton 1965) that conceptualise the policy process as being a balance between what the environment dictates and political institutions give in response. Considine rejects such a traditional systems perspective and suggests that policy systems are built from material and intellectual aspects, manifest in the dimensions of political economy; policy culture; policy institutions, and policy actors.

The political economy is defined as the economic relations underpinning policy systems. Political economy thus 'includes public goods, resources, property and the division of labour and technology' (1994: 47).

Each policy system is also considered to have 'its own culture, made up of characteristic values, preferences and habits of interaction' (1994: 53). An understanding of the role of cultural factors within a policy system can thus be developed by considering values, assumptions, categories, customs and conventions, languages and names, stories and boundaries.

There are also a range of institutions and key factors identified as likely to impact on policy including executives and legislatures, bureaucracies, professions, legislation, elections, budgets and intergovernmental structures. The types of policy influence these institutions may be expected to have relate to the 'effects upon elites, the opportunity for participation by citizens, access for interest groups and as impediments to successful implementation of policy intentions' (1994: 72).

Considine suggests that beneath the surface of any policy system 'is a battle to rank priorities, evaluate competing claims and define responsibilities' (1994: 47). As a result policy systems need to be understood as 'complex structures for political learning and memory driven by actors in different policy networks' (1994: 48). Considine thus argues that understanding policy requires some appreciation of the 'patterns of network formation and the conditions under which a particular set of such relations may decline and change' (1994: 128). The formation and participation levels of these actor networks are likely to be influenced by the creativity of individuals and their networks.

Considine's systems approach provides a more holistic view of policy and the elements of policy making, thus making explicit the 'politics of education', which Dale (1994), in differentiating between education politics, notes is lacking from many approaches to the study of education policy. Whilst Considine also foregrounds and emphasises the role of policy actors, his claim that there are 'identifiable patterns of interdependence' between these dimensions seems to downplay the 'messy realities' (Ball 1990: 9) of policy and policy making that are beyond a systems approach to policy.

A Policy Cycle Model

As noted previously, in moving away from a model of state control, the concept of a policy cycle has been used to understand the complex relationships that are embodied in policy processes (Bowe et al 1992). Building on his earlier contributions to that work, Ball (1994) has further developed this framework of a policy cycle to one that 'presents as a set of interrelating and interactive loops, which although they have a temporal dimension, are not simply linear' (McIntyre and Wickert 2000: 159). As noted by Taylor et al (1997) Ball has extended this framework of contexts to include the contexts of policy text production, practice, influence, outcomes and political strategy (1997: 25).

Ball sees this model providing some conceptual structure to the field, and notes that:

'each context consists of a number of arenas of action – some private some public. Each context involves struggle and compromise and ad-hocery. They are loosely coupled and there is no simple direction of flow of information between them' (1994: 26).

He argues that these contexts operate in a continuous policy cycle and that their operations 'enable policy to be recontextualised and rewritten throughout the process of its existence' (1994: 78). McIntyre and Wickert (2000) note that this implies that 'policies have to be understood as interrelated in unpredictable ways' (2000: 159). A brief consideration of these contexts follows.

The context of influence:
This is where public policy is normally initiated and where policy discourses are constructed. It is where 'interested parties struggle to influence the definition and social purposes of education' (Bowe et al 1992: 19). In this context key policy concepts are established, 'acquire currency and credence and provide a discourse and lexicon for policy formulation' (1992: 20).

The context of policy text production:
In differentiating between the context of influence, where 'narrow interests and dogmatic ideologies are expressed' (1992: 20), the context of policy text production is seen to involve the language of 'general public good' (1992: 20). Policy texts are seen as representing policy, but are noted as being possibly contradictory because 'they are fraught with the possibility of misunderstanding as texts are generalised, written in relation to idealisations of the real world and are never exhaustive, never covering all eventualities' (1992: 21). Features of this context then also include 'attempts to control the meaning of policy through its representation' (1992: 21).

The context of practice:
This is the context in which responses to texts are seen to have 'real consequences' in the 'arena of practice to which policy refers' (1992: 21). It is in this context that 'policy is not simply received and implemented', rather being 'subject to interpretation and then recreated' (1992: 22).

It is noted that in this context 'policy writers cannot control the meanings of their texts' and that 'interpretation is a matter of struggle' where 'different interpretations will be in contest as they relate to different interests' (1992: 22).

The context of outcomes:

Ball (1994) argues that 'the relationship between first order (practice) effects and second order effects' is 'the context of outcomes' where 'concern is with the issues of justice, equality and individual freedom', where 'policies are analysed in terms of their impact upon, and their interactions with, existing inequalities and forms of injustice' (1994: 26). Extending this critical perspective, Taylor et al (1997) have suggested further that this context has two components, namely 'outcomes in policy practice measured against the articulated goals of the policy, and outcomes in terms of social justice goals' (1997: 25)

The context of political strategy:

In relation to this last policy context, Ball suggests that the context of political strategy involves what Troyna (1993) calls the 'identification of a set of political and social activities which might more effectively tackle inequalities' (1993: 12). In this way, Taylor et al note that it 'operates in terms of our evaluations of the former two sets of outcomes' (1997: 25) and in doing so seeks to apply a 'Foucauldian genealogy', which seeks to 'criticise the workings of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent' (1994: 27).

Whilst these two latter contexts may seem to be articulated for the purposes of policy analysis rather than an understanding of policy and policy making per se, they add additional frames within which policy can be described and explained. Ball's policy cycle model foregrounds the role of context and significantly contributes to the framework applied in this research by providing a useful set of policy contexts that have been used to shape the analysis of the Key Competencies program.

A Policy Activism Model

Policy activism is a concept that first emerged through the work of Heclo (1978) and was expanded and further developed by Yeatman (1998). In considering the workings of the 'interventionist state' (see Yeatman 1990, 1994), Yeatman argues that a culture of social problem solving through policy making 'invites different kinds of activism that are centred on the policy process' (1998: 4). The concept of policy as process is thus central to Yeatman's ideas of policy activism:

> 'The emergence of the policy process as a complex, multi-levelled and, to some degree at least, discontinuous process traversing very different spheres of agency and types of agent (politicians, public officials, service deliverers and service users) is entirely contingent on struggles to democratise the policy process and to engage the agency of these very differently positioned players' (1998: 25)

A democratic culture is central to the actions of policy activists when the policy process is open to the participation of a wide range of stakeholders. Yeatman notes:

> 'Policy activism is more or less legitimate, and more or less developed, depending on whether the government of the day favours an executive approach to policy or a participative approach to policy which turns it in to a policy process. When the executive model is the one adopted by the government of the day, policy activism is less legitimate and developed even though policy activists of various kinds may resist the executive model. When the participative approach is favoured by the government of the day, policy activism becomes both more legitimate and developed. For the conception of policy as a policy process to be possible, the work of state administration has to be conceived democratically.' (1998: 23)

Through Yeatman's approach, policy is reconceived as the policy process 'when the distinctive contributions to policy of public officials, direct deliverers and clients are accorded visibility and valued' (1998: 25).

Yeatman also notes that it is worthwhile to distinguish between bureaucratic, professional, practitioner and consumer types of policy activist, and in defining define policy activist in these ways, 'means that we can enter into some interesting debates concerning the extent to which particular types of policy actor were or are policy activists' (1998: 34).

Thus whilst Yeatman's concept of policy activist focuses on the agency of individuals within a democratic policy process, it arises from specific understandings developed through her analysis of the contemporary interventionist state and her theorisation of corporate managerialism and its 'new contractualism' (see Yeatman 1990, 1994, 1996).

In this regime, 'policy is strategic in character, geared to objectives, benchmarks and timelines and subject to robust debate involving a contest of values' (cited in McIntyre 1998: 3). Thus whilst not seeking to describe policy making per se, Yeatman's policy activist model is particularly useful in foregrounding the roles of individuals within the broader policy culture of a policy system.

These four models of policy provide a range of insights into the policy process. Each provides an opportunity to understand policy in a different way, by highlighting specific issues and dimensions. All have strengths and weaknesses, with some seemingly more applicable to the Key Competencies initiative than others. Key features of the models considered to date are:

- the role of policy actors is fundamental to the policy process (after Yeatman 1998);
- the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies can be tracked across different policy contexts (after Ball 1994);
- politics is central to the policy process (after Kingdon 1984);
- the role of institutions is significant (after Considine 1994);

- policy is a process that is rearticulated across the policy cycle (after Fulcher 1989); and

- different policy streams impact on outcomes (after Kingdon 1984).

It is worth noting that these general models do overlap when applied to a particular policy context, such as Australia's VET system. Consequently, when combined together, these elements might form a workable model of education policy making in Australia. However, whilst none of the models should be expected to specifically account for the operation of Australia's federal system, it does appear that they fail to give adequate weight to the link between research and policy. That link has particular relevance to a case study on the Key Competencies, as that initiative involved a significant number of research projects that sought to better understand the potential of generic skills within Australian VET.

Research and Policy

It is clear from the literature that there are various policy contexts where research can influence policy, and vice versa. In their analysis of the impact of research on recent Australian VET policy, Selby Smith et al (1998) suggested that:

> 'we know from case studies of the use and impact of research both within education and in similar areas that the relationship between research and its outcome is almost always complex and not easily discerned and that it is important to note that we do not expect to detect easily the impact of particular pieces of research' (1998: 2).

Spanning a range of epistemological perspectives, Weiss (1992) identified seven different approaches to knowledge utilisation that set out different relationships between research and policy. These were:

- The knowledge driven model – where the research findings inform new technologies that are applied to solve a given problem;

- The problem solving model – where the results from a specific study are applied to a pending decision;

- The interactive model – where social research is part of a dynamic process that influences policy makers;

- The political model – where research is used to justify decisions already made by policy makers;

- The tactical model – where research is used to deflect criticisms that due process has not been followed;

- The social enterprise model – where research forms part of a wider movement of social development; and

- The enlightenment model – where social research provides a backdrop of ideas and orientations that influence available options. (1992: 23-30)

Given the role of research in the Key Competencies policy process, these different models of the relationship between policy and research provide new perspectives that can add value to the models of policy detailed earlier. Whilst it is not possible to categorise what policy research relationship applies in each policy model, the knowledge utilisation literature demonstrates that there are different relationships that can exist between research and policy at different stages of the policy process. McIntyre and Wickert (2000) support this view by arguing that 'there is potential for understanding how research activity gets to engage in policy in a number of different kinds of ways and for a range of purposes' (2000: 159). However, drawing on their experience of Australian education policy, McIntyre and Wickert (2000) also argue that:

- the process of policy development almost inevitably requires the production of policy research;

- a rationalist model of policy analysis continues to dominate in research and policy discourses; and

- there is a complex set of working relationships between researchers and policy-makers despite a continued commitment to a rationalist process, and despite the apparently limited direct utilisation of research findings and recommendations (2000: 160).

Such viewpoints recognise the relevance of research to policy but acknowledge the problematic nature of that relationship. This dimension of the policy process is particularly relevant to the Key Competencies initiative.

Policy Analysis

Given that there is no agreed model of policy or policy making, it is perhaps not surprising that there is no single approach to policy analysis that can be applied to the study of policy.[21]

Indeed the field of educational policy analysis is also a contested one, with debate surrounding, amongst other things, its position in relation to the fields of political science and educational studies (see for example Troyna 1994 and Taylor et al 1997). Grace (1984) in noting the rise of policy studies in Britain, suggest that a new field of policy scholarship has arisen. Troyna (1994) believes that this body of work has created a 'genre of policy studies which breaks ranks with both empiricist accounts of education policy and those which rest upon managerialist perspectives of the policy process' (1994: 3).

Despite acknowledging these recent trends however, he goes on to critique some of the researchers who place their studies 'in the self proclaimed discourse of education policy sociology' (Troyna 1994: 4). Despite these misgivings, he observed that 'the corpus of research revealed influences from an impressive array of theoretical and disciplinary sources' (1994: 4), and cited Finch (1985) in noting that 'methodological eclectism reigns supreme in this subfield of education policy studies' (1994: 5). Irrespective of the range of approaches available, the approach taken when analysing policy will clearly depend on a number of factors including the purpose of the analysis, the nature of the policy, the position of the analyst and the contexts of policy production.

---

[21] Charles Raab's succinct history of education policy analysis is instructive. See Halpin and Troyna's landmark work *Researching Educational Policy: Ethical and Methodological Issues* (1994).

As noted by Taylor et al (1997), Maguire and Ball (1994) have usefully outlined three different approaches to qualitative policy research in the UK. The first of these has been described as 'elite studies' which involve either a focus on long term policy trends through life history methods involving past and present senior policy makers (see Gewirtz and Ozga 1990), or interview based research on specific contemporary educational policy developments (for example Ball 1990). As Ozga (1987) notes, such approaches reveal 'complexities and contradictions in the internal structures of education policy making which macro theoreticians have found easier to deal with as relatively autonomous and homogeneous entities' (1987: 148).

The second category of policy research they classify as 'trajectory studies', which involve elite studies of policy text production as the first stage in the research agenda. Ball (1994) suggests that they provide 'a mechanism for linking and tracing the discursive origins and possibilities of policy, the intentions embedded in policy, responses to policy and effects of policy' (1994: 26). In reviewing the field, Taylor et al (1997) note that trajectory studies 'follow a specific policy through the stages of gestation, the micro politics inside the state involved in text production, and through case studies of the implementation of the policy into practice' (1997: 42).

The third category identified by Maguire and Ball (1994) is implementation studies. These focus on the 'interpretation of and engagement in policy texts and the translation of these texts into practice' (1994: 280). Taylor et al (1997) note that these studies tend to use participant observation methods together with interviews within critical, ethnographic case study traditions' (1997: 42).

One aspect of the debates over different approaches to policy analysis is the issue of the most appropriate level of analysis. Taylor et al (1997) summarise the argument well by noting that:

> "some analysts make the distinction between 'macro' and 'micro' levels,
> whilst others use a 'macro', meso', 'micro' distinction. Macro issues are
> seen as those which impact upon the whole policy making apparatus, for

example global economic pressures; 'meso' is used to refer to the intermediate levels of policy making, for example a state education department implementing a national policy; while 'micro' usually refers to policy making at the levels of schools and classrooms" (1997: 44)

They go on to argue that 'there is a need to explore the multi level character of policy processes, with particular emphasis on the articulations or linkages between the different levels' and in doing so distinguish between the 'contexts, texts and consequences of policy' (1997: 44).

Dale (1994) however, suggests that much policy analysis is preoccupied with education politics at the expense of the 'politics of education'. As a result of this, he suggests there are two main consequences, that it 'impedes the emergence of constructive alternatives' and results in 'parochialism, ethnocentrism and problem solving orientations' (1994: 40).

In noting the significance of engaging critically with the intentions of policy initiatives, Taylor et al (1997) emphasise that is 'extremely important that policy problems as constructed are carefully scrutinised,' noting that the literature emphasises 'the need to problematise how policy problems are constructed and how they are framed within policy documents' (1997: 52).

The challenge of policy analysis then rests in part on methodological perspectives and in part on the contexts, texts and consequences of policy that may be considered at the macro, meso or micro levels.

The literature on policy and policy making clearly grapples with a number of issues in different ways. These issues can be summarised as being related to:

- defining policy;
- developing models of the policy process, cycle or system;
- describing and explaining the importance of values and the interests they represent;

- describing and explaining the exercise of power within policy and policy making;

- accounting for the roles and actions of individual policy actors; and

- describing and explaining the role of the state and related institutions in policy and policy making.

Policy Literature as a Framework for Analysis

The review of the literature in this Chapter has identified different interpretations of policy and policy making, many of which reject traditional and idealised views that see policy as a linear and scientific means of implementing government plans. The review in this chapter has also provided valuable insights into the nature of local institutions, policy actors and politics which are all relevant to the operation of policy in Australian VET.

Consequently, the general questions posed from the literature on VET and generic skills at the end of Chapter 1 have been refined and extended to better reflect the issues evident from the literature on policy and policy making. As a result of these further insights, there are four clear questions to be addressed through the research, namely:

1. What were the key policy events that influenced the policy trajectory of the Key competencies initiative?
2. To what extent did federal education politics influence the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies?
3. How did policy actors and institutions influence the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies across different policy contexts? and
4. Did the conceptualisation of the Key Competencies limit the outcomes achieved?

These specific questions also lead to a more general overarching question of whether the process and outcomes of the Key Competencies initiative suggest the need for a new model of education policy to understand VET in Australia.

Whilst the different models of policy considered in this chapter suggest a range of different features, not all are relevant to the Key Competencies initiative. However, a number of key points from the literature considered to this point have been used to define the conceptualisation of policy applied in this research. They are that:

1. policy actors are fundamental to the policy process (after Yeatman 1998);
2. politics is central to the policy process (after Kingdon 1984);
3. the role of institutions is significant (after Considine 1994);
4. the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies can be tracked across different policy contexts (after Ball 1994);
5. different policy streams impact on outcomes (after Kingdon 1984);
6. conceptual issue surrounding generic skills hampered the implementation of the Key Competencies;
7. policy is a process that is rearticulated across the policy cycle (after Fulcher 1989); and
8. politics within the Key Competencies policy process were influenced by corporate federalism (after Lingard 1991).

It is suggested here that these policy principles may inform a new model of VET policy. Whilst these principles reflect the nature of the policy process in general, it is suggested that they address the particular characteristics of the Key Competencies initiative evident from the literature and my own personal professional experience.

In considering the nature of policy analysis, Taylor et al (1997) argue that there should be 'an open and creative approach which emphasises finding the appropriate theory and concepts for the task at hand, rather than narrowly applying a particular theory which may close off possibilities for interpretation' (1997: 38). Consequently, in the conclusion of this thesis, the key policy principles shown above will be reviewed in the light of the research data to propose a new a new model of education policy to understand VET in Australia.

Chapter 3: Method

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the project and detail the aims of the research. I also consider both method and methodology, examining in detail the tools and process of enquiry, as well as the interpretive, critical and deconstructive approaches that have guided this research.

Overview of the Research Project

The research was undertaken on a part time basis whilst the researcher was employed in different roles in Australia's VET system. In this way, the work retained a direct link with the development and implementation of Australia's National Training Framework, and through that, the policy trajectory of generic skills in Australian vocational education and training.

The research sought to apply critical hermeneutics and discourse analysis within a broad interpretive paradigm. In keeping with this approach, the Key Competency initiative and what followed was considered as a case study.

By definition, a case study is a structuring of interpretations of a context (Stake 1994). Applied to the study of policy development and implementation, it has also been termed a trajectory study (Maguire and Ball 1994). The Key Competency case study used in this research refers to the experiences of individuals and the outcomes of a range of State and national projects and policy initiatives.

Research Questions

The aim of the research was to answer the following questions:

1. What were the key policy events that influenced the policy trajectory of the Key competencies initiative?

2. To what extent did federal education politics influence the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies?

3. How did policy actors and institutions influence the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies across different policy contexts?

4. Did the conceptualisation of the Key Competencies limit the outcomes achieved?

Through answering these research questions, the research also sought to establish to what extent the process and outcomes of the Key Competencies initiative suggest the need for a new model of education policy to understand VET in Australia?

These questions originated from my grounded experience with the Key Competencies and were refined with reference to the literature on Australian VET, policy making and generic skills.

Research Perspectives

Contemporary educational reforms have been cited as contributing to the rise of a genre of policy studies that break with established empiricist and managerialist approaches (Troyna 1994).

By their very nature, the aims of this research were not compatible with conventional methods of scientific enquiry because of the assumptions they make about knowledge and meaning. The research questions underpinning this work have been framed in such a way as to reject positivistic assumptions and draw on alternatives to this traditional model.

Lather (1991) notes that positivism is the result of attempts to extend scientific study to the study of society and suggests that it generally refers to 'those approaches based on identifying facts with measurable entities' (1991: 8).

In essence, positivism makes several assumptions about knowledge and the world, including that the world has an objective reality that can be discovered, that reality is not created by the human mind, and that the validity of knowledge is based on repeatability (Deshler and Hagan 1989). Lather (1991) also argues that 'efforts to make sense of lived experiences with positivist theories and hypothesising (testing) frameworks are inadequate and misleading at best'. (1991: 9)

In rejecting a positivist approach however, I have not sought to replace one orthodoxy with another ie: post-positivism for positivism, but rather to move away from the notion that there exists one preferred research perspective. As argued by Taylor et al (1997), there should be 'an open and creative approach which emphasises finding the appropriate theory and concepts for the task at hand, rather than narrowly applying a particular theory which may close off possibilities for interpretation' (1997: 38).

Contemporary social research has entered a period of uncertainty as a result of qualified claims concerning the efficacy of traditional research approaches. Each research approach is constrained and limited in its own right because of the particular views it holds on the nature of meaning and the tools that it uses to generate and represent that meaning.

Generally speaking, postmodernism and post structuralism are ways of thinking that have led to this position. As Chappell notes, these ways of thinking:

- problematise all of the research paradigms that influence the field of social and educational research;
- question the philosophical, epistemological and ontological assumptions that are foundational to modern research methodologies;
- reject the tenets of positivism with its claims to privileged truth and objectivity; and
- foreground the connections between power, knowledge and language in the discursive production of reality' (2000: 87).

Whilst in one way this situation makes problematic the choice of research perspectives to be applied to any research, it also creates some freedom.

Consequently, in this research a choice was made to combine different research perspectives in an attempt to address the shortcomings of each approach through a counterbalance of emphasis.

The table that follows is drawn from the work of Garrick (1996) and provides a useful overview of approaches to enquiry.

Predict	Understand	Emancipate	Deconstruct
positivist	Interpretivist	Critical	poststructural
naturalist	Constructivist	neo-marxist	postmodern
	Phenomenological	Feminist	post paradigmatic diaspora
	Hermeneutic	Minoritarian	
	symbolic interactionism	praxis-oriented	
	Microethnography	freirean	
		participatory	

Table 3: Approaches to Enquiry (Garrick 1996: 106)

The research approach taken in this thesis has been shaped by three of the major research perspectives shown above. The interpretive, critical and post modern approaches have been applied in varying degrees to understand, emancipate and deconstruct the policy process surrounding Key Competencies.

Whilst these different traditions have at times conflicting epistemeological and ontological beliefs, the strengths of each research tradition have been used to counterbalance the perceived weaknesses that exist in each research perspective. These research perspectives are now considered in more detail.

Interpretive Tradition

The interpretive tradition draws on a number of research histories including social phenomenology (Schutz 1967) and Weberian social theory (Weber 1949). Interpretive methods connect with methodological assumptions that

presume social practices are a foci of inquiry. They also seek to interpret social action in terms of the subjective meanings of participants. An interpretive perspective would thus seek to foreground the meaning making activities of individuals in order to generate local perspectives on the operation and formation of policy. Ball (1994) suggests that a constant tension develops between the intent of formal policies and the ensuing actions of people and institutions in specific contexts. An interpretive perspective allows local conditions to be analysed in contrast to projections of policy implementation that are often made at a systemic or more macro level.

The interpretive research perspective also supports a definition of policy that includes the actions of individuals who reinterpret and reapply the policy in their own way, thus contributing to the making of the policy itself (Ball 1990). Yeatman (1998) argues that from the perspective of the advocate or policymaker, 'policies appear to be tightly connected assertions of value and fact', but from the perspective of the researcher, 'policies are more or less uncertain predictions, never to be taken at face value' (1998: 32).

Such an approach also supports a view of policy analysis that acknowledges the continuum within policy making that includes both the actions of politicians and bureaucrats and those of the practitioners who interpret and implement the policy. Yeatman (1998) also argues that rather than studying formal processes of decision making, research should 'focus on the policy communities or issue networks that form around concerns', and in doing so 'treat relationships between problems, solutions, and political interests in policy making as problematic' (1998: 30).

If a linear model of the policy process is replaced by a more idiosyncratic and fragmented understanding of how policy decisions result in changes to practice, then as Yates (1995) suggests, policy research should aim not to build an abstract model of how policy works, but to 'show what various substantive documents, or ways of acting, or ways of responding to policy directives mean' (1995: 3).

Critical Analysis

The critical tradition draws on the work of the social theorists known collectively as the Frankfurt School and more recently on the work of Habermas. In education, the development of critical perspectives during the 1970's was shaped by neo-Marxist and feminist social theorists from other disciplines. According to Anderson (1989), these theorists 'accelerated the search for representations of social reality capable of providing social explanations sensitive to the complex relationship between human agency and social structure'. (1989: 253).

This research tradition involves methodological assumptions that presume ideology and the influence of powerful interest groups to be a focus of inquiry.

Applying this approach to policy analysis however, can produce different outcomes, depending on the focus and emphasis given. Troyna (1994a) for example suggests that critical policy analysis should be interested not only in what is going on and why, but in doing something about it. Taylor et al (1997) argue that a critical approach should concern itself with the question of how progressive change might occur and the desirability of alternate policy options. Such an approach would 'attend simultaneously to the workings of institutions and the workings of society, given the unique roles they play in socializing individuals and transmitting, maintaining and recreating culture' (Prunty 1985: 135).

Prunty further argues that educational policy analysis must be conducted from within a political and ethical stance, for 'if the policy analyst assumes an objective stance and accepts the neutrality of the educative process, tacit legitimacy is given to a system which perpetuates inequality' (1985: 135). Prunty (1985) also argues that policy analysis extends to choosing carefully a stance which will best serve those whose interests and values have been 'subordinated to the desires of a dominant few' (1985: 136). Such views do not see policy making in education as simply something out there which has to be criticised and removed, but rather recognises it as a possible source of broader

change due to links between policy and broader social movements (Yates 1995).

By applying a critical perspective to this research, the affects of political and institutional power within the policy process can be foregrounded and analysed in terms of how it mediated and shaped the Key Competency agenda.

Postmodern

Usher and Edwards (1994) note that postmodernism is 'not really a system of ideas and concepts in any conventional sense, rather it is complex and multiform, and resists reductive and simplistic explanations' (1994: 1). Postmodernist ideas challenge existing concepts, structures and hierarchies. Within a postmodern approach, discourse analysis features as a tool to analyse and interrogate the application of power and control within society.

Discourses exercise power by determining not only who can speak but what can be said. Chappell (1999) suggests that 'the current discourses of education and training are constructing new educational realities', a view borne out quite clearly by the presence of generic skills within contemporary VET. From this perspective, the development, implementation and transformation of the Key Competencies can be critiqued and analysed in terms of how particular discourses have created policy contexts, texts and consequences through their construction of 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1980: 43).

Grace (1990) observes that an education policy may be as much an outcome of a series of power struggles among a number of agencies, as it is an outcome of a series of working parties concerned with equity, efficiency and excellence. Yates (1995) thus notes that policy studies can be considered as 'an engaged and political relation between people and their historical, political, institutional and gendered positionings' (1995: 15). In attempting to deal with this complexity, Grace (1990) also believes that concepts of conflict and struggle have to be put at the centre of policy analysis rather than at its margins (1990: 166).

The competing claims of different research methods now make it necessary for researchers to make explicit their method, and highlight the limitations inherent in that method. McIntyre (1998b) argues that to do so means that 'the development of methodological arguments is better done in terms of the substantive issues arising from the research' (1998b: 78).

Methodological Assumptions

A major difficulty with empiricist research is the attenuated accounts of methodology that deny the situated, negotiated interpretive practices which accomplish the research (McIntyre 1994). The interpretive practices applied in this research have been influenced by the following methodological assumptions:

- that constructivist and contextualist perspectives are privileged over positivist assumptions about knowledge and reality;
- that by applying postmodern and poststructuralist ideas, contemporary social research methodologies are problematic and can be exposed as resting on assumptions about knowledge and reality that are also problematic;
- that research is not a technical and instrumentalist practice;
- that methodology is constructed rather than presumed as a consequence of paradigm;
- that social practices are a foci of inquiry;
- that the ideologies and influences of powerful interest groups are a foci of inquiry; and
- that researcher reflexivity is central to the research process.

Method

By definition, a case study is a structuring of interpretations of a context. A successful case study should provide the reader with a three dimensional

picture and illustrate relationships, macro and micropolitical issues and patterns of influence that operate on and within particular contexts (see Stake 1994).

The case study in this research was populated by information and data from a range of sources: semi-structured interviews involving focused conversations around key issues; my personal reflections on my role in Key Competencies projects; and textual analysis of research reports, discussion papers, submissions and policy papers. In this way, it is argued that a form of triangulation (Denzin 1989) was achieved.

Interviews were conducted with policy actors directly involved in the development, piloting and implementation of the Key Competencies.

Interviewing has a long history, dating back in recorded history to Egyptian times where interviews were conducted during censuses (Babbie 1992). Early social researchers such as Booth and Du Bois, and ethnographers such as Becker and Hughes used interviewing. However during the 1950's, interviewing became more widely used within survey research as a tool to quantify data.[22] From that period, quantitative survey research came to dominate sociology for the next three decades (Fontana and Frey 1994). Numerous volumes have been published on the techniques of interviewing (see for example Babbie 1992). However, the literature recognises that interviewing is fundamentally limiting because it attempts to frame real life events in a two dimensional space.

Ladwig (1994) nominates two major problems associated with interviewing as being unequal power relations and different motives present within the subject/researcher interaction, and suggests that the relationship is often characterised by exploitation and not collaboration.

Ethnographical criticisms of interviewing and its assumptions, problematise notions of understanding, and suggest that participants rely on glosses to 'fill gaps' in understanding (Garfinkel 1967). Other concerns relate to the need to

---

[22] A more detailed history can be found in Denzin and Lincoln (eds.) (1994).

91

make explicit the feelings and voices of the respondents (Marcus and Fischer 1986), the relationship between the interviewer and the respondent (Crapanzano 1980), issues of gender in interviewing (Gluck and Patai 1991) and issues of race in interviewing (Stanfield 1985).

As noted by Fontana and Frey however, there are techniques involved in interviewing, whether one is 'being a nice person or following a format' (1994: 371). Consequently, in the interviews conducted during this research, open-ended questions were used to generate discussion that evolved into focussed conversations around key issues. This approach allowed for the development of a closer relationship between interviewer and interviewee, and can be seen to have parallels with phenomenological and existential sociologies (Douglas and Johnston 1977, Kotarba and Fontana 1984) and reflect the concern of postmodern ethnographers (Marcus and Fischer 1986).

The interview schedule used during the research was trialled and refined during early interviews. A copy can be found at Appendix A.

Interviews of varying length were conducted with 60 different policy actors. Interviewees were first contacted by telephone and then followed up with a letter of invitation. Supplementary discussions and exchanges were also held with various other individuals in the course of the research. All interviewees were, in one way or another, directly involved in the development, piloting and implementation of the Key Competencies, or involved in the subsequent development of an Employability Skills agenda within Australia's VET system. Those interviewed included:

- school teachers, policy and program staff (from the independent, public and catholic sectors);
- Technical and Further Education (TAFE) college teachers;
- TAFE policy and program staff;
- national and State representatives of industry;
- policy and program staff within State and Commonwealth departments of education and training;

- policy and program staff within government agencies such as ANTA;
- university researchers; and
- project contractors and consultants.

Respondents were initially drawn from my professional networks that were developed during the Key Competencies initiative.

That number was expanded through personal referrals from interviewees and additional contacts identified through the literature. All those interviewed completed consent forms, a copy of which is included in Appendix B. In addition to clearance from the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee, additional approval was required from the NSW Department of Education, which placed conditions on access to staff of NSW TAFE. A copy of this approval is included in Appendix C.

Data Management and Analysis

Interview data was collected in two ways: 1) on audiotapes, which were developed into transcripts, and 2) through detailed notes taken during the interview. The choice of data collection method was determined by an assessment of the respondent's role, and the extent to which previous interviews had produced the same data. Participants were also given the opportunity to review the record of interview.

Interview data was codified, with analysis occurring at the time of collection and afterwards through what McIntyre (199a) calls a 'recursive process of meaning development', which has been noted as 'ultimately an idiosyncratic and heuristic process' (1998a: 82). The approach used reflected the stages identified by McIntyre (1998a), who suggests that the following sequence occurs when codifying data:

- defining a record and its fields;
- deciding what data is to be entered;
- designing layouts and data displays;

- developing and entering interpretations;
- systematising an analysis; and
- producing an account of the analysis exhibiting interpretive work (McIntyre 1998a: 81-92).

The data was entered into commercially available spreadsheet software, where the progress of analysis was recorded in the developing Microsoft Excel 2000 spreadsheet.

A range of written material supplemented the interview data. This material included a wide range of published and unpublished reports, journal and media articles, books, minutes of meetings and personal correspondence. Any material used during the research is listed in the bibliography.

All data was collected by the researcher. The confidential but potentially identifiable data exists as: audiotapes, transcripts of audiotapes, handwritten notes and soft copy original and duplicate coded data. Participant details were coded and stored separately from the records of interview. All data has been stored in lockable containers as part of the personal effects of the researcher. The researcher is the only person who has access to the data. It is envisaged that the raw data will be destroyed no sooner than 1/1/2011 in accordance with AVCC Guidelines on the Storage of Data.

The data collected to answer the research questions in this thesis is analysed in Chapters 4-7. Considine (1994) argues that having an effective set of categories to study key factors is only a 'first step along the way to proposing a reliable account of why such elements are central' (1994: 57). Accordingly, the research results were presented under four key themes that emerged from the data. The four themes are:

- the flow of policy;
- the politics of federalism;
- the complexity of generic skills; and

- policy stakeholder force field.[23]

These themes were developed by subjectively aggregating key statements according to common terms and concepts.

The themes and associated data descriptors are shown in Table 4 below. These themes have been used to organise the data in order to provide structure of the chronology.

Data Theme	Data Descriptors
The complexity of generic skills	the list of skills, methods of integration (competency standards, delivery, assessment, reporting), performance levels, transfer, curriculum design, skill emphasis within training packages, general versus vocational education.
The politics of federalism	politics within the Commonwealth, relations between the States and the Commonwealth, differences in relations across educational sectors, change of governments, educational federalism, and constitutional references.
The policy stakeholder force field	stakeholder actions (industry, State school education authorities, unions, State boards of studies, TAFE systems, State VET agencies, parents, teachers, Commonwealth school agencies).
The flow of policy	the nature of decision making within organisations, the decision making culture within an organisation, the relationship between research and policy, details surrounding specific decisions, implementing change, shifting policy priorities, conflicting and competing policy directions.

Table 4: Data Themes and Data Descriptors

---

[23] Lewin (1952) developed the term 'force field analysis' which involved an assessment of 'driving forces' and 'restraining forces'. In this context, the term is applied to describe how stakeholder influence can act as a driving or restraining force, enabling the policy to continue or lead it to stop, depending on where it is along its policy trajectory.

These data themes were also used to focus discussion on the research
questions. Table 5 overleaf shows the research questions aligned with the most
relevant data theme.

Research Questions	Data Theme
What were the key policy events that influenced the policy trajectory of the Key competencies initiative?	The flow of policy
To what extent did federal education politics influence the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies?	The politics of federalism
How did policy actors and institutions influence the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies across different policy contexts?	Policy stakeholder force field
Did the conceptualisation of the Key Competencies limit the outcomes achieved?	The complexity of generic skills

Table 5: Data Themes and Research Questions

The Key Competencies policy process extended over more than a decade of
Australian VET policy and practice. In order to construct a logical picture of the
policy process whilst providing a means of addressing the research questions,
the data has been presented in the following chronological stages:

Stage 1: The development of the Key Competencies (1985-1993);

Stage 2: The trailing of the Key Competencies (1994 -1997);

Stage 3: Implementation of the Key Competencies (1998-2000); and

Stage 4: Emergence of the Employability Skills agenda (2001-2005).

Within each of these stages, the data themes have been used to organise the
data. Consequently, Chapters 4-7 of this thesis analyse the research findings
across these key stages of the Key Competency initiative.

Due to confidentiality requirements imposed by NSW DET and the requests of some interviewees for anonymity, a decision was taken to not name individual respondents in the text. Instead, a series of respondent codes were used. Confidentiality was further maintained through the use of generic role descriptors, which also served the purpose of providing some context to interviewee comments quoted in the thesis.

These role descriptors are detailed in Table 6 below.

Descriptor	Role
Commonwealth Department Staff	Senior Bureaucrat – Branch Head or above. Section head – Director. Senior Project Manager - education agency staff responsible for multiple KC projects across sectors. Colleague – junior bureaucrat.
ANTA / SCC Staff	Senior bureaucrat – Director or above.
State Department Staff	Senior Bureaucrat – Director or above. Program Manager - education agency staff responsible for multiple KC projects across sectors. Project Manager – education agency staff responsible for single or multiple KC projects within a sector.
Other Stakeholders	Committee member - member Mayer Committee. Committee secretariat - member Mayer Secretariat. Industry stakeholder – representative of ACCI, BCA etc. Policy activist – member of independent think tank, union. Observer – witness to relevant meetings. National Consultant – consultant engaged on one of the national funded projects. Researcher – contract researcher engaged by either State or Commonwealth bodies.

Table 6: Interviewee Role Descriptors

The Researcher as Participant

The competing claims of different research methods make it necessary for researchers to make their method explicit, and highlight the limitations of that method.

It is also necessary for them to consider their role as participant in the research and how that role affected the research claims.

McIntyre (1998) believes that as the researcher influences both data collection and data analysis, central to the process should be the researcher asking 'How do I account for my interpretive procedures and their account producing activity' (1998: 1).

The term reflexivity is used to highlight the important role the researcher has on the research process. Fontana and Frey (1994) argue that 'without researcher reflexivity, the data reported tends to flow nicely, there is no contradictory data, and no mention of what data was excluded'. (1994: 372)

Whilst plagued by overtones of confession, reflexivity is an invaluable way of foregrounding the complex, cumbersome and problematic process of interviewing people (Fontana and Frey 1994). As a result, the text that is produced can be deconstructed to provide alternate ways of looking at the data (Clough 1992), as well as leading to a critical examination of the research practices as they unfold during the inquiry (McIntyre 1998).

These issues are addressed more fully in Appendix A, where a reflexive account of my role in the research can be found.

Chapter 4: Development of the Key Competencies (1985-1993)

Or how Australia's first generic skills initiative was nearly scuttled by industrial indifference, political gamesmanship and conceptual confusion.

The genesis of Australia's generic skills agenda occurred during a tumultuous period in Australia's education and training system. Major reforms led to changes in the way education was organised and funded, but more fundamentally, they challenged the very purpose of education in a contemporary industrialised state.

The Key Competencies were part of that reform agenda, and this chapter will present and discuss the research findings that relate to the first chronological stage of the Key Competencies policy process.

a. The flow of policy

The first reference to generic or general competencies within Australian education and training appears in the work of the Quality of Education Review Committee that released its report in 1985. The report of the Karmel committee, as it came to be known, sought to develop strategies for raising the standards attained by students in communication, literacy and numeracy (Karmel 1985). It recommended that funding be provided to schools to improve the development of the general competencies of:

- acquiring information;
- conveying information;
- applying logical processes;
- performing practical tasks as individuals; and
- performing practical tasks as members of a group (1985: 201).

Welch (1996) has noted that the report of this review committee 'marked a move to a much more outcomes-based assessment from the earlier input-based

rationale and strategies' (1996: 67). Marginson (1997), in commenting on the emergence of a new form of vocationalism during this period, suggested that the Karmel committee was 'the first to develop a new vocational orientation for schooling on a general scale' (1997: 173), and as suggested by Kennedy (1988), appears to have 'come to some agreement that the academic curriculum concentrated too heavily on theoretical aspects of learning with greater attention required on practical and work related issues' (Kennedy 1988: 368).

The call for a greater focus on generic skills by the Karmel Committee foreshadowed not only the positions adopted by Finn, Carmichael and Mayer in Australia, but also reflected the drivers of generic skills movements internationally (Werner 1995). Whilst Karmel was concerned with a greater vocational emphasis in schooling, the type of skills identified were consistent with those called for in the skill literature at the time, reflecting the types of abilities associated with emerging industrial systems during the late 1980's.[24]

Whilst the skills identified by Karmel can be identified in the sets of skills developed for the Key Competencies and subsequent Employability Skills, the focus of the committee at the time was directed at issues of quality in schooling, rather than the specific issues around the relationship between schools and work as was the case with the Finn and Mayer reports. Thus whilst Karmel raised the notion of generic skills and connected their attainment with an increasing vocational emphasis within schools, the main recommendations and outcomes of his report had more direct impact on other aspects of policy focussed on the quality of education. However, Karmel's work was a key policy event that illustrated developing interest in emerging global questions on the outcomes that should be expected of schooling in society.

After Karmel, the Australian Education Committee (AEC) resolved in October 1988 to establish a working party on the links between schools and TAFE. The report of that working party led to the development of terms of reference for a review which was to consider 'appropriate national curriculum principles designed

---

[24] See for example OECD (1985), Hackman and Oldham (1980).

to enable all young people, including those with special needs, to develop key competencies' [25] (Finn 1991:2). Clearly by this stage, the developing international interest in generic / core / key skills had become apparent to local policy actors.

The scope of the review was to be wide ranging and included participation targets, national curriculum principles, principles for key competencies, links, roles, barriers, career education and resources. The committee of eight was named the Finn Committee after its Chairperson, Brian Finn, who was CEO of IBM at the time. Laurie Carmichael of the ACTU was also on the committee, along with a small number of educational bureaucrats from the Commonwealth and State governments.

This review made a number of recommendations that called amongst other things for a convergence between general and vocational education, national reform of entry-level training and the development of employment related Key Competencies. In particular, it noted that 'there are certain essential things that all young people need to learn in their preparation for employment' (Finn 1991: *x*), suggesting that steps should be taken to ensure that 'all young people are able to develop these Key Competencies regardless of the education or training pathway they follow' (Mayer 1992: 1). The Finn Review identified these employment related Key Competencies as being in the areas of:

- language and communication;
- mathematics;
- scientific and technological understanding;
- cultural understanding;
- problem solving; and
- personal and interpersonal characteristics (1991: x).

To support the implementation of Key Competencies within education and training, the Finn Committee also recommended that a standards framework be

---

[25] The term key competencies appears here in the literature for the first time and appears to be drawn from a non cited issues paper generated by staff of the Commonwealth Department of

developed with 'a profile for each Key Competency to describe clearly the nature of each competency at a range of levels' (Mayer 1992c: *i*).

The Finn Review was clearly a key policy event during this period as it gave shape to the Key Competencies and reinforced the work of Karmel in calling for a greater focus on outcomes based education and the need to develop generic skills.

However, the major event shaping the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies during this period was the work of the Mayer Committee. At the 65th meeting of the AEC, the Finn Report was tabled, noted and released, with a steering committee, formalised in October 1991 as the Mayer Committee, established to explore the Key Competencies further, including the 'feasibility of developing and implementing the Key Competencies concept' (AEC / MOVEET 1991: 7).

The Mayer Committee was chaired by Eric Mayer, a former CEO of National Mutual. The Committee's twenty-seven members were drawn from the school and training systems, unions, business and teacher organisations. Whilst it was a joint project between State, Territory and Commonwealth governments, one member of the Mayer Committee noted the meetings were 'a challenge marshalling more than thirty persons who each represented their own constituency' (AEMA32). For some members, the nature of the committee's task meant that 'for a long while there was a sense of things going around in circles' (AJNA47). Indeed, reports that there where instances were committee members fell asleep at the table have been used to suggest that the initial meetings of the committee were 'not dynamic and focussed. They were hard work.' (AJNA48).

Despite these teething problems, a number of committee members argued that the Mayer Committee 'was forward thinking in its terms of reference and ahead of its time in a number of ways' (ASHA3).

Employment, Education and Training (DEET). The issues paper is referred to in the Finn Report but not available in the public domain.

A particular strength was deemed to be the mix of stakeholders involved, with a member of the Mayer secretariat commending the way the Mayer committee conducted its work:

> 'particularly in the way that educationalists and industry were brought together to develop a common framework. They considered the things that bound them together and that allowed them to look at things in the context of lifelong learning' (AAMA23).

Another member observed that 'it was cross sectoral, and they had their difficulties, but what they did was of great value' (ASHA49). Indeed as noted at the time by Borthwick (1993), 'the establishment of the Mayer Committee marked the first attempt in Australia to tackle an (educational) issue on both a national and an intersectoral basis' (1993: 22).

Discussion papers were produced by the Committee in February and May 1992, and following consultations within education circles, the committee claimed there was 'broad support for the development of the Key Competencies' (Mayer 1992: 3). However, this claim in the committee's public documents masked tensions within the Committee itself, and ignored a range of competing policy and political priorities, issues explored later in this chapter.

Following the release of the discussion papers, the committee undertook a round of national consultations, a process deemed by many committee members as being 'difficult', where they were confronted often by 'hostile bureaucrats who were resistant to many of the ideas contained in the discussion papers' (ASCA16). The effectiveness of the Committee in promoting its work was also raised as an issue, with one committee member noting that 'some committee members were active in promoting the KCs, others were not' (AEMA33). Clearly the concept of Key Competencies was not equally attractive to all stakeholders at the time of the Mayer Committee.

An alternate view suggests that the reason for the mixed response was the political views of Eric Mayer.

One committee member noted that 'Mayer was a small 'l' liberal of the Melbourne establishment and quite different to Carmichael in background...it was the politics of the chair, the networks they could influence and the doors that they could or could not open' (ASHA50). Indeed one committee member posed the question of 'who would listen to Mayer at a national level?' (ASHA51).

Beyond his political orientation, it was also suggested that the Chair's personal style also affected the outcomes of the committee's work. One committee member noted that 'Mayer found politicking distasteful' (ASHA53). Indeed Mayer himself stated that 'education policy has as much to do with political differences, as it does personality differences' (Mayer pers. com.).

25,000 copies of the second discussion paper (Mayer 1992c) were distributed nationally for comment and discussion, and were supported by a second stage of seminars and presentations. In addition to the responses collected on these occasions, the committee received more than 500 written submissions (Borthwick 1993), a level of response that illustrates a relatively high level of interest in the work at hand. This round of State consultations involved various meetings with stakeholders from across the sectors, and as would be expected, again 'exposed differing views' (ASHA54).

Whilst a revised timeline for consultation was approved by Ministers to allow for protracted delays[26], a number of committee members believed that 'it was a marketing failure if not anything else' (AALA36), with one suggesting that 'it wasn't sold well and it didn't get the level of Ministerial support and systemic support at the State level that it needed and deserved' (ASHA55).

Despite the difficulties experienced during the process, the Mayer Committee concluded its deliberations and tabled its report at the 68th AEC meeting in Auckland during September 1992.

---

[26] Approved at the 67th AEC Meeting, Melbourne June 1992 (AEC / MOVEET 1992a).

At that meeting, Ministers welcomed the report 'as a significant contribution to addressing those education and training issues vital to Australia's future' (AEC/MOVEET 1992: 10). They gave in principle endorsement to a definition of Key Competencies, and endorsed the seven recommended generic skills of:

- Collecting, analysing and organising information;
- Communicating ideas and information;
- Planning and organising activities;
- Working with others and in teams;
- Using mathematical ideas and techniques;
- Solving problems; and
- Using technology (Mayer 1992).

The meeting also established a framework for further consultation with the States and Territories and agreed that further work should go ahead to examine approaches to incorporating the Key Competencies into general education (AEC 1992).

Whilst Queensland reserved its position on the endorsed list over concerns regarding the omission of cultural understanding as an eighth Key Competency, New South Wales and Western Australia also 'expressed the view that the list of Key Competencies might need to be extended' (AEC 1992: 11). Indeed, as one Mayer Committee member noted, the debate surrounding cultural understanding 'detracted attention from the main message and showed that there wasn't consensus and that there was no reason for the proposal to be implemented' (ASHA60).

Similarly, the content and scope of the report was criticised. Suggesting conceptual problems with the proposal, a representative of the NTB at the time noted that 'there needed to be more work done with the levels' (AALA28). Similarly, a Director within the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) at the time noted that the Mayer report 'was not practical enough, there was no real implementation framework and it was set up as an all or nothing proposal. It was a failure, it was too rigid and not practical enough'

(ACRA11). A member of the committee secretariat also suggested shortcomings in the final proposal, claiming that it was 'too academic, complicated by the use of unfriendly language' and requiring 'a big investment to bring about the cultural change required' (AJNA41).

As noted by (Lingard et al 1995), the Key Competencies were 'seen by the States to be too cumbersome in their implementation' and whilst one Mayer committee member suggested that 'they were seen as an imposition, something new' (AALA37), the timing of the report's release also contributed to its lukewarm reception.

Whilst the Mayer Committee was one consequence of the Finn Review, Ministers of education and training had also commenced work on redesigning Australia's entry-level training system through the work of another committee of review headed by Laurie Carmichael.

The Carmichael Review was another key policy event during this period, one that sought to address many of the broader issues around post compulsory education and training articulated by the Finn Review. In the same way that generic skills were progressed through the work of the Mayer Committee, pathways, national curriculum principles, measures for participation, career education and education and training delivery arrangements were all placed on the agenda for policy reform through the Carmichael Review (Finn 1993).

Whilst the release of the Mayer report did trigger deliberations across the network of AEC / MOVEET committees and working parties[27], the endorsement of the Carmichael report three months earlier attracted the attention of policy stakeholders to a greater extent.

It is argued here, that this occurred primarily because of the very nature of the content of the Carmichael report itself and the ability of its members to influence the policy community more effectively than the Mayer Committee.

---

[27] These included the Joint Working Group on Higher Education, the AEC Standing Committee and the Vocational Education Employment and Training Advisory Committee (VEETAC).

The Carmichael report prepared the outline of a comprehensive system of entry level vocational training that advocated 'an accelerated implementation of competency based training in all industry sectors and almost all enterprises' (Carmichael 1992: v). In the proposed Australian Vocational Certificate Training System (AVCTS), the apprenticeship and traineeship systems would be merged, creating a 'flexible range of fully articulated substantially work based vocational certificate training pathways' (Marginson 1993: 159). In endorsing the report, Ministers noted that:

> 'the report should be seen as a natural progression in the development of strategies emerging from the Deveson and Finn reports, the establishment of the National Training Board (NTB) and the development and implementation of competency based training in Australia' (AEC 1992: 3).

The Carmichael Report was underpinned by a more pragmatic vision of VET reform compared to Mayer and its work on non-occupationally specific skills. As noted by a member of the Mayer committee, 'Carmichael was signed off and Mayer was in hiatus with a loss of momentum caused by ongoing debates over cultural understanding and the fine detail of implementation' (ASHA56). It can also be argued that conceptually, the Carmichael report was a simpler proposition than that of Mayer and the Key Competencies. Indeed, one committee member noted that 'Carmichael was easier to understand' (AEMA39).

The research suggests that the Mayer Key Competencies were overshadowed by the proposed Australia Vocational Certificate Training System (AVCTS) and the subsequent pilots that implemented the findings of the Carmichael Report.

The Australian Senate (2000) noted that these pilots included 'the adoption of competency based training throughout the VET system, the establishment of the Australian Standards Framework, the development of industry competency standards and the development of the National Framework for the Recognition of Training' (2000:25).

These developments produced considerable activity amongst an already crowded policy agenda. In this environment, it is perhaps not surprising that the Key Competencies received only scant attention amongst stakeholders and policy forums at this time.

Indeed at the next meeting of Ministers at the last combined forum of AEC / MOVEET[28], the States and Territories on balance rejected the proposal seeking to implement the Key Competencies, in particular, Ministers decided to:

> 'refer these matters back to the States and Territories for further review involving consultation with their own educational communities so that each State and Territory can determine if the initiatives should be proceeded with' (AEC / MOVEET 1993:2).

Whilst the politics of this key policy event will be examined in later sections, it is worth noting here the assertion made by Lingard et al (1995), who argue that the States were fundamentally opposed to the nationally imposed Mayer competencies and to any national testing potentially associated with them. Thus whilst the release of the Mayer Report was clearly a key policy event during this period, the trajectory of the Key Competencies was influenced by a range of related issues and stakeholder actions, the detail of which is considered in the following sections.

Consequently, despite the rejection of the Mayer proposal, the Commonwealth proceeded with efforts to negotiate individually with each State and Territory to see the Key Competencies taken to the next stage. As the Commonwealth had already expended large sums of money on the development of the Mayer competencies, after the July AEC / MOVEET meeting, they 'vigorously negotiated with the States to find a solution to this impasse' (Lingard et al 1995:52). The States for their part, whilst rejecting the Mayer competencies, 'remained reluctant to see the millions of dollars potentially available to them

---

[28] A new ministerial council was then formed involving ministers for both schools and training under the banner of the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

returned to federal consolidated revenue' (Bartlett et al 1994: 32). Consequently, agreements to trial the Key Competencies were signed between the Commonwealth and all the States and Territories over the subsequent 12 months.

A summary of the key policy events related to the development of the Key Competencies is shown in Table 7 below.

Date	Decision	Forum
Oct 1985	Karmel Report accepted	Australian Schools Commission
Aug 1991	Finn Report endorsed	66th AEC / MOVEET meeting
June 1992	Carmichael Report endorsed	67th AEC / MOVEET meeting
Sept 1992	Mayer Report endorsed	68th AEC / MOVEET meeting
July 1993	Mayer proposal rejected	69th AEC / MOVEET meeting
June 1994	National program of field testing in place	Separate negotiations between the Commonwealth, States and Territories.

Table 7: Milestones in the development of the Key Competencies

Whilst development of the Key Competencies occurred over a period of seven years through the work of a series of influential committees, their stymied progress during this period was the result of more than simply a competing policy agenda, but broader struggles between the Commonwealth and the States over funding and control of curriculum and outcomes. Despite their rejection at the Perth AEC / MOVEET meeting, generic skills survived to move from development towards implementation.

b. The politics of federalism

A federal system divides power between one central and several regional governments. In Australia, the development of a generic skills agenda cannot be understood without recognising the federal constitutional arrangements that underpin the delivery of education. Whilst Section 51 of Australia's constitution gives States the responsibility for education, Section 96 allows the Commonwealth to make financial assistance grants to the States. However, as a result of the greater revenue raising capacity of the Commonwealth, the States remain heavily dependent on the transfer of Commonwealth funds.

This financial relationship, coupled with the Commonwealth's role in national systems, inevitably leads to conflict over the control and responsibility for education within schools, the VET sector and universities. This tension between "States rights" and the "national interest" is seen by Taylor et al (1997) to create a 'major barrier to co-operative and co-ordinated policy making' (1997:97).

Compounding this funding dynamic is the reality that there are nine separate governments involved in Australian education that at times can be of differing political persuasions. This creates a mix that often separates on party political lines, and frustrates attempts to introduce national initiatives. Commenting on the period of reform during the early 1990's, Fookes (1996) argued that 'the State's major objective was to organise things so that the Commonwealth officials did all the work, the Commonwealth met all the costs, and the States maintained a power of veto which they would exercise frequently' (1996: 12).

In the case of school education, the situation is further complicated by the fact that State and Territory governments support separate assessment authorities who generally have responsibility for setting curriculum and overseeing public examinations for the schools in that jurisdiction. These Boards of Studies, as they are typically known, often complicate the process of change as they have different legislative bases for their actions, and effectively operate as independent organisations. These agencies are typically at arms length from the deliverers of school education who themselves are discrete entities generally organised into three schools sectors, namely public, catholic and independent. Whilst evident to a lesser extent, organisational diversity is also a characteristic of the VET sector and amongst universities, a situation that creates a complex context for the workings of federalism in Australian education.

When the genesis of Australia's generic skills agenda emerged from the Karmel report in 1985, the Australian Education Council (AEC) was the primary intergovernmental forum where 'the States primarily responded to the Commonwealth's agenda' (Dudley and Vidovitch 1995: 75). Whilst the AEC at the time of Karmel functioned more as a forum for discussion, Lingard et al (1995) argue that after 1987, and particularly during the term of Minister

Dawkins (1987-1991), the AEC became a more significant policy body. This was so because under the Hawke Labour government, the AEC became the site where the Commonwealth sought to pursue a national agenda in education with the support of a predominance of Labour States.

Associated with the rise of the AEC as the strategic national education forum, was the abolition of the Commonwealth's Schools Commission and the Tertiary Education Commission. Marginson (1997) suggests that this change eliminated the main source of potential opposition in the bureaucracy and 'freed the government to reset the policy agenda and limit the capacity of educational institutions and interest groups to retard government initiatives' (1997: 163).

In 1990, the Ministerial Council of Vocational Education, Employment and Training (MOVEET) was created, and from October 1991, met jointly with the previously constituted AEC. Lingard et al (1995) suggest that 'this structural rearrangement was intended to integrate policy across all sectors of education with a greater emphasis on training and the needs of industry' (1995: 44). As observed by a NSW AEC representative during this period, 'the Commonwealth was pushing connections between employer needs and the outcomes of schooling. Dawkins changed the landscape significantly' (AJMA27).

The development of a national agenda in education parallelled similar shifts in other portfolio areas. The Special Premiers' Conferences of 1990 and 1991 saw the Commonwealth and the States agree on 'national systems in transport, power and finance and the establishment of a national market for goods and occupations' (Marginson 1997: 165). Followed by the creation of the Council of Australian Government (COAG) in 1992, it is evident that across a range of portfolio areas, the Commonwealth was aiming 'to achieve a more efficient national economy and a single national market' (Lingard et al 1995: 42).

These developments paralleled and contributed to a period of restructuring and organisational change within the Commonwealth public service at a time when 'economic rationalism' dominated the government's thinking on its role in providing services (Pusey 1991).

During this period, the political leadership took a greater role in policy making than was the case in the past. Taylor et al (1997) argue that this contributed to a 'reconstituted relationship between ministers and their public service bureaucracies' (1997: 81). Indeed this ministerialisation of education policy making occurred within both State and Commonwealth arenas during this time, a development that ensured the Key Competencies would not be considered on their educational merit alone, but influenced by political imperatives.

Marginson (1997) suggests that this ministerialisation was 'associated with the imposition of economic agendas' (1997), which supports Yeatman's (1990) view that 'public policy objectives couched in terms of social goods' were being replaced during this period by 'public policy objectives couched in terms of economic goods aimed at fostering a competitive economy' (1990: 33). Welch (1996) argued that the emerging training agenda was 'a strategically rational economic agenda driving educational change' (1996: 57), and as noted by a member of the AEC at the time, 'the interventionist style of Dawkins really pushed reform in schools, national curriculum and accountability. They were pushed hard' (AJMB33).

The context described here created an environment where Ministers with clear agendas and strong wills could progress certain developments in ways less possible in previous times where bureaucratic mandarins mediated such agendas.

According to Marginson (1997) 'the emergence of corporate federalism enabled policy makers to conceive of all education sectors in terms of a national system, whether they were subject to single governments or not' (1997: 166). This national agenda was clearly evident in the proposal ultimately put forward by the Mayer Committee, and in itself was a crucial factor in the rejection of the Mayer proposal at the 1993 AEC/MOVEET meeting in Perth.

Lingard et al (1995) argue that the rejection of the Key Competencies in Perth was not a direct rejection by the States of the competencies per se, but rather 'a clear message to the Commonwealth that they would not be dictated to over national

curriculum statements, profiles and competencies' (1995: 50). A ministerial advisor in NSW noted that 'the KCs were caught in the States rights debate where the States tried to strike back against the Commonwealth and their national curriculum agenda. At that meeting the States ganged up on the Commonwealth' (AJMB13).

The Commonwealth's efforts to introduce a national school curriculum during this period reached its head with proposals to introduce national profiles on student achievement and national curriculum statements for schools. These developments triggered the politics of federalism into play, and directly influenced the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies and the generic skills agenda in Australia.

Arising in part from the declaration in Hobart of the *Common and Agreed Goals of Schooling in Australia,* the development of profiles and statements from May 1990 onwards represented 'extensive curriculum initiatives at a national level' which sought to 'explore a common curriculum framework' (Eltis 1995: 7). Learning area statements determined the scope of all curriculum by outlining the essential elements to be covered, and in doing so, were intended to provide 'public information about the content of Australian schools' (Randall 1993: 48).

Profiles however, included a series of student outcome statements associated with each learning area that could be used by teachers to 'monitor and report on the achievement of individual students and at the school or system level to represent those achievements to the wider community' (Randall 1993: 49). Such a framework of outcomes for schools in some ways presented a competing framework for the Key Competencies, one that possibly limited their value given their relatively narrow focus.

It is worth noting here that the push for national curriculum within schooling at this time paralleled similar developments within VET. At the Special Ministerial Conference on Training in November 1990, the Australian Committee on Training Curriculum (ACTRAC) was established to 'develop national curriculum for both institutional and workplace training' (CEDA 1995: 13), and with support from the

States, went on to develop national curriculum and resources for a wide range of occupational areas. Clearly in the VET sector, the Commonwealth's federalist agenda looked more likely to proceed.

In the school sector, the process to establish the national profiles and Statements was centralised and managed through the newly created Curriculum and Assessment Committee (CURASS), which, whilst being predominantly a forum for the States, was tasked with a national agenda and undertook the bulk of the work. However, Allen (1993) argued at the time that 'inadequate opportunities for consultation' coupled with public critique, led educational practitioners and discipline experts across the country to be 'marginalised from the process' (1993: 3). Whilst the States supported CURASS, it has been argued that this support was in reality an important defence mechanism to obviate the possibility of rigid national testing and the possibility of the Finn, Carmichael and Mayer agenda dominating schooling (Lingard et al 1995).

State concerns for a Commonwealth imposed national curriculum were evident from the time of the Finn Review, when the first clear indications of a generic skills framework became apparent.

Whilst expressing their in principle support for the concept of Key Competencies arising from the Finn Review, at the 66th AEC/MOVEET meeting Queensland and Tasmania expressed reservations regarding possible implications of competency standards including their 'compatibility with other curriculum structures and their possible influence on compulsory and post compulsory sectors of schooling' (AEC 1991: 2). Indeed interviews conducted with Directors General of State education authorities at the time indicated that they were more concerned about the Finn recommendations than were their Ministers (Lingard et al 1995). Writing on competencies in education at the time, Collins (1993) warned that 'Key Competencies testing will become part of the experience and the grading of all post compulsory aged students' (1993: 7), a proposition that clearly concerned the States and their independent assessment bodies.

Whilst issues surrounded the development of a national curriculum for schools, the potential compatibility between the statements and profiles and the Key Competencies was also considered. At the time when Key Competencies were being reviewed by the States and Territories, Randall (1993) noted that 'as further work is done on benchmarking and validating the Key Competencies and on the production of work samples for profiles, there will be a strengthening of links centred on classroom activities and learning situations' (1993: 54). However, as the two initiatives focussed primarily on two different groups of students ie: compulsory and post compulsory cohorts, there remained outstanding issues on how the two initiatives could usefully be linked.

Collins (1993) suggested that 'the competency debate represented an important political moment for educators in Australia' (1993: 7). Interestingly, Collins also argued that the States viewed the thrust by the Commonwealth to develop national teaching standards as part of their 'competencies approach' (Collins 1993: 7), and during this time, there is evidence from the literature of a developing siege mentality amongst educators, particularly in the school sector (see for example Karaolis 1995).

The trend towards federal centralism evident during this period was as much a consequence of corporate managerialism within the Commonwealth bureaucracy as a reflection of traditional ideology within the then governing Australian Labour Party. As a general rule, Labour governments have a tendency to support centralist approaches, a characteristic that further politicised the agenda during this time of considerable reform.

Regardless, the Hawke and Dawkins agenda of educational reform was vigorously pursued within the AEC at a time when Labour dominated State governments around the country.

Since 1986, a corporate federalism (Lingard 1991) has been seen to evolve within education, as educational leadership and policy formulation moved from State bureaucracies to Federal forums (Hattam and Smyth 1998), and as the public sector and executive became more corporatist over time.

It is clear then that during this period a range of political tensions existed within the AEC and education politics more broadly. In this context, the rejection of the Key Competencies at the Perth AEC / MOVEET meeting can be considered from a number of different perspectives.

A Director within ANTA at the time observed that, 'the AEC decision was unfortunate in that the KCs were rejected and caught up with broader educational politics' (AALB19). Reflecting more broadly on the policy process at the time, a member of the Mayer committee noted that 'education policy was a highly politicised arena'. The Chairman himself observed that the work of the Mayer committee 'was a massive education in the politics of education' (Mayer pers. com.). The politics of the AEC and their impact on the Key Competencies is outlined by Lingard et al (1995):

> 'The new non-labour government in Victoria had made commitments to reject the profile statements although the other non-Labour States were more supportive. To extricate the Victorian government from its predicament, Virginia Chadwick, the New South Wales Liberal Education Minister, linked the statements, profiles and competencies in the one motion so they stood or fell together' (1995: 50).

Whilst not considering the Key Competencies in detail, Lingard et al (1995) show that despite evidence of some support for the statements and profiles, the face saving exercise by the coalition State governments was a purely political exercise between the Labour and Liberal / National Party coalition governments, one that reflected a shift in the political balance across the Commonwealth.[29]

The Key Competencies implementation proposal was tabled at the AEC / MOVEET forum at the same time as the Commonwealth's national profiles and Statements, an outcome that saw the Key Competencies "in the wrong place at the wrong time", thus reflecting Kingdon's (1984) view on the importance of timing within the policy process.

---

[29] Labour's majority was further eroded by the subsequent change of government in South Australia late in 1993.

More fundamentally, a combination of political gamesmanship conspired with longstanding suspicion of national curriculum initiatives to derail the fledgling national generic skills agenda. As noted by a member of the Mayer Committee, 'at the time of the Finn Committee the majority of States were Labour, at the time of the Mayer Committee the balance had shifted the other way with the effect that the report was received but no funds were allocated for implementation' (AEMB37).

Leading up to the Perth AEC / MOVEET decision to reject the Key Competencies, questions also emerged over the responsibilities of each education sector to develop the Key Competencies. These questions challenged the boundaries between VET and schools, and VET and universities, adding another dimension to the politics of the Commonwealth and the likely success of national school reform initiatives.

It can be argued that reservations towards generic skills articulated by representatives of the higher education sector formed part of the political context influencing State Ministers of education at the time.[30] Of particular concern to universities was the suggestion that the Key Competencies could facilitate a seamless system between schools, TAFE and universities. Competency standards, both generic and technical, were seen a possible basis for formal credit transfer between schools and TAFE, TAFE and universities and between individual institutions within the same sector. Marginson (1993) observed that such as system sought to remove 'the division of labour between the sectors particularly the old binary division between TAFE and universities' (1993: 162).

Mayer argued for the same outcome in relation to the Key Competencies, stating that their achievement 'should be taken into consideration in processes of admission to higher education and vocational education and training' (1992: 50). Indeed, when the Mayer report was given in principle support in December 1992 at the 68th AEC / MOVEET meeting in Auckland, Ministers referred the

---

[30] Whilst the funding for universities was managed by the Commonwealth, the States retained a minor administrative role pursuant to State enabling legislation.

report to the NTB and the Joint Working Group on Higher Education to provide advice on the matter.

Whilst the NTB argued at the time that academic disciplines could be located in a competencies framework (Johnston 1992), on behalf of the Australian Vice Chancellor's Committee, Professor Brian Wilson commented that 'it was difficult to conceive of mechanisms whereby the outcomes of a liberal education could be easily weighed on a competency scale' (Wilson 1992: 9).

In noting that the Mayer Report was the only proposal for competency measurement in generalist courses at the time, Marginson (1993) argued that notwithstanding the conceptual and practical challenges to the notion of a generic skills cross sectoral credit transfer system, another obstacle was that 'universities may resist closer formal relations with TAFE seeing this as a downward move in status' (1993: 163). This issue was recognised by members of the Mayer Committee, one of whom suggested that the Key Competencies were 'rejected by schools and universities whose elitist and hierarchical attitude involved no commitment to pathways' (ASCB53).

By the time of their rejection in Perth, the Key Competencies had not been embraced as a mechanism to facilitate cross sectoral credit transfer, being viewed by a ministerial advisor in NSW as 'a marginal development where schools and VET might dip their toes in the water on a whole range of issues' (ACRB14). The rejection of the Key Competencies by the universities at the time clearly affected general attitudes amongst State educationalists and also contributed to the difficulties experienced by Mayer as he sought to promote the proposal in each State and Territory. As noted by a Section Head within DEET at the time, 'there were issues surrounding the proposal's viability, schools and universities didn't like them and the State's weren't given a sellable package' (CRA31).

Whilst the politics of federalism within the school sector clearly impacted on the fate of the Key Competencies, a different story was emerging in the VET sector.

Trends to develop a national system were also evident, and whilst initial developments were charged with acrimony, during this period a more co-operative form of federalism emerged in that sector (Taylor et al 1997).

As part of its *One Nation* Package in February 1992, early Commonwealth moves to restructure TAFE nationally and establish an open training market 'provoked intense opposition from the States who initially rejected an offer of two billion dollars from the Commonwealth for their stake in TAFE' (Taylor et al 1997: 33).

The resistance of the States towards the 'clammy hands of Canberra' (Rann 1991a) can be interpreted as a reflection of concerns by the States over the 'appropriate boundary between TAFE and schools if TAFE funding was to be taken over by the Commonwealth' (Lingard et al 1995: 54). Regardless, whilst the reaction of the States could be considered as a 'cautious response' (Senate 1995: 23), the literature generally indicates that the Commonwealth's bid to assume financial responsibility for TAFE was the subject of intense discussion which resulted in the States vehemently rejecting the proposal (see for example Bartlett et al 1994, Taylor et al 1997).

One view suggests that the impetus for this debate stems from the outcome of the Finn Review. A member of the Mayer Committee suggested that when the funds were allocated for TAFE as a result of the Finn recommendations:

> 'the Commonwealth didn't trust the States not to take the AVTS money and then cut back on their own expenditure with no net gain, so they started to float the ideas of a Commonwealth takeover of TAFE as a condition for the money flowing which started an almighty row between them' (RSBC42).

However, after considerable wrangling, agreement was reached between Commonwealth and State governments to establish ANTA in 1992, a decision that allowed Commonwealth funding to continue flowing to the States.

The Senate enquiry into this first ANTA agreement noted that the difficult birth of the agency in fact represented 'an innovative approach to co-operative federalism similar to, but different from, that of the Environment Protection Authority and the National Rail Corporation' (Senate 1995: 1). The ongoing tensions at play however, were evident from Statements by ANTA's first Chief Executive Terry Moran, who noted that there were difficulties due to the challenge of balancing the 'advantages of national strategic direction and co-ordination with crucial qualities of flexibility and autonomy at the State, Territory and provider levels' (Moran 1993).

The ANTA agreement saw that 'States and Territories could continue to manage vocational education and training, but that the national context within which they were to operate would be determined by advice given by ANTA to the ministerial council directing the system' (Senate 1995: 2). Taylor et al (1997) noted that whilst 'bringing State schooling systems within a national framework was a politically fraught process', in relation to VET, there existed at this time 'a greater consensus across party lines that there was a need for a national approach in this policy domain' (1997: 112). Clearly though, the Key Competencies were not a driver of this greater consensus, as witnessed by the lack of engagement by the VET sector with the Mayer proposal.

As a result of ANTA's new leadership role, one might have expected that ANTA would have further developed the strong links being suggested between schools, TAFE and industry in the reports of Finn, Carmichael and Mayer. However the Report of the Inquiry into the Australian National Training Authority (Senate 1995) noted that these cross-sectoral issues featured little in ANTA policy documents at the time.[31]

This lack of focus on school and VET links was criticised by peak school bodies at the time, including the National Council of Independent School Associations which suggested to the Senate inquiry that the major problem with the national

---

[31] See for example the limited focus within *Towards a Skilled Australia: A National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training* (ANTA 1993) and *Training Australia: Who Are the Players?* (ANTA 1993).

agenda was that 'it purported to address needs in both the school and vocational sectors, but is in fact focussed almost exclusively on the needs of the vocational sector' (Senate 1995: 55).

The apparent lack of focus on generic skills at the time by ANTA was also noted in the Senate review, in particular through the minority report by Senators Carr, Denman, Forshaw and Bell, who criticised the 'narrow concept of vocational education adopted by ANTA' (Senate 1995: 74). ANTA's approach at this time indicates that they continued to consider the Key Competencies as primarily a schools issue whilst being preoccupied with other "start up" issues expected of a new authority.

Whilst the creation of ANTA introduced a new set of relationships between the Commonwealth and the States in the VET sector, the initial priorities of this new organisation provided no challenge to the existing responsibilities of the NTB and ACTRAC who continued to manage the implementation of a competency based system for the VET sector. Without any national direction, it is perhaps not surprising that the engagement of these two organisations with the generic skills agenda was limited during this period, with no decision taken to address generic skills within curriculum or national competency standards until some time after the Key Competency trials commenced.

It can be argued that the lack of engagement by the VET sector in the initial Key Competencies work left the fate of the Mayer Report in the hands of the school sector, which was more significantly influenced by the politics of federalism than VET was at the time.

Thus during this period, the generic skills agenda was clearly dominated by contestation between the Commonwealth and the States on multiple fronts in the school sector. Indeed Lingard et al (1995) have argued that 'the politics of the AEC and MOVEET, the nature of federalism itself, and the changing political complexion of governments at the State level have in varying degrees mediated the achievement the Key Competency agenda' (1995: 55).

It is clear then that during this period there was not a simple unified coherent agenda for the long term integration of schooling, VET and universities across State boundaries and that this was played out in the educational politics of Commonwealth and State governments in Australia's federal system. This fact effectively limited the potential of the Mayer proposal during this period, and ensured that the politics of the Commonwealth and the differences between educational sectors strongly influenced the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies at the time.

c. Policy stakeholder force field

Welch (1996) observed during this period that 'the electorate which is shaping the educational policy agenda now includes a wider range of stakeholders with substantially competing agendas' (1996: 78). This research demonstrates that the outcomes of the generic skills policy process were influenced by a range of stakeholders and the substantive positions that they assumed in relation to the relative merit of the Key Competencies.

Active stakeholders during this period included industry organisations, unions, State public and private school agencies, State training agencies and departments of education, school boards of studies, Commonwealth government departments and agencies, government ministers, TAFE, colleges, universities and private policy organisations. The actions of these stakeholders during the period had considerable influence on the progress of the Key Competencies.

Specific individuals, and the organisations they represented, were active participants in the policy process. However, in the case of different school agencies and industrial partners, there were clearly divergent views on the role of schooling and the place of generic skills within reform initiatives.

State and Commonwealth Governments

State and federal educational bureaucracies were clearly an important stakeholder group at the time.

At the State level, reservations and concerns of one form or another were held over the merit of the Key Competencies proposal and competencies more generally. Lingard et al (1995) go so far as to suggest that 'the concerns of many of the States over aspects of the Mayer competencies were such that the national implementation process was halted' (1995: 50). In reflecting on his work advising the NSW education minister at the time, one State bureaucrat suggested that:

> 'there was little enthusiasm for Key Competencies in NSW at the time, and that would have been the advice given to the Minister based on the hostility of the schools towards industry taking over control of the curriculum' (AJMC28).

Although the Key Competencies did have implications for the VET sector, the same ministerial advisor suggested that, 'whilst the school sector is the loudest voice heard by the minister for education, often those ministers are also responsible for VET, so it's difficult to separate out the issues' (AJMC15). Indeed despite evidence that government ministers increased their influence over policy, another ministerial adviser suggested that in education, 'when push came to shove, if the minister wasn't prepared to buck his department then reforms would be blocked' (ARSC34). In this context, the actions of State educational bureaucrats also contributed to the difficulties experienced by policy activists involved in attempting to introduce a new model of non-employment based vocational education to schools, one that also sought to develop generic skills, albeit not the set prescribed by the Mayer Committee. Reflecting on the 'absurd vocational preparation model that separated general from vocational education' (ARSC29), comments from one of the instigators behind the formation of the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF) provide an insight into the culture that existed within educational bureaucracies at the time:

> 'throughout the whole of that time we were confronted with either the indifference or downright hostility of senior bureaucrats at the State level within both the school and the TAFE sectors, and at the Commonwealth level as well' (ARSC51).

This perspective was shared by a member of the Mayer Committee who noted that whilst 'there was strong resistance to vocational education amongst school teachers,' he was struck by 'the sheer reluctance of teachers to getting people ready for anything other than university' (AEMB05).

The competencies movement was criticised at the time for seeking to control all education and training in terms of work related competencies. Marginson (1997) suggested that the generic skills agenda enabled general academic programs to be described in terms of work related outputs, thus making it possible to 'govern all educational programs in terms of vocational objectives' (Marginson 1997: 1972). This view is reflected in the concerns of educators of the time such as David Pennington, VC of Melbourne University, who argued that government was looking 'to bring all within a seamless web of control through a network of tripartite committees of union, industry and government representatives' (*The Australian* 1992:8). However, the development of these networks appears to have been as much about breaking State agency stranglehold over educational programs, as it was about facilitating input from the government's industry partners.

Reflecting on the institutional landscape at the time, a Director of the Dusseldorp Foundation suggested that 'in the early days of the Hawke government they were sitting around in the ACTU plotting the reform of Australia's education and training system, and for them, the biggest enemy was the States' (ARSB21). This suspicion was perhaps valid, if one considers the actions of school authorities that briefed ministers involved in the Perth ACE/MOVEET meeting that rejected the Key Competencies.

The Commonwealth through DEET was responsible for driving policy initiatives that sought to introduce a more national picture to education at this time and whilst they were no doubt influenced by the tripartite arrangements that were in place, the efforts of the Commonwealth to proceed with the Key Competencies may also be attributable in part to the efforts of the then First Assistant Secretary of DEET's Schools and Curriculum Division, Alan Ruby.

Ruby was a member of the Mayer Committee, and was described by one committee member as 'Mayer's right hand man' (AAMA38). He was a noted advocate of the Key Competencies, and was observed by a colleague at DEET as having 'kept things going within the Department' (ACDA20). Indeed, commitment from the Commonwealth ensured that the Key Competencies remained on the agenda, despite the complete rejection of the Mayer proposal by the States at the Perth AEC / MOVEET meeting.

Whilst some bureaucrats considered the Key Competencies in terms of their educational relevance, their potential impact on funding arrangements also influenced how sectoral representatives responded to the initiative. One member of the Finn Review panel suggested that:

> 'one of the Finn committee people was a senior DEET bureaucrat who went in with the agenda of using the process to win large slabs of Commonwealth dollars for TAFE, with the logic that as universities and schools had recently benefited from Commonwealth largesse it was TAFE's turn' (ARSC24).

He further argued that:

> 'this was tacitly supported by a senior schools representative who wasn't prepared to break ranks and was happy to go along with the notion of Key Competencies as a compromise to addressing the problem of young people's vocational preparation. That's why the Finn report ended up implicitly recommending lots more money for TAFE' (ARSC26).

This view suggests that ongoing support for Key Competencies through the Finn and Carmichael processes had as much to do with protecting existing program arrangements in schools and TAFE as it did with implementing generic skills based reform of school to work transition arrangements. The evidence suggests that State education authorities offered considerable resistance to the changes suggested by the Key Competencies for a number of reasons, further

demonstrating the impact of policy institutions on the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies during this period.

Industry and *Unions*

Whilst State educationalists held reservations about the Mayer proposal, a counter view was that the Key Competencies had 'gained powerful tripartite support in government and industry' (Marginson 1993: 157). It is true that the Business Council of Australia (BCA) and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) endorsed the Finn Committee's recommendations, including those on the Key Competencies. The Mayer Report itself was also endorsed by a wide range of industry bodies, although there is evidence to suggest that their endorsement may not have been all that well informed.[32].

However, whilst the support of industry for a generic skills agenda may have been superficial to some extent, their involvement in the development of the agenda was a significant issue, and provides evidence of the key role played by industrial actors and institutions during this period.

During this period, business organisations in Australia began to develop policies on the role of education in national economic reconstruction. The business based Committee for the Development of Australia (CEDA), the Commonwealth's Economic Planning Advisory Committee (EPAC), the Business Council of Australia (BCA), the Australian Science and Technology Council (ASTC) and the Trade Development Commission (TDC) all released reports that made recommendations for an increased commitment to education and training by various means. In particular, these organisations and forums simultaneously called for closer co-operation between industry and each sector of education.

The growing contribution of business organisations to policy debate reflected what Marginson termed 'strategic centralisation' (Marginson 1997), where the

---

[32] See for example, correspondence from the National Printing Industry Training Council (NPITC 1993), which endorsed the Mayer report despite handwritten notes on supporting documents claiming that the report had not been sighted.

Commonwealth government drew industry, unions and the media into education policy making and programs. As noted by Gittens, 'the development of Australia's human capital is far too important to our economic future to be left in the hands of patch preserving educationalists' (SMH 1986: 17). Thus during this period, business and media played an increasing role in policy debates with business also becoming more involved in program delivery (Papadopoulos 1991). Writing in *Business Review Weekly,* Duncan noted that business involvement was 'becoming more focussed, concerted and effective, working partly through the government's education-industry liaison committees' (BRW 1987).

The emerging view of industry needs, emphasised work performance issues evident in the literature, and as noted by a Director within DEET at the time, 'Mayer was a critical first step in reconceptualising the nature of skill. The schools had a content focus and the VET system had a technical focus, but Mayer looked at other things and that was important' (CRBC01).

Notwithstanding the limited educational expertise of the government's industry partners, industry and union representatives were involved in the Finn, Carmichael and Mayer Committees. As observed by a member of the Mayer Committee, 'it was important that there was a fairly equal weighting of employer and union representatives' (AALC26). The Chairperson, Eric Mayer, was himself active in the BCA during this period through his role of CEO at National Mutual. When he moved on from that position, the BCA appointed him to be the inaugural chair of the Business / Higher Education Roundtable which was being established at the time. Reaffirming the strong links between government, and industry, Mayer noted that 'Brian Finn mentioned me to Bob Hawke as a suitable candidate, and it all went from there' (AEMA29).

The government's partners were publicly supportive of their new roles within this reform agenda, as evidenced by their support for the Key Competencies and the demands for new skills that they presupposed. The work of Mayer was premised on the assumption that 'the changes currently occurring in Australian industry to enable Australia to compete in international markets depend on

developing a workforce capable of participating effectively in emerging forms of work and work organisation' (Mayer 1992: *i*).

During this period however, the concerns of business leaders were arguably different to those that motivated the public policy makers of the 1960's and 1970's. Marginson (1997) argued that business was 'little concerned about equality of opportunity and fair educational competition, its objective was to maximise the direct contribution of educated labour to production, firm by firm' (1997: 166).

Despite this perspective on industry involvement, the union movement also became more actively involved in the policy agenda, which came to increasingly assume an industrial perspective. In the influential report *Australia Reconstructed* (ACTU / TDC 1987), ACTU Secretary Bill Kelty argued that 'employers and unions need to recognise their obligation to tackle the problem of skill formation' (1987: v). During the period of Finn, Carmichael and Mayer, an accord between the Labour Commonwealth government and the Australian Council of Trade Unions facilitated the restructuring of a wide range of industrial awards. This enabled unions to establish more broadly based descriptions of skill that were tied to new work classifications, and they achieved this in part by taking advantage of the government instigated reform of industry training standards.

Collins (1993) notes that after the publication of *Australia Reconstructed* in 1987, Laurie Carmichael 'had a sense of urgency about the restructuring of Australia's economic and industrial base', seeing competency based training as 'the contribution education and training could make to that process' (1993: 8). However, a member of the Finn Committee suggested that:

> 'Laurie Carmichael went into the Finn process with the agenda of making education more relevant to working life through introducing Key Competencies rather than vocational preparation as part of the transition from school to work' (ARSC45).

As unions became influential in policy development and planning (Senate 2000), Eric Mayer himself expressed concern that the Key Competencies would

'end up being driven by industrial relations issues' (Mayer 1992b). Indeed, the industrial climate did influence the fate of the Mayer and Carmichael reports. A member of the Mayer Committee observed that 'when the Carmichael report was finished, the Labour government agenda was driven by Carmichael who was pushing career pathways at the expense of other agendas' (ASHA53). Carmichael's new system of substantially work based vocational certificate training pathways was to be 'established by enterprise bargaining but within industry awards' (Marginson 1993: 159), an approach that left room only for lip service to generic skills.

A member of the Finn Review team observed that 'Carmichael was focussed on an employment based model as the solution to school to work transition, and by that stage transition was the main game and Mayer was a side issue' (ARSA78).

Whilst it is arguable that this approach 'stemmed from the old fear of streaming vocational students' (ARSC46), it is also possible that the emphasis on Key Competencies that emerged from the Finn Review and that was reinforced through the Carmichael report, was part of a conscious strategy to avoid dealing with the more challenging task of school to work transition in its entirety so as to deliver a broader industrial agenda that sought to trade off productivity increases for an increased investment in training.

However, an Assistant-Director in DEET at the time, suggested that 'Carmichael basically dealt with the easy stuff and confirmed everyone's view about what training should be about. It was a conventional and orthodox view that hit a chord with government' (ACRC12). Conversely, the Mayer Committee was seen as 'dealing with hard stuff, not stuff that was easy to capture hearts and minds with' (ACRC14).

Whilst Marginson (1997) argues that the role of industry and unions in educational reform during this period was the most important manifestation of the new vocationalism in Australia, Duncan (1987) argued that one consequence of

industry being on the 'inside' was that their emphasis was placed on 'rising economic needs rather than falling educational standards' (1987: 25).

Thus with the Key Competencies, advocates of generic skills in industry and the unions saw their job as simply being 'to specify the performance outcomes without addressing the educational problem of how the capabilities for such outcomes can be developed' (Collins 1993: 7). Consequently, they adopted the view that 'the professional and technical issues were mere details that could be dealt with easily in the implementation phase' (Stanley 1993: 145).

The accepted view was that industry were leading the push for generic skills during this period. However whilst a range of industry bodies endorsed the general concept of generic skills, it is useful to consider the workings of the Mayer Committee in order to gauge what meaning and value generic skills might have actually held for the business representatives involved.

The composition of the Mayer Committee was larger than both the Finn and Carmichael Committees, and arguably broader in its membership. Whilst it struck a reasonable balance between educationalists and union / business representatives, those from industry were in the minority. The positive contribution from Alan Houston, Director of Personnel at Coles Meyer was noted by a member of the Mayer secretariat, as was the role of Laurie Carmichael and the general 'input of the unions' (AJNC13). A member of the secretariat observed that 'the industry representatives agreed with the concept of generic skills and had strong convictions that opportunities to address them were being wasted' (APWC12).

However, a member of the Mayer Committee noted that 'the whole process was not really industry driven. Industry wasn't jumping up and down for them to be introduced even though they were the sorts of skills that they wanted from recruitment' (AEMC07). Indeed after the Committee itself was constituted it was noted that 'there was no real commercial representation on the committee, when the hard word was put on possible individuals, nothing happened – they didn't want to back up their general support with specific resources' (AEMC08).

A member of the Mayer secretariat reinforced this view by suggesting that 'industry in the main was not very interested' (ABBC15), with the Chairman himself indicating that:

> 'whilst many large employers had affiliations with specific TAFE colleges, they didn't want to get involved more broadly as they believed that the sorts of things surrounding the KCs were part of their competitive advantage and they didn't want that to enter the public domain' (Mayer pers. com).

Whilst the Mayer Committee's State consultations were designed to provide scope for additional industry input, a member of the committee secretariat noted that across the whole exercise there 'generally wasn't much industry input' (JNA12). The work of Mayer was thus a difficult task in more ways than one. As suggested by a Director within DEET at the time, not only did it have to overcome industry's apparent ambivalence, it suffered because 'clearer statements needed to come from business so that the leadership of schools and State training agencies would recognise demand – that didn't happen with Mayer' (ACRC16). One Mayer Committee member suggested that a major issue was that 'Mayer was disbanded too soon and no one was tasked to manage implementation. Champions were sent to the four corners of the earth and that fragmented the momentum' (AAMC18).

The involvement of industry in the reform processes during this period was thus a patchy and variable affair. Pickette (1992) argued that 'industry (was) not well prepared for its central role in the national training reform agenda in an organisational, managerial nor policy sense' (1992: 243). Similarly, Butterworth (1992) suggested that small to medium firms that comprise the bulk of industry have 'great difficulty identifying and articulating their own basic training needs, let alone the competencies for their industry' (1992: 22). Indeed, the industry training advisory body (ITAB) networks established during this period were involved in 'inherent structural and power tensions between themselves and the peak employer bodies' (Beevers 1992: 97).

As a result, meaningful industry input into the development of a generic skills agenda was always unlikely to be comprehensive and truly representative. Because of this, Sweet (1993) argued that:

> 'the lack of research into how occupational skills are acquired coupled with insufficient ownership of the training reform process by industry, has meant that the Key Competency debate has been dominated by those concerned to classify, measure and report achievement rather than by those interested in how to develop and use competence' (Sweet cited in CEDA 1995).

Thus despite the goodwill that appears to have existed amongst the Committee members, on release of the report the ACTU ironically complained that the model was 'too academic' and too far from the 'realities of industry' (ACTU 1992: 3-4). This response may not be surprising if one accepts the view that unions were focussed on an employment based model of vocational preparation, compared with the broader development of generic skills. As noted by a policy activist at the time, 'Laurie Carmichael and DEET were firmly locked into the view that vocational preparation and entry level training meant employment and wages after leaving school not the integration of learning and work with a focus on generic skills' (ARSC19).

Universities

Whilst less directly affected by the Key Competencies initiative, Australian universities also became involved in the generic skills debate during this period.

Within higher education, the Mayer proposal stimulated debate over the relationship between general and vocational education and the potential for cross-sectoral articulation based on the Key Competencies. Universities had been involved in developing professional competencies and had been participated in the work of the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR), which Collins suggests was the 'vanguard which led the competency based movement into university territory in Australia' (1993: 5).

However, Chappell et al suggest that 'the reluctance of many educators to embrace the concept of competence can in part be attributed to the history of the competency based training movement in vocational education' (1995: 175), which has been criticised for atomistic and oversimplified approaches to training delivery and assessment.

Adding to the negativity towards competencies within the sector was the view that consultation with universities had been inadequate throughout the development of CBT (Wilson 1992). Although Marginson (1997) notes that 'the AVCC said that the professions were free to opt for CBT if they wished' (1993: 155), the fact that same statement indicated that the Australian Standards Framework should not be used in relation to university courses, suggests that university resistance to the notion of competence colonising general education was a major barrier to the Key Competencies playing any role in higher education. In doing so, the university sector sent clear signals to the States and the Commonwealth that the full scope of the Mayer proposal was unlikely to succeed.

Thus whilst the policy institutions and actors within higher education did not play as central a role in the development of the Key Competencies, it is arguable that their lack of enthusiasm influenced the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies through their impact on views within government and school policy circles.

d. the complexity of generic skills

The conceptualisation of generic skills within Australian VET was crucial in influencing the trajectory of the Key Competencies during this period.

As an educational construct, generic skills are not universally accepted as a meaningful and useful innovation. They are contested phenomena. During the work of the Finn and Mayer committee, conceptual and operational issues arose that were related to debates surrounding:

- the definition of generic skills;
- the development of standards frameworks;
- assessment and reporting;
- teacher education and professional development; and
- the implications of outcomes based education for curriculum development.

In assuming the responsibility for operationalising the Key Competencies, the Mayer Committee was faced with a number of difficult tasks, not least of which was a number of definitional challenges. As Borthwick (1993) noted, 'the first issue that occupied the Mayer Committee when it embarked on its task of further development of the Finn recommendations was the term competence itself' (1993: 25). This challenge had preoccupied the Finn Committee before it, which noted that 'competence has been an unstable concept which requires explicit definition' (Finn 1991: 56). Notions of competence have existed in education for a number of years and predate the reforms of this period, however, as noted by Grant (1979), 'perhaps no word has been used more frequently in recent years with less precision' (1979: 2).

The working definition included in the Karmel Report was that competence involved 'the ability to use knowledge and skills effectively to achieve a purpose in work, further education, community participation and self management' (Karmel 1985: 68-79). In adopting a broad definition of competence that would influence the approach of Mayer and others, Karmel (1985) also noted that generic skills were 'not the preserve of any particular subject discipline and their acquisition should be possible through many different subject areas, both academic and practical' (1985: 70).

This and other interpretations of competence however, reflect broader meanings than those contained in the strict behaviouralist interpretations that shaped the competency movement in its beginnings.[33]

---

[33] See for example the summary found in Chappell et al (1995).

Borthwick (1993) observed at the time of the Mayer Committee that 'words have histories, and while the term has been embraced generally by the training sector', the school sector was wary of the term competence because of 'long memories' where the idea of competence was associated 'with the chequered history of attempts to specify tight behavioural objectives' (1993: 25). Finn (1991) also noted the tension over definitions, suggesting that in the school sector 'competence usually denotes a fairly narrow concept of demonstrated capacity to do a specified task' (1991: 56).

The Mayer Committee grappled with this challenge and eventually came to agreement that competence 'was about what people can do' (1992: 5). However, as observed by Stanley (1993) at the time, 'the key publications from the Mayer Committee (were) remarkable for the absence of reference to the professional and technical literature on competency based education' (1993: 145).

In response to the Mayer Reports and the surrounding debates on competencies in schools, the normative aspects of education came to be emphasised by those supporters of general education who criticised the Key Competencies as a manifestation of the inherently narrow and reductionist competence paradigm.

Whilst Mayer's definition of competence recognised that 'performance is underpinned not only by skill but also by knowledge and understanding', Marginson (1993) observed that 'the Mayer competency strands were more specifically focussed on process; they were associated with the use of knowledge but did not themselves contain knowledge. The strands purged competence of all specific content' (1993: 160). These views saw the competence paradigm, of which the Key Competencies were the standard bearer, perceived as threatening to dilute and debase the purpose of a liberal education and its emphasis on specific content. A Victorian TAFE manager at the time observed:

'they shouldn't have been called competencies in the first place, and because they were, they came under the weight of the bigger arguments that circled around the competencies agenda more broadly. The KCs became compromised by questions of assessment, RPL and notions of mastery as opposed to being seen as abilities which are always being developed, improved and refined' (ACDD34).

Not surprisingly, a member of the Mayer Committee suggested that 'the term competency was a problem' (AEMC44).

The Finn, Carmichael and Mayer proposals were also criticised by school educators as being part of an industry driven agenda that viewed the existing school system as failing to adequately prepare school leavers for the world of work. Taylor et al (1997) noted that the Mayer Report 'embodied a critique of traditional pedagogy and existing curriculum content by proposing an additional educative focus on those attributes required in modern society' (1997: 135). A school teacher from NSW noted that:

'there were concerns amongst schools about the reductionist effect on the curriculum that competencies would have. The debate and the rhetoric was centred on content and the question of what was to be the driver of school curriculum' (AIBD52).

Conversely, Borthwick (1993) argued that the Key Competencies were in fact a 'strong endorsement of the essential importance of a sound foundation of general education' and that whilst they may 'involve some change of emphasis in schooling, they are neither new or alien to progressive thinking in education' (1993: 34). Such divergent views reflect the polarised debate that occurred in the education community, one that generated differing conceptual views that clearly hindered progress of the Key Competencies.

Borthwick (1993) also argued that apart from the challenges of definition, the 'issue arousing most comment in that early stage was the intended scope of the application of the Key Competencies' (1993: 25).

She believed that 'in many ways this seemed to be more about the question of labels than the actual substance of the proposed competencies' (1993: 26).

The skills identified by the Mayer Committee were not without controversy, partly caused by the decision of the Finn Committee to avoid specifically identifying a set of Key Competencies beyond the six Key Areas of Competence that they listed. There is evidence to suggest however, that the Finn Committee's emphasis on generic skills was strongly influenced by international developments. A Director within the ACT TAFE sector at the time suggested that:

> 'I knew Norm Fisher who was on the Finn Committee and I told him of the work going on in the USA as part of the SCANS initiative. Fisher went to an OECD conference in Phoenix Arizona and came back enthused about doing something similar. He mentioned it to Finn who liked the idea and Laurie Carmichael jotted down some ideas on the back of an envelope' (APKD22).

Clearly the work of the Mayer Committee further developed these concepts, building the six Finn key areas into seven Key Competencies. However, notwithstanding its consultations with stakeholder groups, the Committee reported that 'some reservations had been expressed about each of the Key Competencies' (Mayer 1992: 6). In particular, Using Technology and Using Mathematical Ideas and Techniques attracted the most criticism, often being 'perceived as specific skill areas, rather than generally applicable skills' (Mayer 1992: 86). In addition, there was some support for the addition of a category of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy (Mayer 1992c), although the relationship between the Key Competencies and general literacy and numeracy was never adequately resolved.

Cultural Understanding was also one of the Key Areas of Competence recommended by the Finn Review Committee, and whilst discussed by the Mayer Committee, it eventually was not included as a Key Competency. When the Mayer proposal was considered by States and Territories, Queensland reserved its position, arguing for 'cultural understanding' to be made an additional competency.

New South Wales and Western Australia also expressed the view that the list might need to be expanded (AEC / MOVEET 1992a). Reflecting the difficulty of bringing a diverse group to agreement on an agreed set of descriptors, Borthwick (1993) suggested that 'there is little doubt that debate over whether the Committee got it right with its list of Key Competencies will continue regardless of the decision that is taken by Ministers' (1993: 31), and continue it did, with the research showing that debate on the competencies themselves continued to restrain the progress of this educational initiative.

A member of the Mayer Committee recalled the 'uncertainty surrounding them as discrete artefacts' (AGJD57), suggesting that there were 'problems with definitions, and although they weren't major, they did create issues for us along the way' (AJGD51). Despite the view that 'once you peeled away the jargon, it was just about common sense' (AEMD23), industry consultation facilitated by the Australian Centre for Best Practice in March 1993, noted that 'the wording used to describe the Key Competencies was universally criticised as too complex, confusing and failing to provide clear definition and meaning' (ACBP 1993: 2). Clearly the logic of the Key Competencies was proving to be a complex set of ideas.

Indeed the overlap between certain skills, the varying degrees of genericism across them, and the relevance of separately identifying particular competencies, was recognised as an issue by the Finn Committee, who noted that:

> 'some of the areas of competence have a stronger knowledge content than others; some are more skill oriented; some are more readily assessable by objective methods than others; and some are more suited than others to be placed meaningfully into a standards framework' (1991: 57).

This degree of variation ensured that implementing the Key Competencies in school and VET systems would not be a simple matter.

Another significant challenge associated with the Key Competency proposal was the development of an assessment framework.

The Finn Committee noted that:

> 'the most difficult step in making the competencies operational is the development of each of them into a usable profile within a consistent framework describing different levels of achievement against which progress can be assessed and reported' (1991: 59).

Taking on this challenge, the Mayer Committee established three levels of performance, and whilst the fit between these levels and those of the Australian Standards Framework (ASF)[34] was not exact, they were established to provide a 'common reference point or points as the basis for nationally consistent assessment and reporting' (Mayer 1992: 12). The performance levels however attracted substantial and conflicting criticism. A member of the Mayer Committee observed that:

> 'some felt that there were too many levels, others that there were too few. Much of the criticism was directed at the descriptions of the levels: some felt that the levels were described in terms that were too abstract and that could not readily be operationalised' (ASHD47).

Another suggested that 'Mayer didn't have the AQF[35] to help him, so his attempts to work with levels was late in the day, and could have been done better' (AALD17).

There is some evidence to suggest that particular VET sector stakeholders influenced the use of levels by the Mayer Committee. One observer of the Committee's work noted that a particular bureaucrat 'was active at the time of the Mayer committee and was influential in convincing the Mayer Committee to build in the levels against their best wishes' (ACDD23).

---

[34] The ASF was a hierarchical framework used to position competency standards in relation to the complexity of the work being described ie: Level 1 being the most basic, Level 8 being the most advanced.

[35] The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) replaced the ASF and was seen to provide a more useful framework for positioning and analysing the relativities between school, VET and tertiary courses. It is arguable that this feature would have been of assistance to the Mayer Committee in its work to identify the cross-sectoral potential of the Key Competencies.

Indeed another committee member reflected that 'the levels were seen as not being helpful: they didn't reflect the actual progression of skills, they were inconsistent when applied across the different competencies and were not a sound base for measuring performance' (AJGD12). The difficulties experienced by Mayer in dealing with the issue of levels extended to the relationship with existing assessment frameworks. As foreshadowed by the Finn Review:

> 'the competency profiles have to be broad and generic enough to encompass the diversity of curriculum content across schools and VET without reducing the profile content to superficial generalities' (1991: 60).

Whilst the Mayer levels sought to satisfy this challenge, the resulting framework challenged existing assessment practices and was inconsistent to some degree with the work occurring at the same time through CURASS on the national profiles and statements. Randall (1993) noted:

> 'like the profiles, the Key Competencies sequence is developmental, however the sequence is staged rather than continuous so that the determination of attainment is taken to be explicit and unequivocal, that is the scale is of a different kind from the profiles, typically requiring a yes/no judgement about the competence obtained' (1993: 53).

The layering of narrow competency assessment approaches over developmental skills such as Key Competencies significantly limited the appeal of the Key Competencies to educationalists.

It is arguable that the incompatibility of these two approaches presented a greater challenge to educators than that posed by the profiles themselves, which at the time were poised to significantly alter the design and delivery of school education within States. Given that the Mayer Committee was unable to overcome the difficulties of developing a standards framework that was suitable to existing and emerging assessment arrangements, it is not unreasonable to suggest that this contributed to the negative reaction of the States, and in doing so, affected the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies during this period.

Beyond the development of a standards framework, assessment and reporting of the Key Competencies was another complex issue, and its treatment during the period created a range of issues that required attention during subsequent trials and attempts at implementation.

The Mayer report outlined a set of fourteen common reference points for assessment. The following excerpts (with my italicised comments) have been cited in order to highlight the challenge to assessment arrangements that existed at the time. The common reference points from Mayer (1992: 30-34) noted that:

- Achievement of the Key Competencies should be assessed against nationally agreed performance levels *(which did not exist in the school sector)*;
- Assessment should be undertaken as a holistic process which integrates knowledge and skills with their practical application *(contexts that were outside the scope of most school based experiences available at the time)*;
- Achievement of a performance level should be based on assessment at that level in at least two different contexts *(although it was not clear if different learning areas within school curriculum could provide different contexts)*;
- Criteria for judging performance and assessment methods should be made explicit to the student / trainee *(a challenge to norm-referenced school assessment systems)*; and
- Assessment procedures should provide the recognition of Key Competencies no matter how, where or when they have been acquired *(a challenge for centrally administered examination systems).*

As indicated by these points, the scope of the assessment provisions within the Mayer Report presented an all or nothing proposal, with little option for State school and VET authorities to proceed without considerable reform of their systems. A Director within DEET at the time suggested that 'if it was proposed as a stand alone add on, something that the States could have played with, it might have got somewhere' (ACRD38).

Similarly, a member of the Mayer Committee noted that 'assessment was a complex issue and it might have made the whole thing too hard. We might have tried to do too much at the time' (AEMD45).

A further problem with the Finn and Mayer Committees conceptualisation of the Key Competencies was their relationship to values and attitudes. The Finn Committee, whilst not explicitly considering values and attitudes, noted that 'once it had identified what it regarded as essential competencies for the world of work, it had also incorporated many of the attributes required for individual well being and for citizenship' (1991: 55). During the consultation phase, members of the Mayer Committee were confronted by arguments from industry and parent groups that called for the inclusion of attitudes and values within the set of Key Competencies (Mayer 1992c). In discussing their position which excluded attitudes and values, the Committee argued that 'a set of Key Competencies can only contain those things which can be developed by education and training which do not require some innate predisposition or adherence to a particular set of values and which are amenable to credible assessment' (1992: 9). It is on this point that differences between the Mayer Key Competencies and comparable generic skills schemes developed elsewhere emerge.

Other schemes, but most notably those in the United States and Canada, have included generic skills that are based upon particular attitudes and dispositions. And perhaps it is in this regard that the Key Competencies were described as an 'incomplete set of work' by one Committee member at the time (AALD25), perhaps in recognition of the fact that values and attitudes were possibly more important to industry and employers because of their relevance to recruitment and selection for initial employment.[36] Consequently, the lack of explicit treatment of attitudes and values contributed to the view that the Key Competencies were an incomplete and inadequate set of generic skills.

---

[36] See for example Goddard and Smith (1996).

Whilst the relationship between knowledge and performance continues to challenge educators today, the Mayer Committee's position on transferability added further debate on the merit of the Key Competencies during this period.

The Mayer Report suggested that competence involves 'both the ability to perform in a given context and the capacity to transfer knowledge and skills to new tasks and situations' (1992: 4). However, Perkins and Salomon (1989) argue that 'the case for generalisable, context independent skills and strategies that can be trained in one context and transferred to other domains has proved to be more a matter of wishful thinking than hard empirical evidence' (1989: 19). Through its position on transferability, the Mayer report did imply a dual system of knowledge which separated foundational generic knowledge from discipline based learning.

Marginson (1997) and others argue that this assumption is problematic in that it 'privileges generic competencies over discipline-based learning' (1993: 121). Thus notwithstanding evidence from the literature to the contrary, Mayer's position on transferability not only reinforced aspects of the NTB's then definition of competence, but provided a key element of the Committee's aim to provide a link between general education, vocational education and training and the needs of industry.

While the Committee assumed that Key Competencies were transferable between related settings, the notion of generic work related competencies was a contentious issue, particularly amongst educators faced with a range of contexts for delivery and assessment. Commentators have argued that the implicit assumption in the Mayer Committee's approach was that generic skills are able to transcend the contextual as they are common to all learning in work and education. Marginson (1994) suggests however, that at least some of the time, 'both employers and educationists use the notion of transferable skills to advance different agendas of their own that are unrelated to the question of transfer per se' (1994: 2).

The Mayer Committee itself struggled with the implications of the concept, with one member of the secretariat noting that 'there were some unresolved issues around the role of context and the relativities between learning area context and workplace context' (AJGD27). Whilst transfer was not necessarily a major issue for educators as they considered the Key Competencies proposal, the issue again contributed to the view that the Key Competencies were not adequately conceptualised.

As previously noted, whilst the main focus of the debate on generic skills was oriented around the concerns of schools, the VET sector was also challenged by issues of how the Key Competencies would relate to competency standards.

The NTB did undertake further work to articulate the principles by which the Key Competencies were to be incorporated into industry competency standards (NTB 1992), but given the slow rate of standards development that was plaguing the NTB at the time (Beevers 1993), it is not surprising that simply mapping the Key Competencies against existing frameworks was the approach recommended.

Indeed, an occasional NTB representative on the Mayer Committee noted that 'the focus at that stage was more on identifying them as opposed to taking steps to focus on them or to seek to add them in where they weren't covered' (AALC28). Notwithstanding this pragmatic approach, the two models for integrating Key Competencies within the standards were not well understood (Ducker 1992). The two models effectively represented the difference between an integrated or stand alone approach, and as noted by a Section Head within DEET at the time, 'there was a tension between identification and integration so that even at the end of the day when the proposal was finalised, there were still conceptual issues being debated' (ACRD41).

Whilst to a large extent the VET sector maintained an arms length position on the Key Competencies during this period due to their positioning as a schools issue, it is arguable that the lack of engagement from the VET sector occurred

in part due to incomplete conceptualisation of how the Key Competencies were to relate to competency standards.

Consequently, it is clear from the research that conceptual issues surrounding generic skills hampered implementation of the Key Competencies, as various unresolved matters came to impact on the substantive positions.taken by stakeholders, the policy trajectory of their implementation, and ultimately their review a decade later.

Conclusion

Between 1985 and 1993, the Key Competencies came to be established as Australia's first attempt at broadly integrating generic skills within schooling and vocational education. This occurred at a time of significant policy activity that generated major reforms though a number of key policy events that include the work of the Finn, Carmichael and Mayer Committees.

These reforms occurred in a contested education and training landscape, where dominant policy drivers produced reform initiatives that would impact on the policy landscape for decades to come. This research has demonstrated that these drivers not only influenced general VET policy, but also the trajectory of the Key Competencies during this period.

The re-emergence of human capital theory amongst new vocationalists has been shown to be a major policy driver between 1985 and 1993. Questions over the purpose of education were central to the work of not only the Finn and Mayer Committees, but also that of the Karmel Committee that preceded them. Thinking on generic skills was directly influenced by the literature on emerging forms of work and work organisation, views that were given greater force by the realisation that labour markets would never be the same again and that the transition from school to work was an emerging social and political issue of significance. It was in this context that a case for improved links between the education system and the world of work was most strongly made.

Despite this rhetoric, piecemeal industry support for the Key Competencies threw into question the extent of their engagement, and clearly demonstrated that as a stakeholder group, industry were not yet able to clearly articulate their expectations of the education system, nor the importance that they placed on generic skills. The research suggests that this void was filled by the work of Carmichael whose more pragmatic AVTS proposal presented a far simpler policy initiative, one that reinforced the primacy of employment based pathways and secured additional Commonwealth funding for TAFE.

In doing so, it would appear that during this period, Australia missed an opportunity to implement more sophisticated approaches to the transition from school to work, approaches that would have provided greater opportunities for the assessment and reporting of generic skills as a tool for vocational preparation.

The research has also demonstrated that other influences affected the Key Competencies during this period. Chief amongst those was the inadequate conceptualisation of the Key Competencies as a set of generic skills. Definitional issues, the challenge of assessment, the question of transfer and the links to competency standards all combined to question the completeness of the Mayer proposal and its ability to be nationally implemented. This shortcoming made the Mayer proposal more complex than it might have been, and ultimately allowed uncertainty to restrain progress in both schools and the VET sector.

The research has also demonstrated that whilst industry was finding its feet in this new vocationalist dialogue, political and constitutional tensions between State and Commonwealth governments ensured that educational federalism was the major VET policy driver in Australia, one that had significant influence on the development of the Key Competencies. This key driver hinged on the nature of curriculum, consistency of assessment, and funding arrangements between the Commonwealth and the States. Mayer's proposed program of national assessment threatened the State's rigid testing regimes and their

investments in curricula, and guaranteed there would be no State government support for the Mayer proposal.

Consequently, the Commonwealth's efforts to implement national consistency through its agenda of corporate federalism suffered serious setbacks during this period, with the rejection of the national statements and profiles and the near scuttling of the Mayer proposal, a development that was only salvaged through the offer of additional funding for further trialing of the Key Competencies.

From this point on, the new political balance within AEC and MOVEET saw the conservative parties utilise their new majority to halt or at least slow down the emerging national agendas, and as the political complexion of the Commonwealth altered, the federal government had increasing difficulty in implementing its curriculum reforms (Bartlett et al, 1994).

This phase of the Key Competency policy trajectory also provided further insights on the policy model proposed at the beginning of this thesis.

In reflecting on the concept of policy arrived at through the literature review in this thesis, the research in this section clearly demonstrates that not only is policy rearticulated across the policy cycle (from Karmel, to Finn, to Mayer), but that different policy streams came to impact on the trajectory of the Key Competencies. It is also clear from the research that politics was central to the Key Competencies policy process and that both the process and its outcomes were influenced by corporate federalism operating at that time.

Thus whilst key policy drivers of the time led to the emergence of Key Competencies on the national scene, industrial indifference, educational federalism and conceptual uncertainties would have scuttled the initiative, if it had not been for the personal influence of key policy actors and the availability of supplementary funding which both combined to enable the Key Competencies to go on and feature in one of the country's largest ever educational trials.

Chapter 5: The Trialing of the Key Competencies (1994–1997)

Or how the Key Competencies came under intense scrutiny but were left to drift towards the policy wilderness

Over the period 1994-1997, Australia's Commonwealth Government allocated $20M under the Key Competencies Program to 'support further development of the proposals set out in the Mayer Report, and to support the States and Territories and other education authorities in piloting and assessing the feasibility of the proposals' (DEET 1993: 2).

This Key Competencies Program thus came to frame generic skills activity for four years, and in doing so, laid the foundation for each jurisdiction's treatment of generic skills over the subsequent decade. This program of trials is the focus of this chapter, which will present and discuss the research findings that relate to the second chronological stage of the Key Competencies policy process.

a. The flow of policy

The first key policy event during this period was the Key Competencies Program itself as it had a significant effect on the integration of generic skills within vocational education in Australia. $20M of Commonwealth funds were allocated, resources that demonstrated ongoing strong commitment to one of the original central planks of VET reform at a time when the fiscal restraint of subsequent governments was yet to take effect. The Key Competencies Program has been described as one of the largest educational trials ever undertaken across Australia (Salier 1996).

The funding was allocated in two stages. The first stage involved a promotional strategy, major State and Territory pilots, and other general projects including the further validation of the Key Competencies in industry (Rowland and Young

148

1996). The second stage involved a professional development package for teachers and a wide range of different projects involving teacher associations and parent and community groups.

Whilst Rowland and Young suggest that funding during the second stage 'gave greater emphasis to industry and the VET sector' (1996: 11), the actual range of projects indicates that the Key Competencies Program was concerned more with school rather than VET sector reform. This is borne out by an analysis of the seventy-seven (77) projects funded in the program. Only nine were either directly or partly concerned with formal vocational education and training programs. These projects are listed in Table 8 overleaf.

Whilst each of these projects produced a wide range of reports and products, it is arguable that the NSW Project was the most significant VET project, including as it did, a focus on both VET curriculum and on and off the job training practices.

The overall NSW project was also unique as it involved a cross-sectoral approach to piloting the Key Competencies in schools, TAFE and workplace training. However, whilst efforts were made to collaboratively address the outcomes of the program, the VET sector activities were considerably separate to the work undertaken in the school sector, despite the formation of a joint management team and liaison between individual project officers. Whilst significant differences existed between and within the VET and school sectors in NSW, the work undertaken in each strand largely adhered to a series of common phases: mapping curriculum, mapping practice, and field testing innovative approaches to curriculum, delivery, assessment and reporting.

In South Australia, a series of VET action learning projects and case studies were initiated; in Victoria, less of an emphasis on field-testing resulted in a number of mapping projects being completed; and in the ACT, a small project looked at the issues for youth at risk using the Key Competencies as a vehicle for the recognition of prior learning in the VET sector.

Clearly, in the other States and Territories during negotiations with the Commonwealth, there was either little interest from VET stakeholders or the program itself was seen as being only relevant to the school sector.

Project	State and Agency
New South Wales Vocational Education and Training Initiative - Strand 3	NSW: NSW TAFE Commission and the NSW Department of Training and Education Co-ordination
The identification and further integration of Key Competencies into the curriculum, delivery, assessment and reporting of apprenticeships	Vic: Victorian Office of Training and Further Education
Teaching and Learning the Key Competencies in Vocational Education and Training	SA: South Australian Department for Employment, Training and Further Education
Key Competencies and Transfer of Learning	NSW: NSW TAFE Assessment Centre for Vocational Education
Key Competencies in Industry Standards	National: National Training Board
Teaching and Learning the Key Competencies in VET: A Professional Development Strategy	SA: South Australian Department for Employment, Training and Further Education
Self Paced Learning Guide for Workplace Trainers	SA: South Australian Process Manufacturing ITAB
Key Competency Training and Recognition Service Pilot Project	ACT: Canberra Institute of Technology
Piloting the Key Competencies in the Australian VET Sector and Workplaces: A Synthesis Report.[37]	National: University of Technology, Sydney

Table 8: Key Competencies Program VET Sector Projects

As evident from the table above, Key Competency VET projects had a common focus of:

- VET curriculum, particularly apprenticeship and traineeship programs;
- teaching and learning, both on and off the job; and

---

[37] This grouping relates to those projects examining formal VET programs and as such does not include several other projects not focussed solely on schools, but having cross-sectoral

- assessment and reporting, both on and off the job.

As these projects drew to a close, a synthesis report of VET sector projects (Hager et al 1997) concluded that there was 'agreement amongst all stakeholders that the Key Competencies need to be integrated into all aspects of vocational education and training: curriculum; resources; delivery; assessment and reporting' (1997:1). Notwithstanding this consensus, this research found that a range of tensions and disagreements did exist, particularly in relation to the management of the projects.

Chief amongst those were issues surrounding the conceptualisation of the projects themselves. The projects were variously described as pilots, research projects, field testing, action learning and policy implementation. Whilst the projects may have been all of these things, reflecting a 'complex, iterative and fluid research undertaking' (Ryan 1997: 3), there were clearly differing views about the purpose of the projects.

Whilst a school sector project manager in NSW noted that 'the projects were conducted as a research project', a section head with DEET at the time suggested that 'the dollars allocated for the trials were really about fishing to see what was possible, it wasn't really a research project' (BCRA17). Conversely, a manager of one of the school sector projects in NSW suggested that the program was 'thought of as a genuine research project in that we didn't know the answers and they wanted to explore the possibilities' (BJGA29).

Despite these views however, the research suggests that the projects were destined to provide minimal policy impact because of their very nature. A DETYA consultant argued that:

> 'education research is poorly perceived amongst industry and policy stakeholders because its a flexible ideological baggage train that can be plundered. From a critical perspective, the Key Competencies program

---

relevance, including the work of Lohrey (1995), NIEF (1995) and Goddard and Ferguson (1996).

151

was unfocussed and scattered with few quality controls. Because of that it had little to rely on in terms of reliable knowledge' (BBYA3).

Whilst the projects were supported by generous timeframes and budgets, a VET sector project manager in NSW suggested that 'it was wrong that responsibility for large budgets was given to an individual rather than to a broader committee which would have increased ownership' (BPGA11). Relatedly, the research found issues surrounding the management of individual projects. Another VET sector project manager in NSW noted that, 'the conceptualisation of the pilots was a problem because there was no scoping of the work to be done. The politics surrounding the concept and the range of organisations and interests involved prevented that from happening' (BPCA27). Clearly, the potential implications of these projects were such that an exploratory approach was deemed to be the most appropriate.

However, the research also identified suggestions of poor project management both at the national and State levels. A VET sector project manager in NSW provided a particularly illuminating description of the process:

> 'It didn't go anywhere because those involved weren't project managers, funds were thrown everywhere and neither the goals or the methods for getting there were clear. The project was a type 4 project. What I mean by that is that neither the methods nor the goals were well defined - we were walking in the fog' (BPGA51).[38]

Whilst these views might reflect the reality of policy making being a 'hit and miss affair made on the run' (Ball 1998: 26), another VET sector project manager in NSW also criticised the projects for being done 'without a coherent project framework and no criteria against which success or failure was measured' (BJWA11).

---

[38] This comment draws on a framework of project classification developed by Eddie Obeng (see for example *Putting Strategy to Work: The Blueprint for Transforming Ideas into Action*, London: Pitman Publishing, 1996).

These views demonstrate the irrelevance of static conceptions of policy that presuppose calm and ordered policy environments. They also suggest that shortcomings in the conduct of individual State and national projects contributed to the minimal national substantive policy impact that occurred after the Key Competencies Program was wound up in 1997.

It should be stressed however, that the Key Competencies Program did not exist in isolation as a focus of policy activity. A number of other key policy events significantly affected the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies, particularly those that focussed on better preparing school students for the world of work.

Chief amongst those was the creation of the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF). Malley and Keating (2000) found that prior to the development of a coherent national picture for VET in schools, there were two pathways along which the VET in schools policy agenda travelled. The first was the 'orthodox VET pathway and the Australian National Training Authority', which 'followed a formal bureaucratic process of extending existing processes and structures in the post school / TAFE structures' (2000: 637). The second was shaped by schools and the work of the ASTF.

The creation of the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF) had a particular impact on the generic skills agenda within Australian VET. The ASTF was a body with an independent board able to stimulate grass roots school to work partnerships without funds having to go through the State education systems. Through ASTF funding, which amounted to $35mil during 1994-97,[39] many schools became involved in programs that developed independent approaches to developing generic skills, some of which experimented with the Key Competencies outside the program of the trials.[40]

---

[39] Malley and Keating (2000).
[40] See for example the student placement sheets and employer guidelines used by the Central Coast TRAC program.

Malley (1999) suggests that the creation of the ASTF expanded localised experimentation which was characterised by 'resource sharing, careers advice and concern for the welfare of the student in the workplace' (1999: 442), approaches that challenged traditional thinking and funding available through DEET at the time.

A DEET consultant involved in the Key Competency national projects reflected on his involvement in the ASTF initiative by noting: 'in our minds the answer was to weave vocational competencies into general education. By doing that, we'd prepare youth for work rather than doing it through traineeships and Key Competencies that were being pushed at the time' (BMRA31). The formation of the ASTF thus created a local movement of school based transition programs that significantly influenced policy on school to work transition over for the following decade, and eschewed the formal integration of Key Competencies into program design and delivery.

As a measure of the complex arrangements in place at the time however, during 1994, the reliance on employment based pathways within policy circles was further reinforced by the introduction of NETTFORCE traineeships.[41] Thus during the Key Competency trials, the Australian Traineeship System (ATS), Career Start Traineeships (CST) and NETTFORCE Traineeships all continued to promote employment based pathways.

It is argued here that the creation of the ASTF not only consumed attention and resources within DEET and State bureaucracies, but introduced a competing approach to generic work skills development that provided little focus on the Key Competencies, which had themselves been "parked" as a result of the trial process.

Whilst school systems grappled with these localised developments, they also had to manage implementation of the Commonwealth's AVTS and the New

---

[41] The National Employment and Training Taskforce (NETTFORCE) was established through *Working Nation* (Keating 1994) as an initiative to co-ordinate increased provision of apprenticeships and traineeships through additional incentives for employers.

Apprenticeship System, developments that were in themselves additional key policy events on school to work transition that occurred during this period. Indeed, the then new Minister Kemp noted that 'from 1996 to 2000, the main issue between States / Territories and the federal government, and between schools and Departments of Education, State training authorities and TAFE institutes was about the provision of funds to sustain these VET in schools and school based New Apprenticeship Programs' (Kemp 1999). Indeed, the 1995 Senate References Committee inquiry into ANTA noted that 'at the very time schools were being urged to promote vocational education and training, they were almost completely denied access to growth funds supplied by the Commonwealth and supplied by ANTA' (1995: 53).

ANTA MINCO endorsed key principles for the New Apprenticeship System in May 1996, preceding a detailed policy framework in May 1997 (ANTA 1996). Whilst building on foundations developed through the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA), these new reforms had considerable impact on the delivery of VET and the take-up of apprenticeships and traineeships throughout industry. They included new standards for registered training organisations and a new national quality assurance regime. Training Packages were also introduced, an initiative that sought to remove the central importance of curriculum and replace it with more direct relationships between industry competency standards and the delivery and assessment of learning outcomes within the VET system.

The implementation of the AVTS and the New Apprenticeship System represented a significant shift in the way VET was conceived and delivered in Australia. In schools, the top down implementation of the national training reform agenda was balanced by the emergence of ASTF funded local school initiatives. Indeed, Malley and Keating (2000) argue that as State and Territory governments absorbed the AVTS and New Apprenticeship System into their senior secondary schooling structures, they also sought to connect these with existing initiatives in years 7-10, thus creating a general model of vocationalism.

In the VET sector however, providers and State systems were thrown into disarray by the scope and nature of the new national reforms, changes that

were still being analysed eight years later through ANTA's high-level Review of Training Packages (ANTA 2004). Clearly, these developments significantly influenced the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies in both schools and the VET sector.

Another policy initiative targeting more generic skills during the period was the concept of Enterprise Education, which gained support within DEET and created competing priorities to the Key Competencies.

Initially derived from the work of Colin Ball at the OECD (OECD 1989a), the Enterprise Education in Schools Program (EES) was specifically designed to address a number of issues concerning enterprise education that arose out of the Karpin Report (Karpin 1995). Enterprise education was concerned with 'achieving a learning culture which results in greater numbers of students being equipped and enthused to identify, create, initiate and successfully manage personal, business, work and community opportunities (Keys Young 1999: x). Initiated by the same section in DEET responsible for managing the Key Competencies Program,[42] EES was allocated $3.4 million over a three-year period from 1996-97 to 1998-99.

Whilst Ministers at the third MCEETYA meeting in Canberra noted that work should proceed to 'determine the relationship between the development of Key Competencies in students and the development of an enterprising student' (MCEETYA 1995), it is interesting to note the comments of one of the first EES program managers who suggested that amongst his staff, 'enterprise skills were seen to operate above and beyond the KCs' (BCDA26), a position that would have surely influenced views within the Department on the status and role of the Key Competencies.

Another significant policy event that affected the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies at this time was the restructuring of policy fora at the national level. During this period, MCEETYA disbanded the Post Compulsory Education

---

[42] School to Work Section, Quality Schooling Branch, Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training.

and Training Taskforce, that until then had carriage of the Key Competencies Program.

Outstanding issues from that forum, including the Key Competencies, were referred to the Schools Taskforce, which was requested to 'report direct to MCEETYA on Key Competencies at the conclusion of the pilot phase' (MCEETYA 1995: 12). At the same meeting, the ANTA Ministerial Council (ANTA MINCO) was tasked to 'monitor developments under the Key Competencies Program and related issues relevant to the VET sector' (MCEETYA 1995: 6). Despite this monitoring role for ANTA, this move saw responsibility for the Key Competencies Program move from a forum tasked with cross sectoral issues related to post compulsory education and training, to one solely responsible for schooling.

During the period 1994-97, apart from noting progress of the pilots, the only detailed treatment of Key Competencies evident from MCEETYA minutes and papers related to the further development of the eighth Key Competency, Cultural Understanding, which was explored through work independent of the trial projects by ANTA's Standards and Curriculum Council and the Curriculum Corporation (MCEETYA 1997c).

The implementation Proposal for the AVTS, developed by the Post Compulsory Education and Training Taskforce and tabled at the second MCEETYA meeting in Alice Springs made no reference to Key Competencies or other non technical vocational skills, instead focussing on structures, targets and mechanisms for the new employment based framework (MCEETYA 1994).

Similarly, whilst much of the agenda of the fourth MCEETYA meeting in Adelaide was directed at the implications of the AVTS in schools, the Key Competencies did not feature in the record of discussions, despite their central role in the original program design as developed by the Carmichael Report in 1992. Council instead focussed on recommendations dealing with a range of issues including principles for VET in schools, funding arrangements, teacher training and materials development (MCEETYA 1995a).

Clearly, at Ministerial level, the focus on Key Competencies was waning at this stage, in part because of the crowded policy agenda, and in part through the ongoing program of trials and pilots which themselves created a vacuum that was ultimately filled by the increasing policy focus on VET in schools. However, the shift in responsibility for the Key Competencies within MCEETYA also resulted in the Key Competencies having a more narrow scope within policy circles, a shift that also clearly limited the likely impact of the program given the greater resistance to the Key Competencies in the school sector.

Whilst VET in schools and New Apprenticeship initiatives crowded the policy agenda, they also provided alternative policy options for the Commonwealth who were still confronted with declining youth labour markets and the ongoing problem of school to work transition. As suggested by a consultant involved in the evaluation of the pilots, 'there were several balls in the air at once, that's what politicians do' (BBYA39). Clearly, the culture within DEET at the time encouraged a range of policy initiatives that 'looked for something different' (BCDA25).

The Key Competencies Program of pilots drew to a close in 1997, with the report on the outcomes of the pilot phase (Rowland and Young 1996) tabled and noted as part of the last agenda item of the sixth MCEETYA meeting in Melbourne during March 1997. A senior project manager with DEET reflected on this process by noting that 'the report was delivered within DETYA, tabled to the taskforce and then MCEETYA, but there was no policy impact' (BPMA27). Indeed, a member of the Schools Task Force Working Group on Key Competencies that had ultimate responsibility for the pilots, suggested that 'the final report didn't even get presented to the minister' (BPGA16). Another member of that same working group noted that 'the report had very little impact, it was not widely read and was not widely distributed. It seemed to go into a hole' (BMSA21).

It would appear that the fate of the Key Competencies at this point had been previously decided in that their potential impact was insufficient to warrant ministerial attention.

A senior project manager with DEET summarised the process of the trials by saying that whilst 'a lot of work was done and a lot of the people involved got very excited, in the end it was just another project' (BPMA41). The lack of impact at the national level thus had as much to do with the mechanics and cycles of policy as it did with other factors.

In their review of the program of trials, Rowland and Young et al (1996) suggested that educators involved in the pilot projects were 'looking to education authorities for clear policy direction on the future development of the Key Competencies' (1996: 183). However, this clear direction never came, as ongoing relations between the States and the Commonwealth dominated the VET agenda and further mediated the impact of the Key Competencies Program.

b. The Politics of Federalism

Whilst the difficulties experienced by DEET in progressing the Key Competencies agenda were possibly further complicated by having to negotiate with States and Territories, the conduct of the trials themselves led to ongoing tensions between the Commonwealth and the States over access to Commonwealth funds and the intended scope of work. A section head within DEET at the time noted that:

> 'in Victoria there was clearly an attitude of "we'll take the money, now piss off", which meant that schools used the funds to do more in other areas than were strictly intended through the program. All the reporting requirements were OK, but it was very much a case of them using the funds to support whatever innovations they wanted to pursue in their own way' (BCDB58).

Other DEET staff shared similar reservations, with a project manager in the same section suggesting that 'the States were short sighted in dealing with their

159

projects and in some instances used the Commonwealth funds to simply maintain staff levels within their administration' (BMHB52).

The NSW trials were the last to be negotiated by the Commonwealth. Whilst the relationship between the States and the Commonwealth are a constant feature of educational politics in Australia, in the case of the Key Competencies, they were particularly sensitive in NSW where schools, unions and TAFE in the largest State had already voiced their displeasure with Key Competencies during the Mayer Committees consultations.

NSW was also an important player at the 69th MCEETYA meeting that rejected the Key Competencies proposal along with the national profiles and statements. A DEET Key Competencies project manager observed that 'MCEETYA is a forum for the Commonwealth to progress reforms, but the States use it as a forum to resist' (BPMB36). A school sector project manager in NSW argued that 'it was a commonly held belief that the outcomes would get up and that the KCs would piggy back it, but Chadwick, on advice from McMorrow rejected them in the end'[43] (BJGB38). Consequently, in early 1994, whilst negotiating with the Commonwealth over the trials, the NSW government chose to clarify its position in relation to the Key Competencies. A Statement by Minister Chadwick at the time noted that NSW:

- gave in principle agreement to the broad descriptors of Key Competencies as identified in the Mayer Report, with the addition of Cultural Understanding;
- agreed that these descriptors of Key Competencies can be integral to providing a platform linking school curriculum learning outcomes, vocational education programs and the needs of industry;
- rejected the detailed assessment and reporting framework and the levels of competencies suggested by the Mayer Committee; and
- agreed that the Commonwealth should support the development and trialing of these arrangements in States and Territories through its Key Competencies Program' (Crump and Walker 1996: 186).

---

[43] Virginia Chadwick was Minister for Education and Youth Affairs at the time, with Jim McMorrow being one of her Policy Advisors.

This Statement identified areas of disagreement with the Mayer proposal and signalled the key points of discussion over program objectives between the Commonwealth and NSW. Copies of original documents include hand written notes that further identified the areas of most concern for NSW. These refer to:

- implementing best practice pedagogy models to support delivery of Key Competencies in pilot schools;
- identifying strategies for widespread implementation of assessment and reporting arrangements for the Year 10 School Certificate; and
- identifying strategies for widespread implementation of Key Competency assessment and reporting arrangements in the context of the Higher School Certificate (DIRETFE 1994).

The initial lines of resistance apparent from these specific clauses cut across the main thrust of the original Mayer Proposal, and sought to restrict the potential of the initiative in NSW to a situation where Key Competencies would be identified in curriculum but not implemented more thoroughly so as to affect delivery, assessment and reporting.

NSW were clearly not interested in the Key Competencies impacting on assessment and reporting arrangements within that State, and thus NSW project amendments to the Commonwealth agreement deleted all objectives concerned with the implementation of best practice pedagogy and widespread implementation of assessment and reporting arrangements. As suggested by a school sector project manager in NSW, 'the KC's couldn't have been the next best thing in NSW' (BJGB51).

Available documentation from other States suggest more straightforward negotiations, although the relatively limited scope of VET and school projects demonstrate that the Commonwealth did not achieve the full scope of activity envisaged under the Key Competency Program.

Another consequence of the politics of federalism during this period was the ongoing tension around the national profiles and statements.

A DEET Key Competencies senior project manager suggested that at a national level, 'the debate surrounding statements and profiles was also on the agenda and distracted the focus on KCs' (BPMB28). Echoing concerns in the other States, the new NSW Labour government in early 1995 paused implementation of the profiles and statements on the basis of concerns over the quality of outcome statements, teacher workload and the speed of implementation (Aquilina 1995). A schools project manager in NSW observed that 'a number of groups in this State were opposed to levels in curriculum. A group of secondary principals lobbied the Minister, pressure came from Prof. Gaudrey at NSW uni, and the creative arts people were all against the move towards outcomes and profiles' (BJGB37).

The subsequent review in NSW was keenly watched by other States and Territories who themselves convened a national forum independent of the Commonwealth in 1996 to discuss the future of the profiles and outcomes (MCEETYA 1996).

The review of the use of outcomes and profiles within NSW schools (Eltis 1995) involved representatives of the major educational interest groups and authorities in NSW. A NSW Key Competencies schools project manager commented that 'throughout the review, the debate raged over a focus on content as opposed to a focus on skills. The Eltis review decided that content should be the focus, and that's the approach still guiding NSW schools today' (BIBB21). Writing as a school teacher at the time, Jo Karaolis argued that the core message of the Eltis Review was that 'educational change must be grounded in comprehensive and well-tested educational research, developed through collaboration with a broad range of teachers and academic experts' (Karaolis 1996).

Whilst this message was equally relevant to the Key Competency program, the Eltis Review, in commenting on the Key Competencies, noted that 'the panel does not support a position that would force any syllabus to fit an externally imposed outcome or competency' (Eltis 1995: 75), a clear indication of the effect of educational federalism in Australia at the time.

Eltis recommended the rejection of profiles, outcomes and levels, and suggested that instead there should be a focus on curriculum stages. A Key Competencies schools project manager in NSW noted that:

> 'stages K-12 lock students into stages in the curriculum not standards of performance, in other words they're not outcomes based. The KCs suffered accordingly, they were outcomes based, and copped some stick during the review process even though the KC trials weren't completed' (BIBB25).

Thus, 'by the time the KC trials were well underway, the Carr government in NSW was not favourably disposed towards competencies in school education' (BIBB2).

Whilst the fate of the Key Competencies in the largest State may have been sealed at this point, another issue influencing Commonwealth / State / Territory relations was the issue of teacher professional development. The need for substantial professional development was a clear consequence of Mayer's Key Competency proposal. Rowling and Young et al (1996) observed that the potential of the Key Competencies needed to be 'tempered by cautions concerning the availability of resources, workload issues and professional development programs' (1996: 173).

During the period of the trials, the Commonwealth government had implemented the National Professional Development Program (NPDP). Over a three year period from 1994-96, the program provided $60M for the enhancement of teacher professionalism, with the objective being to improve educational outcomes for young people through teacher professional development activities (NCS 1995). Whilst the States and Territories argued for an extension of the program, it was not supported by the Commonwealth (MCEETYA 1996).

A senior project manager in DEET observed that 'around the same time that the KC projects wound up, Commonwealth professional development funding was

withdrawn from the States who had been actively lobbying for more funds' (BPMB5).

A section head within DEET suggested that 'the NPDP was well funded and a good program, but it left a bad taste in some peoples minds because there was a poor use of resources in some of projects, and after that, nationally funded PD was off the agenda' (BCDB15). The failure of the States and the Commonwealth to agree on the continuation of teacher professional development, affected the likelihood of the Key Competencies proceeding due to the need for professional development to support implementation.

Notwithstanding the demise of professional development funding for school teachers from DEET, it is interesting to note that in 1997, ANTA MINCO agreed that $20M of VET funds would be provided to State and territory school authorities each year for four years to 'fund both the delivery costs for apprenticeships and traineeships and developmental work on teaching materials and professional development' (Senate 2000: 224). This emphasis within Commonwealth funded professional development resonates with earlier evidence regarding the influence of the VET in schools agenda, and demonstrates again that the Key Competencies Program were not only given little emphasis by ANTA, but were overshadowed by debates surrounding the effect of the ANTA VET in schools initiatives.

As previously signalled, the politics of federalism was also evident from the contestation between the Commonwealth and the States around the creation of the ASTF, where DEET and State education authorities were concerned about the decentralisation of control and funding that was to occur as a result of funds being directed to local initiatives outside of existing funding channels. A member of the Finn Committee claimed that in terms of public policy, the creation of the ASTF was one of the 'most radical and innovative proposals at the time because it was seen as having set a precedent for Commonwealth education funding which in the past had always flowed through the States' (BRSA16). A ministerial advisor quoted John Dawkins as asking DEET staff at the time, 'look, we like this stuff, employers like this stuff, parents like this stuff, and the media likes this stuff. How come it's only you guys that don't like it?' (BRSA42).

The formation of the ASTF thus affected the balance of educational politics between the States and the Commonwealth and forced the various school agencies to respond to a new force in school to work transition, one that challenged the centrality of existing pathways and curriculum structures and introduced another competing driver for reform alongside the Key Competencies and other centralist VET in schools initiatives through the New Apprenticeship System.

Funding of the Key Competencies was also a significant issue that was influenced by the politics of federalism.

Whilst the States provided in-kind support to the trials, the Key Competencies Program was an initiative funded wholly by Commonwealth cash. When the pilots were completed, there was an expectation amongst some State agency staff that further Commonwealth funds would be provided to support implementation. However, the likelihood of ongoing support was limited, given the Commonwealth's general approach at the time. A former head of the School to Work Section within DETYA made the following observations:

> 'nationally, it was always going to be a State's rights issue, the nation's constitutional basis always makes it difficult to change. Look at the way statements and profiles were scuttled after moving along well. The pattern of DETYA's approach to driving national initiatives is through the provision of dollars, if the Commonwealth don't provide the dollars or tie the initiative to grants, then they don't get picked up. The pilots were seed funding and the States new this. DETYA's not involved in recurrent funding. If we would have thrown another three years worth of funding at them we would be in the same boat as we are now' (BMHB33).[44]

The continued funding of a Key Competencies Program extension was thus clearly not an option for the Commonwealth, and as noted by a Key

---

[44] The Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) was restructured during this period and renamed the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA).

Competencies project manager in DETYA, 'there was no pressure from the States to continue with the Key Competencies' (BPMB31). Despite this view however, a member of the Schools Task Force Working Group on Key Competencies, which had responsibility for the pilots, suggested that:

'DETYA seemed to change its approach to funding around that time. Because of federalism, the Commonwealth generally have to provide funds to stimulate initiatives but at the end of the trials, the Commonwealth had done the work and expected the States to run with it, you know, "here you are, now you work it out", but they didn't back it up with dollars so it didn't really go ahead' (BMSB24).

Whilst the suggestion that the Commonwealth's attitude to Key Competencies after the trials represented a new approach to the funding of initiatives, it seems equally likely to be connected to the general budgetary restraint at the time. As a DEETYA section head suggested, 'there were savings across all budgets at that stage, you know, the famous Labour black hole, so the Key Competencies must have been something they didn't want to take up, there'd already been plenty of developmental work through the State systems' (BNSB23). Indeed a senior staffer with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet summed up the situation by observing that 'it was not an easy implementation environment' (BCRB35).

The development of a national training market was another dimension of the politics of federalism that contributed to tensions between the Commonwealth and the States during this period and influenced the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies in the VET sector.

In September 1994, ANTA commenced the introduction of its User Choice policy, which sought to change the funding base of State TAFE systems by providing funds to private training organisations. NSW reserved its position on the initiative, and in 1997, ANTA MINCO agreed that State and Territory governments should be responsible for implementation, leaving ANTA with a reduced role. This outcome was the decided preference of the States and

Territories, but reflected ongoing Commonwealth and State / Territory tensions over funding (Selby Smith et al 1998). These tensions further impacted on the capacity of State training systems to implement the Key Competencies, and as noted by a senior project manager within ANTA at the time, 'user choice forced TAFE to reinvent itself due to changes to its funding base' (BCR2B11).

The lack of Commonwealth follow up funding could also be considered a consequence of structural changes within DEET itself. Towards the end of the Key Competency trials, there was a change of government where a Liberal-National Coalition government replaced the Labour administration. A section head within DEET at the time referred to the subsequent restructure as creating a period of uncertainty in the organisation: 'the restructure saw the loss of 3,000 jobs and the incoming Minister (Kemp) was very suspicious of Departmental staff. In general there was suspicion over the level of service provided and the quality of advice from the bureaucrats' (BCDB25).

However, the restructuring of DEET and associated general fiscal restraint did not in itself prevent a proposal for limited further Commonwealth funding from being considered. A former section head within DEET observed that 'when programs lapse, specific decisions need to be taken to keep them going. There was a specific proposal taken to Vanstone, but it didn't get up because of the other moves starting to get under way' (BNSB42). Whilst the proposal only sought to undertake further promotion and marketing of the Key Competencies, cabinet did not approve it. This lack of support within cabinet was observed by a consultant for the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), who commented that:

> 'there was slight chance when Vanstone was education minister, but she stuffed up in cabinet and didn't secure any funds to take the work further. Kemp's agenda was not to endorse anything that the ALP had been connected with, but I'm convinced that something could have been pushed through with a name change so that it was more attractive to the coalition government' (BAMB38).

Indeed, the future fortunes of Minister Vanstone, who was removed as senior Minister for Education and replaced by David Kemp, then junior Minister for Schools, reflects cabinet issues with management of the portfolio and suggests that internal political conflicts within the coalition government were also a factor that influenced the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies. Reflecting on this period, a senior advisor in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet at the time commented that 'everyone lives in a just in time world, including politicians, the Key Competencies were seen as long term issues that belonged in the too hard basket' (BCRB377).

Notwithstanding the cabinet intrigue, there was clearly more support for the Key Competencies during the previous Labour government's administration. A Director within the Tasmanian Department of Education suggested that 'the Labour administration drove the KC's harder than the Libs' (BMSB41). The significance of political cycles is clear here too, for as a senior advisor with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet noted, 'Labour saw the trials as an implementation blueprint, but nationally they ran out of momentum, they ran out of steam with the change of government' (BCRB27).

Public reviews and reports at the time also indicated that any emphasis on skills development and learning during this period, were overshadowed by managerial issues concerned with the operation of the VET system,[45] issues that became fodder for the ongoing politics of federalism.

These managerial issues between the States and Commonwealth were further brought to ahead through debate on implementation of the New Apprenticeship system, which saw ANTA become more active in implementing the Commonwealth's VET agenda in the States and Territories. Hawke and Cornford (1998) argued that 'underlying the whole concept of the New Apprenticeship system is the strongly contested issue of control. The federal coalition government is clearly committed to decentralising control and transferring control from State authorities to industry' (1998: 116).

---

[45] See for example Allen Consulting Group (1994), CEDA (1995), Taylor (1996).

Similarly, Shreeve suggested that the debate aver the New Apprenticeship System was 'more about who should control the VET system than who should pay for it' (Shreeve 1995: 3).

Thus whilst the issues of funding, control and focus were central to the politics of federalism during this period, the research suggests that dynamics of various institutional and individual stakeholders also strongly influenced the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies.

c. Policy Stakeholder Force Field

The effects of public sector restructuring during the 1990's was amplified in the VET sector by the significant policy shifts affected the design and delivery of vocational education and training. Whilst aspects of DEET's restructuring at the federal level have been discussed previously, during the period of the Key Competency trials, TAFE colleges also underwent considerable change at the State level. It is argued here that the change agenda amongst this group of key stakeholders also influenced the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies.

In New South Wales, for example, restructuring had been a constant theme for the State's public provider since 1990. In that year, a review of TAFE recommended that it should cease being a department of government and become an organisation with twenty-four decentralised networks each headed by a senior manager (Scott 1990). Since that time, the institution changed from a government department to an authority, and in 1991, became a commission, abandoning the network structure in favour of a structure based on eleven Institutes of TAFE (Chappell 1999). Four years later in 1995, the TAFE Commission was absorbed into a new government department; the Department of Training and Educational Co-ordination (DTEC), with two of the Institutes of TAFE re-named as Institutes of Technology.

In December 1997, DTEC itself was abolished and subsumed under an expanded Department of Education and Training (DET) that also included NSW TAFE within this new super-Department.

As Chappell (1999) notes, 'not surprisingly, TAFE teachers have experienced the impact of these government policies on their everyday pedagogical practices' (1999: 3).

During the period of the Key Competency trials, a VET sector project manager in NSW noted that 'the restructuring within TAFE was a destabilising force at that time, and amongst the TAFE project team, the Key Competencies was simply seen as a project that had to happen' (BJHC3). Indeed the capacity of TAFE to deal effectively with the implications of the Mayer proposal was known to Key Competency project managers in NSW, one of whom suggested that NSW 'TAFE was a write-off because of the restructuring' (BJMC22).

At the time of the NSW TAFE reforms, the TAFE college network in Victoria was also undergoing restructuring and consolidation. Anderson noted that in 1997 'the Victorian State training system entered another significant phase of reorganisation at the provider level' (1998: 19). Anderson argued that the main force in Victorian restructuring was the expansion of recognised non-TAFE providers, which 'grew from a total of 61 in 1992 to over 600 private providers by 1996' (1998: 22). Similarly, in South Australia, related developments led to the restructuring of TAFE SA, which became part of a new Department of Education, Training and Employment. These developments were mirrored to varying degrees across the Commonwealth, with the TAFE system in general being subject to continuing structural reform in response to national and local imperatives (Chappell 1999). Clearly, this tumultuous period did not present a stable environment for implementing the Mayer proposal.

In addition to organisational restructuring, new approaches to delivery and assessment in VET also influenced the capacity of TAFE to engage with the Key Competencies. Billett et al (1999) found that the introduction of CBT during this period had considerable impact on the workload of teachers, particularly in relation to administrative issues. Similarly, Smith (1997) argued that the implementation of competency-based education represented a radical change to the way that TAFE teachers conceptualised and undertook their work. Consequently, a VET sector project manager in NSW noted that 'there was a

fair bit of scepticism surrounding teaching and learning within TAFE institutes and their capacity to deal with the KC's adequately' (BJHC17).

Thus in each of the States that managed VET sector projects through the Key Competencies Program, organisational reform and increased demands on teachers influenced the treatment of the Key Competencies, and to some extent limited the impact of that agenda in the respective State systems.

Furthermore, at both the State and Commonwealth level, the culture of management within the bureaucracies was not prepared to deal with complex situations. According to a senior DEET bureaucrat at the time:

> 'KPI's and the culture of deliverables aren't there to deal with messy situations. The generic skills agenda doesn't fit into a neat framework that allows for simple policy prescriptions and settings, it isn't complimentary to the performance measurements required of educational bureaucrats because they get no prizes for dealing with messy situations. They confine themselves to certainties for which they receive reward' (BCRA19).

Whilst a managerialist culture existed at both Commonwealth and State levels, trial projects managed in a centralised way were found to encourage different levels of innovation to those within decentralised project structures. In Victoria, dispersed management arrangements resulted in a wider network of schools embracing Key Competency driven reform at the local level, engagement that continued after the trials were completed (Rowland pers. com. 2002). In NSW by comparison, a centralised approach within the recently enlarged bureaucracy of the Department of Training and Education Co-ordination (DTEC), controlled the extent of engagement at the school level. As noted by a NSW project manager, the work was 'conducted in isolation because as a project there was no certainty surrounding the outcomes' (BPGA39).

The question of workload was an issue for teachers and trainers who, as a strongly unionised group, represented a key group of policy stakeholders.

Whilst program staff and teachers recognised that teaching and learning benefits could flow from a focus on the Key Competencies, the implications for professional development were considerable.

In developing a professional development strategy for the VET sector, Downs called for significant investments in 'policy, marketing, planning, development, quality assurance and resources at the national level' (Downs 1997: 1). Similarly, Jasinski suggested that 'comprehensive professional development will be required' (1996: 8.1), a proposition that had considerable financial and industrial implications for State employers and unions.

Whilst the Key Competencies received support from union bodies in the period leading up to the trials, concerns emerged over the increased workloads assumed to be associated with a focus on the Key Competencies. Rowland and Young (1996) balanced this concern by highlighting the rewards to teachers from increased student motivation, but recognised that there would be an increased workload 'mostly associated with materials preparation and assessment and reporting' (1996: I).

The issue of additional teacher workload was not only a concern for teachers and trainers, but also one for administrators and governments trying to maintain award stability during periods of organisational restructuring. As an ACCI representative at the time suggested, 'teachers were looking for IR leverage, if you look at South Australia for example, progress there was stalled because of the line that KCs were argued as being additional work' (BAMC12). Similarly, in NSW, a school sector project manager suggested that 'they didn't want to impose a KC reporting framework on top of the one that was there for the existing curriculum, that was an issue, and it had IR implications' (BJGC39).

Rowland and Young (1996) also identified a shift in teacher perceptions of the nature and impact of the Key Competencies during the period of the trials. Drawing on survey research of teachers, they suggested that in 1994, teachers tended to think that the Key Competencies would be introduced in a separate stream, and independently taught and evaluated.

In 1995, respondents were more inclined to see the Key Competencies as an integral part of teaching and learning for all students, viewing the major issues as being 'how the Key Competencies were to be assessed and what the implications for teacher workload were to be' (1996: 41).

Whilst teachers awaited clear policy direction on the Key Competencies as the trials drew to a close, the two issues of assessment and teacher workload were also the concerns of State governments. A Section Head in DETYA at the time noted that 'there were considerable challenges at the time, and they created an environment in which additional change through a Key Competencies agenda was always going to be hard' (BCR2C21). These issues combined to generate little enthusiasm for change at the State level in both schools and TAFE. Clearly, the Key Competencies were an initiative that challenged the existing capacity of organisations and individuals within the school and VET sectors.

In the VET sector, the lack of enthusiasm for Key Competencies also existed at the national level, being mainly a consequence of ANTA's preoccupation with funding and broader policy developments. However, despite the general lack of engagement, institutional and individual stakeholder resistance within the VET sector is possibly best illustrated by the dynamics surrounding the representation of Key Competencies in national industry competency standards.

The decision to identify the Key Competencies in competency standards was raised by the Mayer Committee and agreed to by the National Training Board in 1993 (Lewis pers. com. 2002). Independent of ANTA at the time, the NTB was responsible for the development of competency standards that were the cornerstone of the VET system. In 1995, David Rumsey completed a project for the NTB that examined the extent to which Key Competencies were embedded within competency standards and provided additional advice on ways to better integrate them (Rumsey 1995).

As noted by a general manager in the NTB at the time, 'the tabular approach identifying the KCs by level was the approach adopted in 1993, with Rumsey's work intended to provide additional guidance on how the presence of KCs in standards could be better ascertained' (BALC39).

The Allen Review criticised competency standards as providing no 'practical relationship between NTB standards and the Mayer Key Competencies' (Allen 1994: 21). Rumsey (1995) however argued that mapping should continue as the preferred approach, a view that was accepted by the NTB, thus validating the criteria against which the outcomes of the pilots were to be judged. A Director within ANTA indicated that 'Rumsey's work for the NTB laid the foundation for ANTA's approach, and after a while the ITABs got it right, and it felt as though we were getting the standards part right' (BALC14).

Thus apart from the work of some individual VET providers[46], this work on standards was the extent of treatment of the Key Competencies in the VET sector outside the trials during this period.[47]

However, the NTB and ANTA's approach became increasingly unpopular as the VET sector projects began to engage with the practical challenge of translating competency standards that identified Key Competencies into curriculum that integrated Key Competencies. Consequently, the VET sector projects all argued for a more holistic approach that integrated the Key Competencies within each component of competency standards. However, as noted by a VET sector project manager in NSW, 'Rumsey was instrumental in defending his own view and the Standards and Curriculum Council were not interested in opening up debate at the time' (ACR2C45)[48].

---

[46] There is evidence that the Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE and the Dusseldorp Skills Foundation were working with the Key Competencies as VET benchmarks from their inception in 1992. These efforts were of course supplemented by the trials which introduced the Key Competencies to a number of TAFE institutes through loosely structured action learning projects.

[47] During this period there was no national ACTRAC requirement to embed Key Competencies in curriculum.

[48] In 1995, the NTB and ACTRAC became part of the structure of ANTA with their functions assumed by the new Standards and Curriculum Council (SCC).

Representatives of each of the VET sector projects travelled to Canberra to raise the issue directly with representatives of the Standards and Curriculum Council (SCC) as it was seen as a major barrier to the implementation of Key Competencies in the VET sector. Of those project managers, one noted that 'the people from the Standards and Curriculum Council showed little commitment and because of this, the outcomes of the projects had little impact on one of the VET sector's key agencies at that time' (BPGC24). This outcome was particularly significant, as the development of the New Apprenticeship System at this time introduced a new role for competency standards, one that saw them become more of a central driver of curriculum and delivery than had been the case in the past. However, as a Director within ANTA noted at the time, 'post training packages, the focus was not on standards but on qualification frameworks and workplace assessment. The standards within the first few training packages were not really changed' (BALC39).

Consequently, this reliance on existing models of competency standards development ensured that Key Competencies continued to be misrepresented in standards at a time when new approaches evident from the trials would have had the most resonance with practitioners (see for example Comyn 1995, Grant and Moy 1996).

When the VET sector trials came to a close in 1997, each project called on ANTA to reconceive the treatment of Key Competencies within competency standards and training packages. These recommendations were not acted on, meaning that an opportunity to drive a 'top down' implementation of the Key Competencies in the VET sector was lost at a crucial time when awareness and familiarity with them as educational artefacts was at its height.

Key Competencies struggled for relevance within ANTA notwithstanding recommendations from all three VET sector projects that called for the need to address Key Competencies in the emerging VET arrangements. The South Australian VET project report for example, also argued strongly for a range of actions to be taken by ANTA to ensure that Key Competencies remained on the agenda (Jasinski 1996).

In particular, its recommendations relating to competency standards urged ANTA to 'review its guidance and technical manuals for competency standards development to explicitly include advice relating to Key Competency in a manner consistent with the outcomes of the project' (1996: 1.6). The response of ANTA during this period was crucial given that the fate of the Key Competencies within schools seems to have been determined through decisions by State and Territory school authorities in the absence of support and pressure from DEET.

Consequently, the fate of the Key Competencies Program within the VET sector was a concern to project staff during the trials. In its key findings, the South Australian project called for 'MCEETYA to separately report on the findings, outcomes and products of the national VET sector project' (1996: 15), a call that was echoed by other VET sector projects in NSW and Victoria (see for example Hager et al 1997). Perhaps noting the lack of interest from major VET stakeholders, the summary report of the Key Competencies Program (Rowland and Young et al 1996) noted that any work to advance the Key Competencies further would require cross sectoral co-operation, co-operation that 'will not be forthcoming unless a structure is set up by MCEETYA charged with this task' (1996: 194). Whilst MCEETYA took no further action on Key Competencies after tabling the report, it was referred to ANTA (MCEETYA 1997) without recommendations, despite the fact that the report only explored the role of Key Competencies in the VET sector 'to the extent that it overlapped with what was happening in schools' (1996: 11). The lack of treatment in minutes (MCEETYA 1997) and the absence of reference within any comparable ANTA documentation is testament to the power that the Key Competencies held over the agenda at this point in time.

Whilst pressure from the three States with VET sector projects led DETYA to fund a separate synthesis report that was also referred to ANTA (Hager et al 1997), a director within ANTA noted that, 'at the end of the trials there was no willingness within ANTA to take them on. The ANTA Board and ANTA per se didn't take responsibility for the KCs because they saw it as DETYA's baby' (BALB20).

This attitude is all the more remarkable given that the generic skills agenda was driven equally by a desire to improve skill levels of both school leavers and the existing workforce, arguably making the Key Competencies an issue squarely within the gamut of ANTA's responsibilities at the time.

In the same way that institutional gatekeepers within ANTA contributed to the lack of enthusiasm for the Key Competencies within that organisation and the VET sector more broadly, individuals within State schooling bodies also contributed to the ongoing resistance in that sector.

Despite the evolving development of the VET in schools agenda, the Key Competencies during the period of the trials were still seen as representing a threat to the tradition of a liberal education. A senior project manager with DETYA noted, 'not everyone's attitudes changed. There were still those that saw the KCs as the introduction of competencies into the school system, the thin end of the wedge if you like' (BPMC12). In NSW, where the Eltis Review of the national profiles and outcomes was underway, a member of the State management committee suggested that 'hostility and antipathy from the school sector manifest itself again during the time of the Eltis Review when it was a real struggle for us to keep the KCs on the agenda' (BJMC6).

Notwithstanding the overwhelmingly positive attitudes from those practitioners directly involved in the trials, resistance in the school sector did come from teachers as well as school agencies and assessment authorities. Writing at the time, Jane Karaolis, the principal of a large independent school in Sydney commented that:

> 'a project team in NSW which spent months investigating schools to determine the extent to which they already teach the Key Competencies, defined the Competencies at such a demanding level that some schools and subjects failed the competency test and the project team recommended that teaching methods and curriculum be amended. It is absurd that the business agenda is running political decision-making in education' (1995: 2).

Similar concerns were noted in the report on the trials. Rowland and Young et al (1996) cited one school teacher as commenting that he was 'happy to be a cheerful guinea pig, but others aren't, and some people feel that it is just business coming in to take over schools' (1996: 33). Such attitudes amongst school teachers in particular also reinforced the anti-employer sentiments that were formed through debates during the Finn, Carmichael and Mayer period. Rowland and Young et al (1996) cited a school project officer who commented that 'with the Key Competencies coming out of an industry agenda, there is a need to ask whether or not they can fit a general education issue' (1996: 25).

Other reactions reflect attitudes amongst teachers and managers that the Key Competencies were already being addressed in teacher practice and thus representing nothing new. The attitude of a teacher cited in Rowland and Young et al (1996) reflects this view, noting that 'to an extent they are what teachers have known to be and have called good teaching practice by and large. It's what most teachers do' (1996: 34). Similarly, survey research conducted on a sample of teachers during the trials in 1995 found that 87% of school teachers and 83% of TAFE teachers agreed with the statement that the Key Competencies were already part of their teaching processes (Artcraft 1995). A senior project manager in Victoria suggested that:

> 'there was also an implication that the KC trials were telling schools how to suck eggs because they were identifying what good teaching practice should be, so some of the schools felt put out because they felt that that's what they were doing anyway, so what did the KCs have to offer?' (BMLD25).

When the Key Competencies became associated with 'what good schools and teachers were already doing' (Colvin 1996), the emphasis shifted to embedding the Key Competencies in curriculum, which was arguably an easier change process to manage than that associated with challenging practices in teaching, assessment and reporting. Thus when project reports suggested that 'mapping current practice has shown a strong relationship between the presence of Key Competencies in curriculum documents and classroom practices' (Ryan 1996:

9), it was not surprising that a school sector project manager observed that 'it quickly became a curriculum agenda and not a general education issue' (BIBC51).

This shifting emphasis was of course supported by the school assessment authorities who from the days of the Mayer Committee, had not shown any interest in the additional assessment and reporting regime contemplated at that time. Rowland and Young et al (1996) argued that this incompatible position had its basis in the demands of the original Mayer proposal that suggested Key Competencies would provide for the monitoring of educational systems (1996).

Thus the original intention of the Mayer Report to 'effect leverage on the curriculum implemented by schools and other providers' (McCurry 1995: 11), was identified by a member of the Mayer Committee as shaping 'the first line of defence amongst the State assessment authorities who were afraid of losing their independence as accrediting agencies' (BSHC19). Similarly, Rowland and Young et al (1996) cite an employee of a State accreditation agency as arguing that it was best to 'just embed them in the curriculum so they can impact on the pedagogy, and don't bother at all about assessment and reporting' (1996: 29).

This sensitivity around assessment and reporting was evident during the period of the trials, with work by the Australian Centre for Educational Research (ACER) being used by State assessment boards and their national forum, the Australian Council for Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities (ACACA) to arrive at their 'minimum position' (Rowland and Young et al 1996). This position, whilst outwardly supportive, left unresolved a number of issues and effectively left their treatment of the Key Competencies up to individual States and Territories.[49]

Whilst the ACER report (McCurry 1995) proposed an assessment regime compatible with the Key Competencies, it also raised a number of issues related to the feasibility of system wide Key Competency assessment. McCurry

---

[49] ACACA is an influential stakeholder in the school sector, able to exert considerable influence over national approaches to assessment and reporting.

argued that 'there is no definite function or clear demand for KC assessment, and without a clear role, such an assessment is in danger of fading to insignificance and irrelevance' (1995: 3). McCurry also suggested that 'Key Competency assessments cannot be readily amalgamated with subject assessments without diluting them both' (1996: 2). Whilst it appears that McCurry's views have shifted somewhat over time (see for example McCurry 2002, 2002a), a VET sector project manager in NSW noted that 'there was dissatisfaction amongst stakeholders that was fuelled by the ACER work on assessment' (BPGC21). The reservations contained in the ACER report in many ways reinforced the suspicions within State assessment authorities, which relied on traditional assessment approaches dominated by measurement technologies that were not compatible with the fundamentally contextual nature of the Key Competencies and the holistic approaches they encouraged.

Rowland and Young (1996) noted that 'at this level of schooling, centralised systems of student assessment assume great importance, and external examinations exert considerable influence over the curriculum, both as documented and experienced' (1996: 77). Consequently, as the trials progressed, the possibility of centralised assessment and reporting of the Key Competencies became less likely, and the minimalist position adopted by most States and Territories was to focus on embedding the Key Competencies in curriculum.

Whilst one element of the schools stakeholder force field related to the actions of assessment authorities, the delivery arms also maintained positions that influenced the outcomes of the trials and the subsequent policy policy trajectory of the Key Competencies. In each State and Territory, the agreements with the Commonwealth stipulated the involvement of public, private and independent schools in the trial program. In NSW for example, there were three major agencies involved from the outset, the then Department of School Education (DSE), the Association of Independent Schools (AIS) and the Catholic Education Commission (CEC).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the dynamics between these stakeholders reflected different priorities and attitudes towards the Key Competencies. A senior TAFE project manager in NSW noted that 'whilst they emphasised a collaborative approach where everyone had to be in the tent at the same time, there were clear political tensions at management committee meetings that kept the project on safe ground' (BJHC9). Similarly, a project manager within the NSW training authority noted that:

> 'DET wanted the best outcome for NSW, regardless of the Commonwealth's agenda, the Catholics wanted outcomes that had no cost implications, and the independent schools had issues with control and being affected by centrally imposed changes, so they all had concerns around exactly what was being proposed' (BPGC38).

In the case of NSW, each agency was represented on the joint management team, as was the Board of Studies (BOS), the TAFE Commission and the then Department of Training and Education Co-ordination (DTEC), which was responsible for workplace training. A VET sector project manager suggested that 'in NSW, all sectors mouthed support for the Key Competencies through the project steering committee, but they were aware of the political nature of the project's implications' (BPGC34). The difficulties associated with having multiple agencies involved was also noted by a member of the Mayer Committee, who argued that 'the second line of resistance for the States was the fact that there were many different agencies to convince, all of whom thought they new what they were doing' (BSHC37). In that sense, as observed by a VET sector project manager from South Australia, 'TAFE and school delivery systems had professional development and curriculum investments that needed to be protected' (BCHC12).

Movements in the cycle of school curriculum reform also influenced key stakeholders during this period and impacted on the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies. Rowland and Young et al (1996) noted that at the end of the trials, there was 'no clear and settled position generally across the country on the incorporation of the Key Competencies among governments, systems and

relevant agencies. Most of the States and Territories are adopting a "wait and see" attitude' (1996: 167).

In Queensland for example, the government held off adopting a position on the Key Competencies because of an impending review into directions for post-compulsory school education. The report of the Post-Compulsory Task Group (Cumming 1996) primarily focused on VET in schools within Queensland and the Commonwealth's evolving New Apprenticeships framework. Its findings gave little attention to the Key Competencies, an outcome that no doubt contributed to their lack of explicit presence in subsequent policy frameworks in that State.

In NSW, there was no formal position on the Key Competencies, with their treatment in that State fundamentally governed by the review of profiles and outcomes (Eltis 1995) and the review of the Higher School Certificate (McGaw 1997), which saw treatment of the Key Competencies limited to narrow segments within the syllabus. As a schools Key Competency project manager noted, 'with the review, debates moved to the outcomes and performance statements within the new HSC. The KCs were never seriously considered as an option for centralised assessment and reporting' (BIBC35).

Whilst institutional and systemic dynamics within the school sector itself thus influenced the outcomes of the program, the relative influence of the school and VET sector agencies was also a factor that contributed to the path of the Key Competencies in vocational education and training.

The management arrangements in place for the trials, the spread of the projects within the pilot program and the reporting pathways back to MCEETYA were all dominated by stakeholders from the school sector. This dynamic caused concern amongst project personnel within the VET sector, and as noted by a Victorian project manager, 'the voice of the schools overwhelmed those in the VET sector' (BCDC18). Consequently, this lack of voice for the VET sector resulted in schools driving the future of the Key Competencies program in vocational education and training.

Even within the VET sector, there was some evidence of differing approaches. A Victorian VET researcher involved in the pilots suggested that:

> 'within the VET projects, there were unresolved difference of emphasis between the KCs as being pre-employment skills, which was the NSW position, and the KCs as employment related skills continually developed over time, which was the position taken in Victoria and South Australia' (BCDC14).

This tension within the VET sector was noted by a Director in ANTA who suggested that 'in some States the trials were hijacked by the delivery systems with their emphasis shifting from new entrants and towards existing workers' (BALC19). Whilst the synthesis report of the VET sector projects found considerable agreement across the States (Hager et al 1997), the focus of Key Competency initiatives remained ad hoc across all sectors, in part because of the lack of clear direction in the form of substantive policy.

This lack of support for the Key Competencies program from within State and Commonwealth bureaucracies was reinforced by the lack of external advocacy from another key group of policy stakeholders, industry and unions. Whilst the industrial partners had been active in developing the generic skills agenda through the Finn and Mayer Committees, a director within ANTA at the time noted that:

> 'post Mayer, nobody owned them which derailed the whole thing. Industry weren't engaged politically at the time, and there was no ongoing facilitation of employers.... generic skills dropped off the agenda of ACCI, the ACTU and BCA and someone needed to make an effort to keep them involved, but no one did' (BALC15).

Notwithstanding the reduced role for unions within the coalition government's approach to policy, the necessary effort didn't occur. Resources within ANTA were preoccupied with the New Apprenticeship System and other aspects of reform, and DETYA were restrained by budgetary cut backs and the demands

of new political masters disinterested in inheriting the consultative approaches of previous Labour administration. Consequently, at this crucial juncture at the end of the trials in early 1997, there is little evidence that industry or the unions were actively engaged in progressing the Key Competencies agenda.

One exception at the national level was the National Industry Education Forum (NIEF).[50] NIEF made efforts to lobby then Minister Vanstone to push for implementation through cabinet, although as previously noted, Vanstone's proposal was rejected. At the State level, there is also no evidence of co-ordinated action by industry or the unions to progress the Key Competencies agenda during this period. Notwithstanding industry support cited at the launch of the Key Competencies professional development kit (Vanstone 1997), a member of the peak industry forum for training in NSW, the Board of Vocational Education and Training (BVET), noted that:

> 'there was a lack of enthusiasm from within the VET sector. There were no champions within DTEC or VETAB[51], and the Board developed a position, based on direct consultations with industry, that the Key Competencies and generic skills weren't the main concern. There were mixed messages from industry that conflicted with the rhetoric from Finn and Mayer. Language, literacy and numeracy were seen as being far more important than KCs' (BJMC54).

The lack of industry engagement at the end of the trials was clearly a major factor in determining the future of the Key Competencies and Australia's approach to addressing generic skills through vocational education and training. Indeed, the lack of follow up demand from industry was used to critique the value of the Key Competencies themselves. Karaolis argued that:

---

[50] The NIEF was an industry organisation jointly resourced by the Business Council of Australia (BCA) and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI). It managed a national trial project on reporting and received additional funding through the Commonwealth's School-to-Work Program to further pursue its work with portfolios after the trials were completed.
[51] Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (VETAB).

'the history of the Key Competencies movement in Australian education is a classic example of imposing change in education for reasons external to learning: a lot of time, money and energy spent to achieve business and educational goals without any understanding of either, all shaped to the words and purposes of political rhetoric without the support to follow it up' (1995: 5).

The conflicting views and demands of policy stakeholders clearly overshadowed the educational value of the Key Competencies. A consultant researcher for DEETYA argued that 'the KCs suffered because of the political imperatives driving them, they were marginalised and didn't have the same power that they might have' (BBYC5).

d. The Complexity of Generic Skills

The Key Competency trials gave practitioners and other stakeholders an opportunity to engage on a practical level and thus directly deal with the complexities and conceptual issues identified in debates at the time of Finn and Mayer. In dealing with these complexities, educators came to affect the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies, as their responses to a range of conceptual and practical issues challenged any notion of a straightforward national implementation strategy.

Whilst recognising that 'the core idea of the Key Competencies had been well understood', Rowland and Young et al (1996) found that unresolved conceptual issues remained in relation to 'the nature of competency, transfer, the Key Competencies as a set in different contexts, and assessment of content and process' (1996: 175).

A Tasmanian schools project manager noted that 'the question of what was generic about the Key Competencies created some tension, but it was generally agreed that some were more generic than others' (BMSD15). In NSW, another schools project manager felt that 'there are issues around generic skills per se,

including whether or not they are discrete artefacts, how often they were to be demonstrated and how many contexts were to be involved' (BJGD26). A researcher from the ACT felt that whilst the Key Competencies were 'a relative and not an absolute concept...you can identify situations where generic skills exist and there is potential for deeper learning by focussing on how they work in that context' (BBYD26).

It is not surprising then that Rowland and Young et al (1996) noted there were 'competing assumptions about the nature of the Key Competencies which need to be further explored and tested. At present, there is no consensus about the constructs that we are trying to assess' (1996: 142). These statements reflect different views and conceptualisations of the Key Competencies, differences that provided education authorities with a considerable challenge to develop a meaningful implementation proposal.

However, whilst there were some outstanding conceptual issues, those stakeholders with a more pragmatic orientation chose to focus instead on the broader benefits that could accrue from the use of the Key Competencies in teaching, learning and reporting. Consequently, at this point of the Key Competencies policy trajectory, a shift appears to have occurred separating the approaches of school and VET systems from those adopted by individual teachers and trainers. In different schools, colleges and institutes across the country, the practical benefits of the Key Competencies were recognised and embraced by practitioners whilst the practical difficulties of system wide approach frustrated the managers and administrators within education authorities. In their evaluation of the trials, Rowland and Young et al indicated that 'there was wide acceptance of the Key Competencies themselves....there was very little debate as to whether they were correct or complete. The issue was what to do about them' (1996: 39).

One of the major issues that influenced decisions on assessment and reporting was whether the Key Competencies were outcomes in their own right or enabling skills. Whilst the distinction between content and process is often used to differentiate between school and VET sector programs, the role of the Key

Competencies in balancing content with process challenged existing assessment and reporting regimes that privileged curriculum content through centralised assessment processes.

For example, in the NSW Key Competencies Project Report, it was acknowledged that existing 'teaching practice is strongly focussed on content with an emphasis on the recall of knowledge and patterns of representation' and that in the post compulsory years, 'there was strong evidence of the domination of external exams in determining teaching practice and the nature of learning experiences' (Ryan 1996: 19).

A key challenge for education and training providers in Australia was the need to determine what scope there was to increase focus on the process and outcomes of learning through Key Competencies, and how that could be achieved without detracting from content. Rowland and Young et al (1996) themselves identified this as a key issue facing education authorities when they queried:

> 'whether the typical range of experiences and associated contexts of performance, including assessed performances, is wide enough to acquire and display all of these forms of understanding and competence that the community considers desirable today' (1996: 181).

The Key Competencies thus came to challenge the nature of curriculum at the time, but not in a way originally conceived by their detractors. Ironically, a focus on Key Competencies created an opportunity to use a greater number of contexts in assessment, thus broadening the curriculum, a potential that was not foreshadowed by critics of the Key Competencies who warned that they would narrow the curriculum through their instrumentalist approach. Despite this situation, a school sector project manager from Queensland noted that 'we had concerns about the reduction of the curriculum and concerns that the Key Competencies reduced what is of value in schools to that which is measurable' (BPMD43).

A school sector project manager suggested that 'there was a tension between a general education view of the competencies and a vocational view. In NSW the predominant view was that competencies were enabling rather than outcomes in their own right' (BIBD21). This view led another school sector project manager to suggest that 'the KCs gave people a broader perspective on VET and they saw that it's not as reductionist as first thought' (BIBD27). Indeed, a program manager from the Catholic Education Commission in NSW suggested that 'the KCs had the effect of smoothing the way for the implementation of VET within the new HSC' (BIBD23). Similarly, a member of the HSC review secretariat noted that 'some thinking around the KCs helped the transition to a standards based assessment framework within the HSC' (BCR2D11).

Regardless, practitioners developed views of the Key Competencies and competencies in general that were different to those held at the beginning of the Key Competency Program of trials.

Views recorded during this research reflect the overwhelmingly positive experiences of practitioners who used the Key Competencies in various ways to improve practice. As a schools sector project manager noted, 'KCs became valued as tools to improve teaching and learning.... it was good to focus on teaching and learning, and the pilot showed that the KCs enhanced learning if embedded within curriculum and taught to' (BIBD23). Similarly, a VET sector project officer suggested that 'there was recognition that the KCs were good for broadening the curriculum' (BJHD28).

Whilst this positive influence was an unintended consequence of the Key Competency trials, Rowland and Young et al (1996) noted that assessment would prove to be the most contentious and intractable issue associated with Key Competency reform. This certainly proved to be the case, and whilst the trials generated four different assessment models and three different reporting models, the requirement for ongoing developmental work was recognised in most States and Territories (MCEETYA 1997b). Rowland and Young et al (1996) identified the major issues surrounding assessment and reporting as being:

- the reaction of teachers to assessing and reporting the Key Competencies;
- the purpose of assessment and reporting;
- strategies and modes of assessment and reporting;
- the use of portfolios; and
- levels of performance in the Key Competencies (1996:134 -140).

However, the work undertaken during the trials was generally recognised as being an insufficient base upon which to implement centralised assessment and reporting regimes, even if such a decision was to be supported by the ACACA agencies. Rowland and Young et al (1996) suggested that a number of targeted studies and trials were still required, and that they 'should focus more clearly than has been possible to date on the major theoretical and practical points of contention' (1996: 154).

The impact of the Key Competencies on curriculum during this period occurred in different ways in each State and Territory. In Queensland, for example, as the trials were completed, it became apparent that whilst the competencies remained an entity in their own right, many schools were interpreting them through effective learning and teaching principles which were deemed more generic and related to the whole of life rather than to employment alone (Aspland et al 1995). In NSW, the Key Competencies were also recognised as being a benefit to teaching and learning. The final project report called for further field testing over longer time frames so that changes in teaching practice could be supported (Ryan 1996). Thus whilst the Key Competencies did embody complex theoretical dimensions, their value to teaching practice provided a vehicle to bypass these complex issues.

In Western Australian, the Secondary Education Authority of Project Report (SEA undated) commented that:

'some teachers will need to make bigger adjustments to this style than others...a significant number of teachers see the Key Competencies as

useful learning tools, but they are not clear about their implications for the way in which the post-compulsory curriculum is organised' (30-31).

Whilst the shift away from centralised assessment can be seen as a move to safer ground, both in terms of the technicalities and technologies of assessment and reporting, some stakeholders interpreted the shift as a defence mechanism against the considerable professional development and resource development implications of a fully implemented Key Competencies agenda. A senior project manager with DETYA argued that 'the actions of curriculum and subject matter gatekeepers within the States limited the treatment of the Key Competencies, so that now in most cases they're being hidden if anyone is doing anything with them at all, they are buried as underpinning in curriculum' (BPMD27).

Whilst a more complete analysis of approaches to implementing the Key Competencies can be found in the next chapter, the emphasis on Key Competencies in curriculum was seen by many of those directly involved in the trials as a "cop out". However, the integration of Key Competencies within curriculum was not an issue without challenges. As a senior project manager with DETYA noted, 'there were big problems around working with standards and making that explicit' (BPMD31). Central to these challenges were the meaning of explicitness in documentation and the likelihood of different documentary techniques impacting on classroom practice. The trials found that the Key Competencies were generally implicit in curriculum documentation and that there was a need to make them more explicit in both school and VET sector curricula. As noted by Rowland and Young et al (1996), this move required 'wider use of exemplars in curriculum documentation as well as systematic professional development of teachers' (1996: 96).

Thus even in the area of curriculum, there were financial implications for progressing the Key Competencies, with a VET sector project manager commenting that 'it was clear that there would be considerable funds required for curriculum revision within TAFE at that time' (BJHD35).

This was particularly an issue across the VET sector because of the ongoing conversion of State based curriculum into CBT, an agenda that had consumed considerable funds through the Commonwealth's National Transition Program.

However, as practitioners worked with Key Competencies in curriculum, they shifted attitudes and informed understandings in the school sector more broadly at a crucial time when the Commonwealth's VET in schools agenda gathered momentum.

A senior project manager in NSW noted that 'the Key Competencies stimulated the debate about competencies in general education, and helped give VET some parity of esteem in terms of what was of worth to the students' (BCR2D31). In that State in particular, the review of the Higher School Certificate (HSC) provided an opportunity for direct input into the new curriculum frameworks being developed at the time of the trials. Whilst the Key Competencies were not comprehensively integrated within the new HSC subject frameworks (McGaw 1997), VET programs that contributed to a student's tertiary entrance rank (TER) were introduced for the first time, an outcome that was linked by a number of respondents to the Key Competency trials in NSW.

This positive affect on the VET in schools agenda also occurred in other States and Territories. In South Australia, the Key Competencies were a central feature of the Ready-Set-Go school to work program that was introduced by the SA State government in 1997, where funds were provided to supplement resources deployed by ANTA and the ASTF in support of VET in schools (Abbott 1998). Similarly, in 1997 the Tasmanian Secondary Assessment Board applied the outcomes of its Key Competency programs to its review of all Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE) syllabi which resulted in competency based VET pathways being introduced into schools in that State (MCEETYA 1997b). A Director within the Tasmanian school system noted that 'our experience with the Key Competencies helped the introduction of VET in schools because teachers were more familiar with the VET agenda' (BMSD16).

Consequently, it is evident that the complexity of the Key Competencies as an educational construct did impede their system wide implementation during this period. However, whilst the pragmatic efforts of teachers overcame many of these issues to improve teaching and learning, agency and political imperatives stymied that progress by failing to address resource issues associated with professional development, curriculum reform and assessment and reporting. In doing so they reinforced the views that generic skills were difficult to deal with.

At the end of the trials, Rowland and Young at al (1996) in their evaluation of the Key Competencies Program, noted that further work was required in a number of areas including:

- the role of Key Competencies in cross sector pathways;
- approaches to making Key Competencies explicit in curriculum;
- the language required to describe the Key Competencies;
- further comparison of the four assessment and three reporting models developed through the trials; and
- direct studies of flow through benefits (1997: i-ii).

Thus as the program of trial projects were wound up in the first half of 1997, the future of a national generic skills program was compromised by issues arising from inadequate conceptualisation at an earlier stage.

Conclusion

The trialing of Key Competencies during 1994-1997 was a period of intense generic skills activity that involved representatives from across the entire education and training community in one of Australia's largest educational trials. The $20M committed to the trials by the Commonwealth at the time was a clear reflection of the value placed on the proposal by DEET, and an indication of the value Key Competencies still held within the Commonwealth government.

The trials illustrated the influence of a different combination of policy drivers than those that affected the trajectory of Australia's generic skills initiative

during the development phase. One of the more significant of these drivers was the marketisation of education. Whilst not directly influencing the conduct of the trials themselves, it had a strong indirect effect on the VET sector's capacity to progress a Key Competencies proposal.

Linked to the emergence of an educational market during this period was the influence of economic rationalist agendas. These agendas led to the continued restructuring of State and Commonwealth agencies, which resulted in further destabilisation of public providers and the dilution of institutional capacity to deal with implementation of the Key Competencies. The forces of economic rationalism also influenced policy systems during this period, through the re-emergence of sectoral boundaries in education and training that further weakened the Key Competencies by isolating them a single sector issues for State school and VET systems.

Educational federalism however, remained the key policy driver during this period.

The lack of recurrent Commonwealth funding at the end of the trials was a major reason for the lack of State support for the Key Competencies, one that was amplified by user choice and the emergence of a funding crisis during a time of fiscal restraint across a wide range of Commonwealth portfolio areas.

Reinforcing this position was the impact of the change of government in 1996 that, whilst linked to party political agendas, saw the Commonwealth seek to further decentralise control of funding and program delivery from State bureaucracies to the hands of industry.

Whilst the influence of policy drivers shifted during this period, the trials provided the States with the opportunity to argue that as the Key Competencies were embedded in curriculum, they formed part of the outcomes achieved by both general and vocational programs. Despite this policy position, there were clearly divergent views between teachers and policy makers over the value that Key Competencies could bring.

These views however were not resolved in a context of competing policy priorities and a lack of organisational capacity that arose from constant policy developments and cycles of school curriculum reform.

In addition to the reform fatigue that evolved during this period, a significant development was thus the emergence of operational issues that created implementation barriers for State schools and VET systems. Chief amongst those were the challenges to teachers that would have increased the cost of professional development and created industrial implications due to fears of increased workload. The limited progress on assessment during the trials was compounded by the States' resistance to the prospect of a national testing regime, an outcome that saw no agreement on a preferred approach, nor calls for further trials at additional cost. These operational issues were further exacerbated by the pressure on public providers to reinvent themselves as a result of user choice and the creation of an educational market. This clearly limited the scale of Key Competency implementation that was to follow and led to a range of issues being highlighted by the States as reasons to obviate the Key Competencies agenda.

These operational issues were also clearly related to inadequate conceptualisation of the Key Competencies, a reality that came to generate unresolved issues that went on to become barriers to implementation.

During the trials, the shifting youth labour market also continued to be a key policy driver, for the rise of the ASTF and the development of an alternate model of vocational preparation came to challenge the importance of the Key Competencies and the capacity of State training agencies to meaningfully progress any generic skills agenda.

This development also mediated the policy driver of new vocationalism by creating a general model of vocationalism in contrast to the New Apprenticeship system, which was the result of the ongoing influence of new vocationalism and the development of employment based pathways that arose as a result of the Carmichael report. Despite this counterbalance, the period of the trials did see

the continued influence of new vocationalism through the emergence of Enterprise Education which came to compete with the Key Competencies as a potential driver of curriculum reform.

The ongoing influence of new vocationalism was also evident in the continuing resistance to the Key Competencies as a spearhead of the competencies movement within general education circles. However, within this period, the impact of new vocationalism on the generic skills agenda was fundamentally weakened by the failure of industry to voice any ongoing support for Key Competencies, an outcome that further questions the level of support that actually existed during the development phase. In terms of the nature of policy itself, the results in this chapter illustrate a number of key characteristics of VET policy that apply to the Key Competencies and perhaps more broadly.

Policy was rearticulated across the policy cycle as practitioners reinterpreted the original Mayer proposal and developed a more pragmatic approach, tailored to the needs of classrooms and other sites of learning. Similarly, it is also clear that other policy streams, such as the New Apprenticeship System, had a significant influence on the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies.

The research also demonstrated that considerable political tension between the Commonwealth and the States in the VET sector and in schools emerged over funding of VET in schools, User Choice and the New Apprenticeship System. In such an environment, the challenge of developing generic skills was further sidelined, a situation that in particular reinforced the limited engagement by VET in the DETYA led trials. Clearly, this period also demonstrated that the actions of various stakeholders within the education policy system contributed significantly to the policy trajectory of the generic skills agenda. In particular, the efforts of State and Commonwealth agencies to protect the status quo and not engage fully with the potential offered by the Key Competencies is further evidence of the range of organisational and systemic factors that highlight the key role of stakeholder actions in VET policy making.

However, as is the case with the policy process and educational change itself, the Key Competencies went on to both thrive and wither in different policy contexts, and it is this varied policy trajectory that we explore further in the next Chapter.

Chapter 6: Implementation of the Key Competencies (1998-2000)

Or how the Key Competencies were lost in a sea of competing priorities and policy complexity

Whilst the Commonwealth progressed its generic skills agenda by funding the Key Competencies trials, by the beginning of 1997 it had become apparent that in the school sector at least, implementation was to be left to individual States and Territory school systems. In the VET sector however, the Commonwealth's preoccupation with the New Apprenticeships system and the nature of the VET system itself meant that the actions of individual providers primarily determined the scope of Key Competency implementation in that sector as key policy agencies reeled with the extent of change being imposed in that sector.

This research has found that during the period between the completion of the trials and the emergence of Employability Skills as a new generic skills framework, the Key Competencies were implemented in different ways across a number of VET settings. These implementation processes and outcomes are considered in this chapter and used to argue that the Key Competencies have had a measurable yet indirect impact in vocational education and training in Australia.

a. The flow of policy

By early 1997, the Key Competency trial projects in each State and Territory were drawing to a close, leaving individual jurisdictions to progress the integration of Key Competencies within existing practices. The National Report on Schooling summary in 1997 noted that 'States and sectors within them were following a range of approaches with varying rates of progress evident' (MCEETYA 1997b: 55). Curtis and McKenzie (2001) considered this to reflect 'a general trend to nationally consistent approaches to curriculum and to a learning outcomes orientation in curriculum' (2001: 17).

The research suggests that most progress eventuated in the area of curriculum analysis compared with reporting arrangements and reform of teaching and learning. Indeed, whilst suggesting progress in each State and Territory, none of the National Reports on Schooling for the years 1997-2001 made any detailed reference to the Key Competencies other than to report briefly on the outcomes of the pilot projects completed during this period.

However, the issue of what constituted relevant school outcomes came to reinforce the importance of the Key Competencies within the growing VET in schools agenda that continued as a major policy development during this period.

By 1999, 86% of Australian schools were running at least one program involving students spending time in a workplace (Malley et al 2001: 6). In analysing VET in schools participation data from 1996-1999, which was immediately after the period of the trials, Malley et al (2001) further found that 84% of these programs 'identified Key Competencies as skills to be developed' (2001: 55), a level of penetration that was achieved without the Commonwealth having funded a comprehensive national implementation program.

However, during this period some Commonwealth support was provided through the School to Work Program. The implementation of the School to Work Program was a key policy development during this period that saw $220M allocated 'to promote effective school to work pathways and support the implementation of New Apprenticeships initiatives in schools' (DEETYA 1997: 45). The program reflected the government's shift away from focussing solely on skills based solutions towards pathway solutions as their approach to the transition from school to work.

The program also funded a small number of Key Competency projects, one of which was the National Industry Education Foundation (NIEF) project that further trialled the use of Key Competency portfolios in schools across a number of States and Territories.

Whilst the project ended in 2001, the report was not made publicly available due to the work around employability skills that commenced during the project's life (Cathy Maguire pers. com. October 2002). Clearly in the minds of DETYA at this stage the Key Competencies had limited shelf life.

This further work was observed by a Key Competencies senior project manager within DETYA who suggested, perhaps somewhat cynically, that 'the use of portfolios generated some additional interest and some additional activity, but that was about it...ultimately the KCs were no longer the flavour of the month' (CPMA26). The lack of meaningful reinvestment can be related to the change of government at the federal level and its subsequent budgetary restraint, lack of interest from the States, competing policy priorities and the emerging VET in schools agenda, all of which contributed to the fate of the Key Competencies as a stand alone element of policy at this time.

A DETYA Key Competency project consultant noted that 'the other agendas gained support, there were other things that could satisfy the constituencies without the degree of change required by the KC's' (CBYA25).

Despite this, and the associated ad hoc implementation funding, Commonwealth departmental staff continued to recognise the Key Competencies and foreground them in discussions around good practice. A section head within DETYA at the time commented that 'the KCs were a focus within DETYA as part of our efforts to encourage good practice at the practitioner level' (CDPA31). It appears however, that that indirect support through the School to Work program was facilitated by department staff who applied a flexible interpretation of the program's purpose, given that the Key Competencies were not specifically mentioned as funding priorities in the program guidelines (DEETYA 1997: 44-46). In this way, within the Commonwealth at least, the Key Competencies and generic skills as an educational artefact no longer held the promise of being a vehicle for cross sectoral articulation, nor the passport for entrée into high performance workplaces, rather, they were recognised as primarily being connected with

practice in the classrooms, and thus in some ways, beyond the reach of centrally imposed policy initiatives.

As a result of the ongoing growth of VET in schools activity, State and Commonwealth Education and Training Ministers met to address a range of issues surrounding the delivery and resourcing of VET in schools, and as a result, agreed to principles and guidelines for funding (DEETYA 1996).

This work led MCEETYA to recognise that VET in schools was a new priority area in the curriculum[52], consequently including it in the terms of reference for the review of the National Goals of Schooling (MCEETYA 1998). In April 1999, after considerable deliberation, State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education endorsed a new set of *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*, known as the Adelaide Declaration (MCEETYA 1999). This key policy development included goals that made 'a range of references to elements of VET in schools and linkages between the education and training sectors, business and industry' (MCEETYA 2000: 7). Whilst not specifically referring to the Key Competencies per se, Goals 1.1, 1.5 and 1.6 of the declaration stated that when students leave schools they should:

- 'have the capacity for, and skills in, analysis and problem solving, and the ability to communicate ideas and information, to plan and organise activities and to collaborate with others;
- have employment related skills and an understanding of the work environment, career options and pathways as a foundation for, and positive attitudes towards, vocational education and training, further education, employment and life-long learning; and
- be confident, creative and productive users of new technologies, particularly information technologies' (MCEETYA 2000).

---

[52] The discussion paper informing the review of the National Goals of Schooling identified information technology, vocational education, literacy and numeracy and civics and citizenship as being the emerging priority areas. The Key Competencies or other generic skills were not referenced.

Clearly these statements resonate across both the intentions and substance of the Key Competency initiative, and as noted by Curtis and McKenzie, 'the release of the Adelaide Declaration may be seen as a pivotal policy statement in revitalizing debate on generic employability skills in the school sector' (2001: 17). Whilst the language of the Key Competencies clearly appeared in the new National Goals for Schooling, they were located within a broader discourse of transition than that which existed at the time of Mayer. The development of the Key Competencies and other generic skills were now seen to be clearly part of VET in schools, rather than only a part of mainstream general education as had been the case at the time of Mayer.

Indeed, in reflecting on the changing nature of VET in schools during this period, the Senate (2000) noted that 'the new national VET system is intended to open up pathways between schools, other VET providers, and the workplace; a process intended to expose most school students eventually to experiential learning, the workplace environment and eventually to employers' (2000: 224). This was clearly a different perspective to that embodied by the Carmichael Report which emphasized employment based pathways as the main instrument for school to work transition. As noted by Sweet (2000) 'concern widened from seeing transition as an issue primarily for unemployed youth or for those in vocational education programs, to seeing it as an issue for all young people whether work is entered from upper secondary education or from tertiary studies' (2000: 44).

Thus during this period the issue of transition became a more complex policy challenge for government, one that required a more sophisticated approach than simply relying on a focus on generic skills within employment based pathways.[53]

Further evidence of this shift and the ongoing presence of Key Competencies can be found in another key policy development of this period, the report of the

---

[53] Difficulties facing young people in transition have been identified as involving information access, parental support, lifelong learning skills, transition pathways, accountability of schools and linkages between institutions (MCEETYA 2000).

Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce, *Footprints to the Future* (Eldridge 1999).[54] In September 1999, the Prime Minister established the Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce and asked it to 'develop creative approaches which would help young people and their families negotiate the transition from school to an independent livelihood' (Eldridge 1999: 1). The report, perhaps somewhat naively, suggested that 'more needed to be done towards identifying and defining what are known as key competencies for the workforce or employability skills' (1999: vii). Interestingly, the report also noted that 'while important work was begun on this in the early 1990s (especially in the Mayer Report of 1992), the focus has become a little blurred more recently' (1999: 18). Whilst not giving more detail on the lack of focus, the report went on to recommend that:

- 'Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments in consultation with key industry organisations and the Australian National Training Authority develop a nationally agreed set of key employability competencies to reflect changes in the workplace, emerging new industries over the last ten years and projected changes to the year 2010 (1999: 96); and
- the Commonwealth Government to work with State and Territory Governments, the Australian National Training Authority, and the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation to ensure that 'young people not connected to formal education and training or employment have opportunities to participate in structured work-place learning models and obtain employability skills' (1999: 103).

It is interesting to note that the Chairperson of this taskforce was given the opportunity to personally address MCEETYA, a far cry from the response within MCEETYA to the Mayer report and its subsequent plan for implementation. Indeed, the work of the Youth Action Plan Taskforce also contributed to another major policy initiative during this period, the development of an agreed policy and implementation framework for VET in schools.

---

[54] Whilst a DETYA School to Work Program manager suggested that the Key Competencies were also 'identified as an issue by delegates to the 1999 National Youth Roundtable' (CPMA38), no specific reference material could be identified to verify this.

In response to the goals detailed in the Adelaide Declaration (MCEETYA 1999), the MCEETYA Taskforce on VET in Schools proposed to Ministers in March 2000 a New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools (MCEETYA 2000). The new framework was driven by an:

> 'imperative to improve the transition of all young people from school to work and further study, signalling a broadening of the agenda to include a focus on VET for senior secondary students, an expanded role for community partnerships, the centrality of lifelong learning, key competencies, enterprise education integrated career education and guidance services' (MCEETYA 2000: 7).

Whilst the new framework attempted to integrate a range of programs and initiatives that had not always been delivered in an integrated way, it is interesting to note that the Key Competencies remained on the agenda for three years after the end of the trials.[55] As noted by a Section Head within DETYA at the time, 'when Kemp came in, there was a broad-banding of programs which subsumed a number of initiatives' (CDPA29). In particular, Key Competencies and Enterprise Education were located within Key Element 2 of the framework, namely Enterprise and Vocational Learning. As suggested earlier, this broader category established a wider focus on skill, and placed it within a broader context of school to work transition. A Section Head within DETYA commented that 'the policy agenda moved away from the acquisition of KCs to a more holistic approach focussing on a range of skills related to successful transition' (CCMA25).

This step is significant for the Key Competencies because it initiated processes that led to them being formally recognised as an ongoing feature of post-compulsory education and training arrangements, albeit in a less significant way

---

[55] This range of initiatives included: Student support services (including Career guidance services, labour market information, mentoring etc), Vocational Learning (including Key Competencies, Enterprise attributes, Community Based Learning, Work Based Learning, Career Education), and VET (including Part-time New Apprenticeships) (MCEETYA 2000).

than originally envisaged. As suggested by a section head within DEST,[56] 'the story of the KCs should be seen as part of the evolution and refinement of the VET system more generally' (CMJA26). This research suggests that at this juncture, generic skills were clearly revitalised and possibly rescued from policy oblivion within the school system by being specifically aligned with vocational learning.

However, whilst a major focus within vocational learning was the enhancement of 'transitions for all young people through access to generic skills and competencies' (MCEETYA 2000: 23), the Key Competencies themselves were not explicitly endorsed as a set of skills demanding attention. Indeed, in the implementation strategy for the new framework (MCEETYA 2001), there was a call to 'extend work already undertaken on Key Competencies and the development of enterprise skills and attributes' (2001: 10). So despite the significant work completed through the pilots and subsequent project work, it would appear that the States and the Commonwealth continued to recognise the value of generic skills without agreeing on clear ways in which to develop and report on them.

In the VET sector however, the Key Competencies struggled to retain relevance to the extent that was achieved in the school sector. Whilst progress within school jurisdictions progressed in a piecemeal fashion, as a result of cycles of curriculum review and the evolving VET in schools agenda, Key Competencies were subsumed in the VET sector by the tides of debate surrounding the implementation of Training Packages and the associated challenges to curriculum, delivery and assessment that they precipitated.

The reforms associated with training packages and the Australian Recognition Framework (ARF) continued as key policy developments in the VET sector during this period, and caused considerable difficulties during the period immediately following the trials.

---

[56] The Department of Education, Science and Technology (DEST) replaced the Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) in November 2001.

Hawke and Cornford (1998) suggested at the time 'that there is a growing sense of cynicism towards putting effort into changes that are of little worth, are seriously flawed and will be subject yet again to major change' (1998: 129). As the first series of Training Packages were endorsed and came to be implemented by State training systems, concerns were voiced over the educational soundness of the packages themselves. In particular, the treatment of generic skills became a focus of attention, particularly amongst those States that had managed VET sector Key Competency projects during the trials. For example, a submission from the South Australian government to a 1999 Senate enquiry into the quality of VET in Australia noted that:

> 'concerns are being raised that the focus in Training Packages on industry specific skills has distracted attention from generic competencies such as communication and problem solving skills and other like competencies identified by the Mayer Report into Key Competencies' (SA 1999: 4).

The final report of the Senate echoed these views, noting that 'many stakeholders claim the design of National Training Packages has flaws because they do not provide adequately for the achievement of Key Competencies' (Senate 2000: 154). The Senate report also indicated that ANTA itself had acknowledged 'that there is a view that the Mayer competencies are not being sufficiently emphasised' (2000: 157). A director within ANTA at the time observed that 'the KCs dropped off the agenda because it was too crowded within ANTA, issues of quality came to the fore' (CALA14). Whilst quality was an emerging issue at this stage, Winchester and Comyn (1997) argued that VET practice across the board inadequately addressed generic skills because they focussed on a limited view of learning.

Drawing on her work examining Key Competencies in Training Packages, Down (2000) found that many practitioners 'expressed their concern about the lack of explicit information about the integration of the Key Competencies within Training Package specifications' (2000: 1).

However, whilst there was general concern over the treatment of generic skills in Training Packages, the sheer scale of changes required of curriculum and resources at the time left little capacity to focus significantly on generic skills in a comprehensive manner. Down's (2000) research into Key Competencies in Training Packages found:

- 'knowledge and understanding of the Key Competencies were extremely variable especially among providers of training;
- there is widespread confusion about the levels used in conjunction with the Key Competencies especially among the end users of training packages;
- the integration of the Key Competencies within training packages requires substantial change in vocational education, training and assessment practices; and
- the contextual nature of the Key Competencies makes their development within a training package framework simultaneously simple and complex and difficult' (Down 2000: 133-135).

Whilst Down's report, and subsequent work with Figgis on underpinning knowledge were considered important and useful contributions to thinking within ANTA in 2000, they did not influence substantive policy on Key Competencies. As noted by a Director in ANTA, 'Cathy Down's work didn't go to the NQTC, so it wasn't accepted as policy, but it did lead to changes to the developer's handbook'[57] (AALA38). Consequently, although Down's work resulted in clearer guidance to the developers of Training Packages, the absence of explicit assessment and reporting requirements limited the presence of Key Competencies and other generic skills within VET that delivered Training Package qualifications.

Whilst substantive policies on Key Competencies were not developed during this period, discussions between ANTA and the NCVER did lead to the commissioning of a literature review of generic skills to inform further work in this area.

---

[57] The National Quality Training Council (NQTC) was ANTA's peak industry committee to the ANTA Board and the forum where policy on Training Packages was determined.

This report (Kearns 2000) was noted as providing a 'useful starting point from which to define generic skills and implement them within the National Training Framework' (ANTA 2001: 1), although how this differed from previous work on Key Competencies at this stage was not made clear. This "new" starting point for the VET sector appears to have been arrived at after the Key Competency journey had effectively been abandoned by that sector, an ironic outcome given that the schools had arguably progressed further with this clearly vocational agenda.

At the end of the trials and prior to her removal in 1997 as Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Amanda Vanstone noted that the Key Competencies were 'regarded by employers and industry as an important step to developing a more highly skilled and mobile workforce for Australia' (Vanstone 1997). However, whilst this 'important step' did not warrant ongoing Commonwealth funding to support implementation, the government's shift in policy priorities was also evident in her remarks, which noted that 'the Federal Government's recently-introduced reforms to the apprenticeship and traineeship system will enable young Australians to build on this fundamental skills base' (Vanstone 1997). Thus in the VET sector at least, the main conclusion drawn by the Commonwealth was that these skills were being adequately developed within current arrangements, a position that illustrated the Commonwealth's limited success in progressing policy reform through a generic skills agenda in that sector.

The New Apprenticeship system and a range of associated major VET initiatives introduced were still in their infancy however, when Amanda Vanstone was replaced by Dr. David Kemp as Minister for Vocational Education and Training Policy.

Kemp saw different priorities and had a vastly different personal style. From his appointment in 1997 and beyond, the new education Minister embarked on a program of initiatives aimed at implementing the government's education

agenda and personalised policy priorities.[58] A section head within DETYA at the time noted that:

> 'the new Minister wanted to stamp his own agenda, he wanted to be seen to be doing something new and something good, so he began his literacy priority. Youth unemployment and the transition from school to work were the other biggies' (CNSB11).

Kemp's literacy initiatives were another key policy development during this period, with Kemp claiming that it was 'the key equity issue in education today' (Kemp 1997). In 1998, when the Federal Government provided $176M for a national literacy and numeracy program for school students, Kemp went on to suggest that:

> 'it is the first time since Federation that there has been national co-operation to improve Australia's disturbingly low literacy standards. It is clear that our education policies are failing a large number of children. Clearly, this situation cannot continue' (Kemp 1998).

Kemp's priorities during this period, coupled with his agenda against the then predominantly labour States, was clearly influenced by his own personal views towards the previous federal Labor administration's VET agenda. As a member of the NSW Board of Studies commented, 'Kemp was known as being publicly opposed to the Finn, Carmichael and Mayer agenda and their atomistic approach' (CJMB29).

Kemp's preoccupation with his literacy agenda however, was balanced by his commitment to address school to work transition and a 'senior curriculum dominated by the needs of the 30 per cent of students intending to undertake academically oriented tertiary studies' (Kemp 1999b).

---

[58] Note also other major policy developments launched by Kemp that included the Work for the Dole Initiative (1997), the introduction of Green Corps (1997) and the development of the Jobs Network (1998).

In citing a decrease in the national school retention rate as a driver of the government's expansion of vocational education in secondary schools (Kemp 1997a), Kemp listed the government's priorities as 'improving school to work transition by expanding vocational education in the senior secondary school years, including the introduction of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships' (Kemp 1999b).

In a speech to the OECD at the time, Kemp commented that a priority of his administration was ensuring education and training systems provide the skills and attributes young people needed to prosper in the 21st century, and that these could be achieved through:

> 'reforming the content of senior secondary education to cater better for the diversity of student needs in the post compulsory years and increasing quality vocational orientation and the opportunities for young people to gain experience in business enterprises while still at school' (Kemp 1999b).

Despite the ongoing relevance of the Key Competencies to these goals, Kemp's rhetoric continued despite his administration's general lack of support for the Key Competencies. Whilst these priorities implicitly acknowledged generic skills through their reference to 'skills of the twenty first century', they reflected assumptions that generic skills were the incidental outcome of improved pathways, a position again cognisant of the Commonwealth's inability to directly influence classroom practice in State managed education systems.

b.   The politics of federalism

The piecemeal pattern of implementation that evolved in the wake of the Key Competency program was also a consequence of the political relationships underpinning education in Australia during this period. In its report on quality in VET, the Senate noted that in addition to 'differences in the attitudes between the States and the Commonwealth to the difficulties faced by the VET sector' there were 'differences in the administrative cultures and regulatory practices

between State government agencies' (Senate 2000: xiii). The ANTA review of their VET in schools program (Allen Consulting Group 2000) also found that on the whole, 'school systems seem to lack common standards and mutually agreed expectations, with State and regional planning processes generally lacking' (2000: 30).

Whilst the Commonwealth's efforts to progress this policy agenda were complicated by systemic and procedural issues, it was more seriously threatened by tensions over funding that emerged in part, through the ongoing expansion of VET in schools.

During its examination of quality in Australia's VET system, the Senate noted that the increasing popularity of school VET courses created a funding crisis for schools who were 'required to divert substantial proportions of running costs to support these new courses' (2000: 223). Indeed, perhaps somewhat conservatively, they also observed that funding was an issue that was 'yet to be properly resolved between the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments' (2000: 223).

Further compounding the tensions over funding was another Commonwealth initiative that saw traditional State centric apprenticeship and traineeship funding arrangements opened up to quasi market forces (Anderson 2000). The further development of the open training market forced TAFE systems to competitively operate in a training market through a range of mechanisms (Kemp 1997b), and created further challenges for States who were now faced with increasing financial commitments generated through growing commencements in the New Apprenticeship system.

Whilst concerns existed around the quality of VET within the new system, there is no doubt that significant numbers of new learners were participating in vocational education and training as a result of the new pathways available through Training Packages. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) identified that the total number of apprentices and trainees in contracts of training rose 33.7% over the period 1998 – 2000 (NCVER 2000),

an increase that strained the capacity of State systems to respond to further curriculum reform initiatives such as the Key Competencies.

Within this context of enrolment growth and broader federal budgetary restraint, the Commonwealth placed a cap on recurrent funding at 1997 levels, withdrew annual growth funding and required States and Territories to fund growth through efficiency gains (Senate 2000). In this environment of financial stringency, it is not surprising that the States and Territories did not commit substantial funds to introduce system wide generic skills initiatives within VET.

The growth through efficiencies program placed the States and Territories under considerable pressure, and whilst real efficiencies were achieved in the delivery and administration of programs (Senate 2000), concerns over declining quality became an increasing issue. Consequently, the States and Territories argued that 'quantitative gains were being purchased through quality loses as a result of the Commonwealth's policies' (NSW TAFE 2000). The tensions manifest themselves in the national press, with Jane Nicholls writing in *The Australian* that 'the Coalition has presided over a steep decline in real levels of TAFE funding and a serious undermining of quality in the VET system', a process which has resulted in 'Australia's VET system, once portrayed by Kemp as his greatest achievement, now in funding and planning chaos' (*The Australian* 2001).

Quality concerns were also raised through the publication of a number of influential reports that provided clear evidence of a system under stress.[59] These reports also identified the lack of attention paid to generic skills in VET as being one aspect of the National Training Framework that required 'remedial action' (Schofield 1999: 71).

Whilst Ministers agreed at their MCEETYA meeting in June 2000 to make a series of amendments to the Australian Recognition Framework and create the National Training Quality Council (NTQC), Victoria's Post-Compulsory

---

[59] See in particular Schofield (1999), (1999a) and (2000).

Education, Training and Employment Minister Lynne Kosky commented at the time that 'the States could take credit for the new quality push', and also suggested that Kemp's new model 'had been pulled together quickly' (cited in Lawnham 2000).

Although quality issues eventually forced changes to national VET policy, the growth through efficiency policy also had the effect of accelerating staff cuts in State and Territory TAFE systems and increasing the casualisation of the TAFE workforce. An Australian Education Union (AEU) submission to the 2003 Senate Enquiry into Current and Future Skill Needs noted that the system at the time involved an 'over reliance on market forces, increased use of casuals to resolve teacher shortages and inadequate investment in staff development to meet the changing labour market training needs' (cited in *Campus Review* 2003).

Combined with increasing class sizes and input based quality measures (AEU 2000), the capacity of State and Territory TAFE systems to adequately focus on generic skills development was clearly strained. To develop generic and technical skills through integrated approaches to teaching and learning requires not only considerable skill, but also a supportive institutional environment. During this period, TAFE systems nationally found themselves under increasing financial and pedagogic pressure, pressure that resulted from the combined forces of the growth through efficiencies policy and the potential narrowing impact of Training Packages. In this environment, it is not surprising that the treatment of generic skills, and the Key Competencies, suffered.

This scenario was in part acknowledged by ANTA, who recognised that the introduction of the Key Competencies was complicated by a number of systemic issues, including:

- 'funding models inconsistent with the flexibility promised by training packages and some innovative approaches to teaching and learning;
- an ageing VET provider workforce trained in a 'sage on the stage' rather than 'guide on the side' approach;

- the need for change management strategies across the VET sector' (ANTA 2001: 5).

Reviewing VET arrangements during this period, Smith identified a range of problems in VET that resulted in inadequate language, listening and reasoning skills and poor vocational preparation. These issues included:

- 'inadequate learning support;
- declining teaching standards;
- poor syllabus and curriculum materials; and
- poor learning resources, particularly for those engaged in entirely on-the-job training' (Smith 2000: 11).

Clearly the VET sector was plagued by a number of operational issues during this period. Relations between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories during this period were also strained over the role of ANTA and the disproportionate power it exercised given the Commonwealth's relative share of VET funding. The Senate (2000) observed that 'State government funding of VET had risen steadily from 1994 to 1999 while Commonwealth funding, after rising from 1994 to a peak in 1997, had declined in both 1998 and 1999' (2000: 82). During this period, State and Territory ministers argued that the ministerial council, not the statutory ANTA and its board of industry and union representatives, should make the decisions and run policy on training. Victoria's minister responsible for tertiary education and training, Mr Phil Honeywood, claimed that it was 'a bit rich when a body like ANTA, controlled by the Commonwealth, tries to call all the shots when States and Territories spend 76 per cent of money in the training pie compared with 24 per cent from the Federal Government' (cited in Richards 1996).

Given this resistance, it is perhaps not surprising then that ANTA did not pursue the Key Competencies as a priority. As noted by Down, whilst there was 'general agreement on the need for Key Competencies to be part of VET, there was no general agreement as to how this might be achieved' (Down 2000: 2).

Another dimension of the tensions surrounding ANTA and its relationship with the States and territories was the composition of the ANTA Board. From its inception, the absence of any representative from the education sector and small business was an issue between the Commonwealth and the States (Senate 1995). Numerous submissions from TAFE representative bodies and State education agencies failed to sway the Commonwealth's view that an industry dominated board was the most appropriate structure.[60] Indeed, a number of educators viewed this position as contributing to the lack of attention on generic skills within ANTA's VET agenda. A senior VET curriculum manager in Victoria suggested that:

> 'there have been political decisions taken to remove educators and teachers from the Board of ANTA and these groups don't think they have a voice in ANTA. You just have to look at the CCC project run by RMIT to see that most interest amongst the teachers and trainers was about how to use the KCs to improve assessment and facilitate holistic delivery. Generic skills are a big issue for them. Generic skills are also a big issue for those in industry on the shop floor – the ANTA board is dominated by the big end of town, which alienates small business' (CCDB16).

These comments echo those made by a Director of an Educational Division within NSW TAFE[61] who noted that 'policy makers, especially within ANTA, have been separated from those groups that particularly value the processes and outcomes associated with generic skills' (CCB51). However, despite recommendations to the contrary (see for example Senate 2000), the ANTA Board did not invite educationalists into its fold.

Another dimension of State and Commonwealth relations that influenced the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies during this period was again the structure of national policy forums. In his review of generic skills, Kearns identified the need for 'better coordination of policy thrusts directed at teaching and learning strategies' (2001: 59). In particular, he identified the need to

---

[60] See for example House of Representatives (1998).
[61] Educational Divisions provide curriculum related support to TAFE Institutes in NSW.

integrate policy initiatives directed at lifelong learning, promoting generic skills, enterprise education, building an innovation culture, flexible learning and the *Learning for the Knowledge Society Action Plan*[62] (Kearns 2001).

Indeed, Kearns also suggested that 'achieving such coordination is impeded by the absence of a national policy framework for lifelong learning and for building Australia as a learning society, so that discrete policy thrusts are integrated in synergistic ways' (2001: 59).

Whilst a consequence of the new VET in schools frameworks was that previously disparate and multifaceted policy initiatives were brought into sharp focus, MCEETYA noted the need to improve mechanisms for coordinating policy, program and resource management across the broad area of VET in Schools, agreeing that the MCEETYA Taskforce on VET in Schools should:

> 'work jointly with the Commonwealth, ANTA, ASTF and State and territory government and non-government education authorities to progress more coordinated and integrated approaches in this area, with particular attention to streamlining diverse funding initiatives and focussing on outcomes driven initiatives' (MCEETYA 2000b: 3).

This new approach also impacted on the forums that surrounded MCEETYA and signalled a new emphasis within arrangements for national collaboration.

At the 12th MCEETYA meeting in July 2001, Ministers agreed to abolish existing MCEETYA taskforces in order 'to advance the national agenda on schooling and ensure the achievement of the *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty First Century*' (MCEETYA 2001b: 3). The work of the new committees was to enhance national collaboration in seven key areas, a shift that resulted in the cessation of the Taskforce on VET in Schools and the creation of the Taskforce on Transition from School.

---

[62] The Commonwealth Department of Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) coordinated the action plan which aimed to adapt education and training to the needs of the information economy (DETYA 2000).

Whilst the new taskforce involved representatives from the previous forum, the new terms of reference clearly reflected MCEETYA's intention that 'VET issues be primarily discussed through the ANTA Ministerial Council' (MCEETYA 2001b: 3), a further indication that the focus of the new forum had moved beyond VET in schools to incorporate the broader issue of pathways and transition.

More specifically, the terms of reference for the new taskforce directed it to report to MCEETYA on 'vocational learning and enterprise education initiatives that would equip young people at all levels of schooling to be innovative and develop skills and attributes to manage their lives successfully in a knowledge society' (MCEETYA 2001c). The Taskforce was also directed to consider the 'development of attitudes, skills and disposition for life-long learning post-year 12' (MCEETYA 2001c), intentions broadly compatible with the aims of the Mayer Committee and indicative of a more holistic approach to the development of generic skills through vocational learning. This research argues that the more collaborative approach evidenced by these national developments were only likely to have been agreed to after the introduction and subsequent growth of VET in Schools programs and the trialing of the Key Competencies. A member of the NSW Board of Studies commented that:

> 'the KC's have helped us get the structures right and have contributed to the changes over the last 4-5 years, including the new goals for schooling. They've been able to support schools getting into VET and there are better structures within the Board of Studies because of it. You shouldn't underestimate the role of the KCs in encouraging schools into VET' (CJMB38).

These developments illustrate that during this period there were a range of relationships between the Commonwealth and the States, including both a lack of cooperation on funding and genuine progress on VET in schools; contrasting outcomes that directly influenced the policy trajectory of Key Competencies and provide new insights into the policy process in Australia.

The relationship between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories in the VET sector reflected a less co-operative form of federalism than that which had been in place up until 1997. This situation was balanced however, by the gains made in the area of school VET policy and in particular, by the revised National Goals of Schooling (MCEETYA 1999) and the New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools (MCEETYA 2000). These agreements reflect a more coherent and integrated approach to the transition from school to work, an approach that surprisingly revived the fortunes of the Key Competencies and other examples of generic skills.

c.   Policy stakeholder force field

During the period following the Key Competency trials, a range of stakeholder actions not only shaped the implementation of the Key Competencies, but also came to lay the foundation for Employability Skills, which were to emerge as the next phase of generic skills within Australian vocational education and training. Chief amongst those stakeholders were State governments and education authorities who took very different steps in their treatment of the Key Competencies.

Drawing on State reports, comments from agency staff and reports from individual pilot projects, a brief overview is provided here of the policy trajectory of Key Competencies through State and Territory school systems.[63]

New South Wales (NSW)

In 1997, the Government accepted advice that there should be no central reporting of students' performance on Key Competencies within the HSC [64] (McGaw 1997). This advice however, was ultimately driven by the local project management committee, which was 'not representative of the views of all project staff' (Crump 1996). Regardless, the decision not to develop a system-wide approach to assessing and reporting Key Competencies was taken

---

[63] Not including VET in school pathways.
[64] Higher School Certificate (HSC).

217

because 'it was considered best to focus on the Key Competencies within the context of the curriculum' (MCEETYA 1997b: 56).

In NSW, Key Competencies were acknowledged as 'providing a useful language for describing attributes that are valued by teachers, trainers, students and employers' (Ryan 1996: 4). However, 'it was accepted that schools should have the option of providing reports, as reporting at school level was acknowledged as providing better opportunities for including contextually rich evidence of students' achievements of Key Competencies' (MCEETYA 1997b: 56). This decision left the future of the Key Competencies in the hands of individual teachers and schools, a decision that ultimately sealed their fate in the context of the new HSC. As noted by a DET employee responsible for providing assessment support to NSW schools, 'there would not be one school in NSW using the Key Competencies in Years 11 and 12' (CPLA30). Indeed, in commenting on the scope of the impact of the Key Competencies in NSW, a member of the NSW Board of Studies suggested that 'there was scope for policy impact on pedagogy, and the HSC review was seen as a way of achieving that but it the end, I'm not sure that we realised it' (CJMA19). As noted earlier, this research also established that additional demands for teachers in the context of new syllabus and curriculum for the HSC was clearly a factor in the State training agency decision not to include Key Competencies within the new arrangements.

Victoria (VIC)

The National Report on Schooling in 1997 suggested that there were two main phases of the pilot projects in Victoria, an audit of curriculum documents and an investigation of classroom practices with respect to teaching and assessing the Key Competencies (MCEETYA 1997b). Perhaps not unexpectedly, it was evident that 'development of the Key Competencies was largely dependent on how the VCE and CSF[65] are taught' (MCEETYA 1997b: 57).

---

[65] The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Curriculum Standards Framework (CSF).

The Victorian Key Competency projects identified a range of issues surrounding the suitability of the Key Competencies, and whilst the Victorian Board of Studies agreed to incorporate them within the new guidelines for the VCE that were reviewed in 1997, it was found that most subjects did not explicitly identify them in documentation (Rowland and Young 1996). Notwithstanding this, curriculum support materials were produced to develop the Key Competencies in the VCE and Levels 6 and 7 of the CSF, and in 1997, the Victorian Minister for Education requested that the Key Competencies be incorporated in 'a State wide assessment program for secondary students' (Howes 1997). This aim was progressed in 1998 through the Regional Development through School-Industry Partnerships Project, which saw Victorian DEET, the South Australian Department of Education Training and Employment and the National Industry Education Forum jointly use Commonwealth funds to develop curriculum, resources and programs in relation to the Key Competencies and Enterprise Education.

Completed in 1999, this project was followed by the School Based Key Competencies Assessment and Reporting Trial in 2000, which, in conjunction with researchers from the Australian Council of Education Research, saw the Board of Studies explore ways in which the Key Competencies might be assessed and reported on by schools (VCAA 2000). This work however, was not progressed to the point of implementation. Curtis and McKenzie (2001) suggest that whilst the Key Competencies had not been fully implemented in Victoria, there was an expectation that work would continue to embed them in assessment and reporting arrangements. At the time of writing however, that work had not progressed further, and as noted by a researcher involved in a number of these projects, 'the Key Competencies have been in and out of favour in Victoria since the trials began' (CDMA26).

Queensland (QLD)

In 1996 the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies completed its Key Competency trial project, which examined the feasibility of integrating the assessment and reporting of the Key Competencies into the system of

assessment and reporting of students' achievements in senior secondary education. At this point, Rowland and Young et al (1996) suggest that the Queensland government 'did not have a settled position on integrating the Key Competencies into curriculum, assessment and reporting in Queensland senior secondary education' (1996: 167). Whilst Grace and Ludwig (1997) suggest that 'little had been done in Queensland in a formal way to link the Mayer Key Competencies with work done on Student Performance Standards' (1997: 161), Pitman (2000) argued that over the previous decade, the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies had been gradually identifying and working on generic skills in senior secondary education. In particular, he argued that they had 'worked pretty closely in recent years to include the Key Competencies in our syllabuses, so in one way or another then, senior secondary education is paying a lot of attention to generic skills' (2000: 1). However, whilst the Key Competencies continued to be referenced as meaningful outcomes of school education in Departmental Statements (see for example EDQLD 1999), this research found no evidence of systemic approaches or resources directed at their development within schools in that State.

Subsequently however, the New Basics Project has come to dominate thinking on cross curricula outcomes in Queensland. The project, which commenced its four year trial at over fifty-nine schools in 2000, has a number of aims, which complement those of the Key Competencies initiative. Indeed, whilst the architect of the New Basics trial suggested that it 'didn't evolve directly from the Key Competencies' (CALA14), the approach seeks to promote the use of 'transdisciplinary curriculum plans expressed in terms of operational fields and repertoires of practice' (EDQLD 2000). A teacher involved in the initiative commented that:

> 'New Basics is providing a wonderful opportunity to at last put into a tangible framework those myriad skills, learning experiences, Key Competencies, call them what you will, that have been talked about for years and implemented only by those teachers game and enthusiastic enough to try either alone or in teams, usually at best on an ad hoc approach' (CRBA12).

Thus whilst the New Basics initiative did not explicitly evolve from the Key Competency agenda, it would appear that many of the sentiments expressed within Key Competency circles were rearticulated through the New Basics initiative and its work to redesign the general school curriculum in Queensland.

South Australia (SA)

After the trials in South Australia, the Key Competencies formed one component of the Ready Set Go school-to-work program, which received $1.3M over 1997–1999 for a phased implementation plan for the Key Competencies in all government schools for students in years R–12. The implementation plan called for three stages, including an information strategy, professional development for teachers and whole school and local community application of the Key Competencies (Rowland and Young et al 1996). The National Report on Schooling for 1997 noted that in the Catholic system however, there was no formalisation, apart from 'encouragement to schools to incorporate into their curriculum opportunities for students to engage with the Key Competencies' (MCEETYA 1997b: 60). Whilst this agenda was progressed primarily through a number of schools participating in the Regional Development through School - Industry Partnerships Project, the scope of the program and its outcomes appears to have fallen well short of initial expectations. After the Ready Set Go program ended, the Key Competencies were not explicitly pursued further within the current SA Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework (SACSA) that was revised in 2000 (Curtis and McKenzie 2001).

Western Australia (WA)

In 1996, schools in the government sector examined student opportunities to develop Key Competencies, including means of assessment and reporting, attitudes of post-secondary institutions and employers, and linkages with the world of work. That work recognized that the 'Key Competencies provided a useful curriculum design for some VET programs, were used as the key organisers for skills lists for on-the-job training, and have been used by some schools as a focus for reporting' (MCEETYA 1997b). However, the Student

Outcome Statements finalized across the Key Learning Areas within WA in 1997 did not account for the Key Competencies (Randall 1997), and in May 1998, the WA Curriculum Council began an exhaustive statewide review of post-compulsory education.

An initial discussion paper released in 1999 was followed by a position paper in 2000, which further developed the options that had emerged as a result of the consultation process (WACC 2001). Whilst the discussion paper released in 1998 provided definitions of Key Competencies in each learning area, it made no specific provision for assessment or reporting these outcomes (WACC 1998). This position was ultimately endorsed, with the new curriculum framework simply noting that 'the overarching learning outcomes address the Key Competencies' (WAC 2002).

Tasmania (TAS)

In 1997, the Tasmanian Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development assisted the Tasmanian Secondary Assessment Board (TASAB) to continue the review of all Tasmanian Certificate of Education syllabuses (MCEETYA 1997b). Arising from their experience with the Key Competency pilot projects and pursuant to a commitment through the Career and Work Education Policy Statement, this review incorporated the Key Competencies where appropriate into assessment criteria within the syllabus (Rowland and Young et al 1996). This research has identified that the momentum created by the pilot programs was maintained through the activism of the CEO of the Tasmanian Assessment Authority who obtained further DEETYA funding to conduct additional pilots during 1999 – 2001. This further work developed a method for reporting on Key Competencies in local assessment processes (TASED 2000). The developed framework and related outcomes of the projects saw the development within TASAB of 'a proposal to introduce a system wide approach to the assessment and reporting of Key Competencies' (CMSA27). That proposal however, was put on hold in 2002 because of the emerging national interest on cross curricula reporting that had emerged through the New

Basics Project in Queensland. At the time of writing however, this proposal had not progressed further to an implementation stage.

Northern Territory (NT)

Rowland and Young et al (1996) indicated that as a result of the trials, Year 11 courses in the Northern Territory came to include a Statement about the place of Key Competencies in each course and a grid indicating which competency levels students have an opportunity to achieve through participation. Notwithstanding this work, Jacobs (1997) found that 'there is no policy on the assessment and reporting of the Key Competencies so they do not feature on the Senior Secondary Studies Certificate, nor are they linked to NT Outcomes Profiles' (1997: 67). Further investigation through this research indicates that since the trials were completed, no substantive action was taken within the Northern Territory schools to address the Key Competencies in any coordinated fashion.

Australian Capital Territory

Whilst schools in the ACT were involved in the national pilots by trialing ways to better integrate the Key Competencies into curriculum, in 1998, further work involved integrating them into curriculum delivery, tracking student progress and incorporating Key Competency Statements into reports to parents and Year 10 references (MCEETYA 1998a). Whilst recommendations from the pilot projects argued that the Key Competencies should be implemented across all year levels from K-12 using a student portfolio system (Willis 1997), ongoing curriculum development arising from the National Profiles and Statements ultimately saw the Key Competencies located within Work Education, one of the Across Curriculum Perspective Statements included in the ACT curriculum framework. These Statements dealt with a number of non-KLA issues, and as they were deemed to 'encompass educational and societal issues of significance that cross all curriculum boundaries', they were to be 'embedded in all sections of course documents and be included in all classroom practice' (ACDET 1997: 1).

Despite this focus and support however, no explicit assessment and reporting of the Key Competencies was introduced in the ACT, nor is there any evidence that there was significant impact on classroom practice. It is evident that this was the case in most States and Territories, where individual schools were left to progress measures that gave explicit attention to the Key Competencies in general education.

Whilst these State and Territory summaries indicate that the Key Competencies did not feature significantly in reform initiatives to general education systems, there is no doubt that in many cases, individual teachers adopted the Key Competencies as a vehicle for reform. A consultant to DEET argued that there were 'significant outcomes from the projects despite the lack of formal implementation' (CMRA41). Reflecting on the trials in Victoria, he noted that:

> 'the trials provided kernels of practice through which the KCs became associated with good teaching and learning and their presence was made more secure through the ongoing debate in the broader community about school outcomes and the skills required by youth of today' (CMRA42).

This view is reflected in the comments of a school teacher who continued to work with the Key Competencies beyond the trials:

> 'the KC's are an important part of my efforts to draw links between different parts of the syllabus. They also make learning more fun for the kids and give them a sense of how what they learn at school is relevant to the world beyond' (CJJB12).

Whilst individual schools may have progressed with the Key Competencies at the local level, within school systems, the question of assessment and reporting brought State and Territory governments into conflict with teachers who represented a significant stakeholder group demanding satisfaction from the policy process.

Commenting on teacher related issues, an ACCI spokesperson based in Melbourne argued that 'teachers were looking for IR leverage, and it came to the fore in South Australia where progress was stalled by the line that KCs were argued as being additional work' (CAMB23). Similarly, a consultant involved in the national review of the trial program observed that 'State Ministers saw that it was too hard because it would involve an arm wrestle with the teachers' (CBYB17). Considering the challenge associated with Key Competency reform, a consultant to DETYA noted that:

> 'the KCs frightened a few people. It would have started them down a path of change that would have been a real bun fight, the slippery slope of change, once you start it's hard to stop. It involved too fundamental a change; they could have done a little bit, but they wouldn't have got all the benefits' (CBYC18).

Similarly, a Key Competency project manager within the NSW public school system observed that 'there was a lack of dollars and political will to pick up reporting. There were real fears that it would upset teachers, and there were doubts over whether it would really be worth it' (CJGC40).

A DETYA project manager within the School to Work Program noted that 'everyone lives in a just in time world, including politicians and the Key Competencies were long-term issues that were going to be too hard to push through school systems already under pressure' (CCBC23). Consequently, as the various school agencies chose not to pursue generic skills oriented reform, the Key Competencies became marginalised. As noted by a school consultant in NSW:

> 'when we were working with a school on a LOTE course, we developed an assessment involving group work. But this was rejected by the school because the group work outcomes weren't part of assessment outcomes even though the language of the KCs were clearly in the syllabus document' (CPLC26).

Similarly, a non-government schools consultant in NSW noted that:

> 'the syllabus says that the KCs are embedded in outcomes of Stage 6 (Years 11+12) curriculum, thus the line from the Board of Studies is that if you teach the syllabus you will teach the KCs. But they are there to varying degrees and the syllabus documents don't go far enough in making them explicit. As a result people are not addressing them in delivery or assessment' (CRLC27).

Similar challenges surrounded teachers in the VET sector. Down (2000) found that providers were:

> 'ill-prepared for the demands made on them by the introduction of Training Packages after an extensive period of reliance on pre-packaged learning support materials and curriculum guidelines, and at a time when fewer VET teachers and trainers have had access to formal educational training other than Workplace Training and Assessment programs' (2000: 21).

To a large extent, the VET sector also adopted a mapping approach, with a director in DETYA observing that 'the VET sector had its entrenched approach of embedding KCs which meant they were not explicit' (CMSC31). The general approach adopted within the VET sector was also a consequence of reform fatigue. Public sector and TAFE restructuring during this period further exacerbated the pressure facing public providers and their ability to deal with generic skills in Training Package based curriculum, which in itself provided a considerable challenge for practitioners who at the time had yet to fully adopt competency based training and assessment methods from the previous round of reform (Billett et al 1999). Consequently, a member of the NSW Board of Studies commented somewhat dryly that 'the VET sector lacked enthusiasm' (CJMA15), a situation reinforced by the limited capacity within State TAFE systems to provide for centralised curriculum support.

In all jurisdictions except NSW, industry specific curriculum branches had been dissolved or devolved to regions, in part due to the reduced focus on curriculum within a training package framework and also as a consequence of the reduced funding of VET. In NSW however, the ACCESS Educational Services Division (ESD) were not only consciously integrating Key Competency and other generic skills outcomes into the general education curricula they developed, but also emphasising them through the curriculum support they provided to other ESDs and TAFE Institutes as part of the implementation support for training packages.

As the program of trials ended, VET sector project staff also became activists for the Key Competencies in their respective TAFE systems. A project officer from South Australia commented that as part of her new role, 'whatever I do, I know it will involve the Key Competencies, at the moment I'm doing some professional development with teachers and trainers and the Key Competencies are always coming up' (TAFESA 1997).

Despite these isolated experiences amongst public providers, the efforts of private providers to develop generic skills in a systematic way were also limited (Down 2000).

ANTA had missed the opportunity to progress Key Competencies in the VET sector during the period immediately after the trials. Indeed, a paper presented to ANTA's National Training Quality Council in July 2001 noted that the focus on national consistency work had limited ANTA's capacity to progress work on generic skills (ANTA 2001). An ANTA Director suggested that 'the ANTA Board and ANTA per se didn't take responsibility for the KCs because it was DETYA's baby' (CALA13). However as suggested by a Victorian VET sector project manager, it appears more likely that 'the emphasis within ANTA had been on administrative compliance rather than PD and delivery, they were more focussed on auditing paperwork rather than process' (CCDA21). ANTA's lack of focus at this time was also reflected in comments from a representative from ACCI's Canberra office who suggested that 'Australia was ahead of the game through the work of Mayer and to a lesser extent through the pilots, but ANTA and the Commonwealth dropped the ball' (AAMA17).

Curriculum oriented approaches to Key Competencies did not meet industry's expectations, and whilst they were slow to mobilise opinion as a group, employers came to reassert control over the generic skills agenda during this period.

When the House of Representatives Committee examined the role of TAFE Institutes in 1998, it found that 'while it was in the long term interests of industry to have well educated employees who possess appropriate general and interpersonal skills as well as industry specific skills, industry itself has been reluctant to make this longer term investment' (House of Representatives 1998: 1589). Indeed the Key Competencies were generally not pursued by industry during the early stages of the period immediately following the trials, with most Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs) doing little more than satisfying the ANTA Training Package requirements to tabulate the presence of Key Competencies within competency standards.[66]

The fact that generic skills were not being sufficiently emphasised in Training Packages was first raised in an ANTA report on school to work transition (McDonald et al 1999).

However, it appears that the demands from industry for ongoing attention were neither consistent nor loud enough to stimulate a specific policy response. A member of the NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training observed at the time that:

> 'there were mixed messages from industry that conflicted with the rhetoric from Finn and Mayer....LLandN[67] was seen as more important than the KCs. That came through during BVET's regional consultations

---

[66] See for example ANTA (1998). My own experience in an ITAB during this period saw efforts to foreground the Key Competencies rejected on the grounds that they detracted from industry specific skills, thus diluting the integrity of the industry qualifications. Whilst it is likely that this limited understanding was not common across all ITABs and Training Packages, the pressure for Training Packages to be developed and endorsed in order to provide national frameworks for training providers led effort to be focussed on qualification frameworks and workplace assessment guidelines rather than the competency standards themselves.

[67] Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN).

and employer forums. There was no clear industry push and there were conflicting local signals from that constituency' (CJMC31).

Similarly, a VET coordinator within a State Catholic Education Commission suggested 'there might have been plenty of letters of support from industry associations as evidence of industry support for the KCs, but there was certainly no evidence of widespread grassroots support' (CIBC19). After the trials, a senior project manager within DEETYA commented 'so where was industry? Where was the follow up to their earlier clamour for action? Where was the pressure for action after Mayer?' (CPMC26). Indeed despite Moy's observation that 'industry supported and valued Key Competencies' (1999: 20), during the early stages of the implementation period, industry's views regarding the Key Competencies and generic skills did not generate significant pressure for policy change.

Commenting on this lack of activity, a school principal in Victoria noted that, 'it's fine to talk about the connections between schools and VET, but there needs to be a clearer message about what industry and VET requires' (CJSC16).

Whilst Moy noted that 'industry endorsement of the Key Competencies has occurred in various ways and at various levels' (1999: 20), there is little evidence to suggest that industry actively campaigned for implementation support for the Key Competencies during the period from 1997-2000. A director within ANTA at the time noted that 'industry were not engaged politically over the KCs and there was no ongoing facilitation of employers to involve them' (CALC21). Indeed concerns over quality in VET were the major issue for employers during this period, with the President of the Australian Computer Society for example, arguing that 'because funding is tied to enrolments and curriculum hours rather than successful graduates, we have a system that rewards TAFE colleges for their marketing capabilities rather than their effective delivery of training and education' (Ridge 2001).

Curtis and McKenzie have identified three distinct groups of employers with an interest in workplace learning whose needs are rather different and not always

met. Citing Harris et al (2000), they note that generic skills are often given lower priority by employers because they 'are perceived to be of greater value to individuals and industry as a whole and whose benefits are harder to capture by the firm' (2000: 21). Given the scope for direct industry input into the policy process, it is not surprising that with ANTA's inaction, industry associations came to take on a major role in the ongoing development of a generic skills agenda.

As the new policy framework for VET in Schools evolved, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) became more vocal in the debate on school to work transition. An education advisor within ACCI commented that:

> 'in 1997/98 ACCI conducted a review on the issue of school to work transition and the report was widely distributed including to MCEETYA. After that Steve was drafted onto the VET in Schools Taskforce and the bulk of the recommendations contained in the report were picked up by the system' (CMN26).[68]

An ACCI discussion paper on priorities for the VET System published at the time identified the need for:

> 'an integrated approach to school-industry initiatives which recognises important strategies such as key competencies, simulated enterprise training, careers advisory services, VET in schools and appropriate systems support to teachers, industry and employers' (ACCI 1999b).

Thus whilst the Key Competencies in their own right as a set of discrete skills had little profile, the growing VET in schools agenda provided a new platform for industry and other stakeholders to re-engage with generic skills. One of the Key Competency pilot project reviewers suggested that 'this was because there has always been pressure over the transition from school to work and the suitability of the curriculum for employers' (CBYC22).

---

[68] Mr. Steve Balzary, Director of Employment and Training, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI).

A key report released in 1999 significantly reinvigorated the profile of generic skills in Australian VET. *Training to Compete: The Training Needs of Industry,* was a report to the Australian Industry Group by Allen Consulting that examined the training needs of Australian industry into the 21st century (Allen Consulting 1999).[69] McDonald noted that the report not only foregrounded the importance of generic skills in 'both industry recruitment and workplace training practices', but also called for 'the education system to provide mainly the generic, core foundations for the national skill pool' (1999: 49). McDonald argued that this call showed that the AIG report indicated 'that the knowledge and skills most valued by employers as a foundation for all others, are the enabling skills needed for work, a mix of competencies, personal attributes and interpersonal skills' (McDonald 2000: 2).

Key findings of the report included the recognition that employers were placing an increasing premium on generic skills being developed prior to recruitment (Allen Consulting 1999), a finding that refocussed attention on the role of education systems and individuals themselves to develop generic skills.

Whilst this major report was clear evidence of industry's interest in generic skills during this period, the university sector also responded to ongoing industry interest in generic skills. In 1999 the Commonwealth commissioned survey research to examine employer satisfaction with both VET sector and university graduate skills (AC Nielsen 2000). The report was based on a national survey of 1,105 employers who were asked a range of questions aimed at identifying their general satisfaction with graduate skill levels and what skills they considered important for graduates to possess. The report found that although most Australian employers were generally satisfied with the skills of the graduates they employed, they felt that there was still a need for students to be encouraged to develop problem solving and creative thinking skills (Kemp 2000). Similar trends were evident from comparable surveys by Flinders University (Flinders University 1998) and the Institution of Australian Engineers (Institution of Australian Engineers 1996).

---

[69] The Australian Industry Group was formed from the merger of the Metal Trades Industry Association (MTIA) and the Australian Chamber of Manufacturers (ACM).

Whilst the focus on generic skills within universities evolved separately to developments in the VET sector, by 2000 a number of Australian universities were also grappling with the challenge of delivering, assessing and reporting a range of generic skills.[70] As noted by Bowden et al, 'the endeavour by universities to foster the development of generic capabilities in their students constitutes both a serious commitment to a broader notion of graduate quality in higher education and a significant challenge to conventional teaching and learning arrangements' (Bowden et al 2000: I). It is interesting to note that whilst the professions influenced the approach by universities towards generic skills, there was little collaboration between the various industry representatives to develop a more common system across educational sectors dealing with the needs of professionals, para-professionals and other skilled workers.

In response to industry concern over graduate skills, in 1999, ACER was commissioned under the Higher Education Innovation Program, to develop a new Graduate Skills Assessment test (GSA). The test was designed to score the generic skills of students when they begin at university and just before they graduate. Whilst the four areas initially included in the test were, critical thinking, problem solving, interpersonal understandings and written communication, Hager et al (2002) warned that such scores 'say little about a graduate's higher level capacity to integrate generic skills together with other attributes to frame an appropriate response to a given contextual situation' (2002: 7).

Whilst the GSA test has not been widely embraced by universities, the clear overlap between graduate attributes and the Key Competencies was not lost on Curtis and McKenzie (2001). They argue that 'the key institutional developments that require re-appraisal of the place of generic employability skills relate less to what is happening within each sector, and more to what is happening at the boundaries where they intersect' (2000: 11). However, whilst some work has sought to embed generic skills within post compulsory school curriculum, Hager et al (2002) suggest that 'significant differences remain in terms of subject range, emphasis and compulsory requirements for tertiary

---

[70] Universities use a range of terms in addition to those generally recognised in VET including graduate qualities, generic capabilities and graduate attributes (for further detail see Bowden et al 2000 and Hagar et al 2002).

entrance' (2002: 12), differences that have led to little progress on generic skills based articulation across the sectors.

It is clear then that stakeholder views and actions continued to negate the implementation of system wide approaches to the Key Competencies after the trials were completed. Whilst the research has shown that these dynamics were shaped by a wide range of political, industrial and philosophical influences, conceptual issues surrounding the Key Competencies as educational artefacts also continued to influence their policy trajectory during this period.

d.   The Complexity of Generic Skills

At the completion of the Key Competency trials in 1996, Rowland and Young et al (1996) found that conceptual issues remained that 'would not necessarily be resolved through a national initiative of the type originally conceived by the Mayer committee' (1996: 63). Kearns (2001) suggested that the ad hoc character of the Key Competencies had led to implementation issues, which Curtis and McKenzie (2002) saw as 'including problems with conceptualisation' (2002: viii). These views were echoed by a key architect of the new HSC in NSW, who concluded that 'it was not clear what you would do anyway, as no one had fully developed a concept of what they were and how they should be reported' (CBMD31).

However, whilst some conceptual issues relating to the nature of the Key Competencies continued to trouble some stakeholders during this period, the major challenges after the program of the trials related more to aspects of delivery, assessment and reporting amongst those schools and training providers who sought to integrate the Key Competencies within new and existing curriculum frameworks.

Jasinski (1996) for example, found that at the end of the trials there was a diversity of understanding of Key Competencies within TAFE, noting that they 'meant different things to different people' (1996: 2).

Whilst this was portrayed positively as representing the different manifestations of Key Competencies in different industry training areas, it also reflected an ongoing lack of conceptual clarity in the definition of Key Competencies. Staff within DETYA were also challenged by the conceptual detail of the task at hand. A project manager within the School to Work Section noted that 'we couldn't make much sense of two reports we had done for us, Lohrey's one on transferability and the one by Colin Marsh on foundation knowledge. They were too much for most of us and included stuff that we couldn't easily deal with' (CBYD40).[71]

During this period, definitional issues surrounding the Key Competencies continued to influence their policy trajectory. In advocating an extension of the scope of the Key Competencies to include 'entrepreneurialism, learning competencies, and intra-personal competencies' (1996: 26), Jasinski identified the ongoing issue of how the Key Competencies related to other initiatives such as enterprise education and lifelong learning. This issue was further compounded by the emerging emphasis on vocational learning that emerged from the revised national goals for schooling.

A DETYA project manager in the School to Work Program suggested that 'the KCs were swamped by enterprise education because of the view that enterprise skills were the KCs plus something else' (CMJD25). Teachers at an ECEF forum on school to work transition observed that 'we need to develop definitions that incorporate or better differentiate Key Competencies and other generic skills. There's overlap, particularly in the areas of communication; collecting, organising and analysing information; planning and organising activities and problem solving' (ECEF 2001).

The resultant confusion was not clearly resolved at a policy level, ensuring that local educators were confronted with an incoherent framework of generic skills

---

[71] Lohrey (1995) and Marsh (1995) developed conceptual papers on assumptions related to the Key Competencies and generic skills more generally. Whilst these papers were enthusiastically debated by Key Competency project staff, the works left a number of unanswered questions and made a number of radical propositions regarding the extent of changes that would be required within education systems to support generic skills oriented educational reform.

being considered within vocational education and training. This lack of policy synergy led some commentators to argue for a broader framework for generic skills in Australia. Kearns (2001) for example, highlighted the role of personal attributes and values and the importance of a capability for lifelong learning, arguing that this would provide more coherence and progression in the lifelong development of key generic skills and attributes' (2001: 31).

An ANTA discussion paper reflected these ongoing taxonomic issues, arguing that despite the Key Competency trials, there was no agreement on which term best described 'skills which apply to work generally rather than to particular occupations or industries; a capacity to solve problems and exercise judgement; and characteristics such as creativity, flair and imagination' (McDonald 2000: 1).

As a result of his analysis of a number of generic skill frameworks, Oats (2001) argued that continuing inadequate theorisation has 'failed to distinguish between commonly occurring skills, generic skills, skills of transfer and skills which are likely to be required in the future workforce' (2001: 5). In an effort to address this lack of clarity, the MCEETYA VET in Schools Taskforce proposed definitions for enterprise and vocational learning as:

> '*Vocational learning* is general learning that addresses broad understandings of the world of work and develops in young people a range of knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes relevant to a wide range of work environments' (MCEETYA 2001b: 12)

> '*Enterprise education* is learning directed towards developing in young people those skills, competencies, understandings and attributes which equip them to be innovative and to identify, create, initiate and successfully manage personal, community, business and work opportunities, including working for themselves' (MCEETYA 2001b: 12)

Whilst this effort did provide some clarity, concerns over the limited definition and demarcation between these categories remained.

In the VET sector, issues identified in the Key Competency pilots also continued to influence emerging arrangements, particularly in terms of how they were best integrated in Training Packages (Kearns 2001).

Down (2000), noted that the ongoing use of the Mayer performance levels within the VET sector lent itself to an approach where the Key Competencies are 'seen as one-off skills to be checked off in order to progress to the next level' (2000: 12). She found that there was widespread confusion about the levels used in conjunction with the Key Competencies, especially among the end-users of Training Packages. In particular, she found that many believed the levels assigned to individual Key Competencies were the AQF levels, and that others associated the levels with the relative importance of the Key Competencies whereby level 3 indicated relative unimportance whilst level 1 was clearly significant or vice versa. Down also found that very few of those end-users interviewed had read the information provided for them within the Training Package materials on the subject of the Key Competencies, and that some interviewees hadn't noticed that there were levels assigned to the Key Competencies at all (2000).

Down further argued that this confusion appeared to be greatest where the Key Competencies were considered in relation to a qualification rather than individual units of competence, and that 'the current implicit and covert integration of the Key Competencies within Training Packages meant that they were difficult to identify and integrate within training practice' (2000b: 6).

Down's work indicated that the lack of clear guidance and agreed approach to integrating Key Competencies within Training Packages contributed significantly to their lack of coverage in VET programs. Indeed, a director within ANTA commented that 'the standards within the first few Training Packages were not really changed, and ANTA was simply prepared to accept what ever was put up, they were mainly trying to embed the KCs in individual units of competency, although it didn't always work out' (CALD13). As a result of Down's work, ANTA changed their policy on competency standards development to allow Key Competencies to be included within qualifications as stand alone units or

embedded at the unit level. Regardless, a director within ANTA noted that '98% of them still do it at the unit level' (CALD28).

This atomistic approach to Training Packages was also evident from the way that developers dealt with the more generic components of underpinning knowledge and skills within units of competence. Down and Figgis et al (2000) found that 'developers didn't devote a great deal of attention to it, with more effort concentrated on defining the competencies themselves, the performance criteria, standards and qualification frameworks' (Down and Figgis et al 2000). Down's research also identified that the links between Key Competencies and units of competence were often implied rather than explicit, a situation that made more difficult the task of those implementing Training Packages.

The inadequate treatment of Key Competency in competency standards led to poor delivery and assessment practices. In a series of RTO case studies, Blom and Clayton (2003) found that the teaching and assessment of Key Competencies is 'relatively problematic and that learners' achievement of Key Competencies is generally inferred, and is only rarely directly delivered and evaluated' (2003: 1). Curtis and McKenzie (2001) also identified a failure to 'link the specification of the Key Competencies to curricula, some difficulties with the conceptualisation of the Key Competencies, and the specification of levels that did not relate to the levels of attainment that were being used in other dimensions of curricula' (2001: 11).

During this period the Key Competencies clearly presented a challenge to educators seeking to integrate them within ongoing reform initiatives.

Another issue confronting educators working with generic skills was how to deal with the ways in which Key Competencies combined to influence effective work practice. Educators found that simply working with lists of generic skills encouraged mechanistic approaches to delivery and assessment that didn't recognise the interdependence of many Key Competencies. Educators were trapped by ANTA's preoccupation with focussing on each element and performance criteria as part of approaches to Training Package assessment.

The new quality framework for registered training organisations led to a new mania for assessment in Training Packages. In 2000, some State recognition authorities take quality control to new depths, by ultimately demanding that training providers identify specific assessment tools for each performance criteria within a unit of competency (Horton 2002).

Clearly, ANTA failed to appreciate the impact of Training Packages on the development of generic skills, and as suggested by an ACCI consultant 'ANTA resisted the assessment implications of the KCs which were huge when you think about the way they'd set up competent or not yet competent as the two options for educators' (CAMD16).[72]

The use of performance levels for the Key Competencies within this framework also limited the concept of generic skills themselves, and led them to be viewed as linear or sequential in character. In doing so, ANTA failed to recognise the magnitude of difference in the application of the Key Competencies across different vocational contexts, thus downplaying the pivotal role of industry and workplace contexts as factors in differing Key Competency performances.

The developmental nature of the Key Competencies, strongly argued by Down (1998) and Hager (1998a), calls for a more flexible skills framework, a view that was thankfully not lost by some Training Package developers who sought to develop individual units for generic skills that were deemed relevant at different qualification levels within particular Training Packages.[73] However, the centrality of competency standards within Training Packages ultimately contributed to a proliferation of individual units and little attention to delivery and the quality of learning outcomes. This lack of focus on learning processes within the VET sector in some ways paralleled issues surrounding generic skills in universities, with Hager et al (2002) noting that problems with generic skills have 'arisen from top-down approaches to deriving assessment outcomes rather than examining what actually happens in various courses' (2002: 9).

---

[72] This challenge manifest itself differently within the school sector where in NSW for example, there was resistance to overlaying another assessment framework on top of the new criterion based arrangements.

In commenting on industry attitudes towards the development of generic skills, Down (2000) found that whereas technical competencies could be enhanced within the workplace, the remediation of generic skills, such as the Key Competencies, was a more difficult proposition for industry to undertake in their own right.

Whilst some learning resources were developed to support their implementation in industry, the vast majority of employers during this period would not have been aware of the Key Competencies nor had a clear view as to how they should go about developing them as a particular set of generic skills.[74] Down found that employers believed that they and their staff did not have the necessary skills to develop the Key Competencies on the job and that they relied on RTO expertise to assist them in this area. Thus whilst industry argued that cost was a major issue, the ability of employers to tackle a complex training challenge no doubt influenced their views that the development of generic skills was the prime responsibility of education and training providers.

Another dimension of the complexity surrounding implementation during this period was the relationship between accredited general education courses and the Key Competencies and other generic skills.

As VET professionals reacted to the restrictive Training Package frameworks, there occurred significant growth in the delivery of general education courses that provided non-vocationally specific learning outcomes[75]. In a report to ANTA, RATIO (2002) found that during this period there developed 'extensive programs and courses being delivered in the pre-vocational area that covered many of the skills required by those entering employment or further study with little consistency in content or outcomes of these programs' (2002: 1).

---

[73] See for example the Metal and Engineering Training Package (MERS 1998).
[74] This does not ignore the fact that some employers have been working with their own set of generic skills and in some cases have developed on-the-job training regimes to develop them. See for example Smith and Comyn (2003).
[75] Non-vocational in the sense that they did not achieve Training Package qualification outcomes.

Whilst these pathways and qualifications were viewed by industry as compromising the integrity of Training Package qualifications, they also effectively established another form of streaming by focussing on generic skills as pre-requisites for Training Package courses. As noted by a DETYA VET Directorate project manager:

> 'assessment of generic skills within these courses was difficult, and there are equity issues in that students already under-performing are possibly going to be put in a situation where they will experience further disadvantage by not being judged competent against the KCs. I mean you're looking at a situation where the KCs might reinforce disadvantage' (CMHD26).

This situation further complicated the position of the Key Competencies within VET during this period and in some ways contributed to the evolution of Employability Skills as a fresh attempt to provide a focus on generic skills within VET. Consequently, whilst the complexity of the Key Competencies was strongly related to the challenge of integrating them within existing curriculum arrangements, the narrowness of the Mayer skill set and the unclear relationship with other relevant skills appears to have been a strong driver for the review of generic skills in Australian vocational education and training.

This process of review and revision is considered in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The period of 1997-2000 saw the Key Competencies become a policy initiative that was overlooked and bypassed, relegated to a second order priority by more pressing policy issues and the inherent difficulties that they posed as a reform initiative. It was during this period that the Key Competencies and generic skills as an educational artefact no longer held the promise of being a vehicle for cross sectoral articulation, nor the passport for entrée into high performance workplaces.

Instead they were recognised as primarily being connected with good practice vocational learning, and thus in some ways, beyond the reach of centrally imposed policy initiatives and widespread adoption.

This Chapter has illustrated that these outcomes were caused not only by the inherent complexity of the policy system, but also by the ongoing effect of the same key policy drivers at work during the development and trialing of the Key Competencies.

The influence of new vocationalism was a constant during this period. Major policy initiatives such as the New Apprenticeship System and the School to Work Program, sought amongst other things to introduce a more direct relationship between industry competency standards and the assessment of educational outcomes. Employment based pathways were expanded in the school system, with industry demands directly resurfacing through the emergence of Employability Skills as a new tool with which industry sought to shape educational reform.

Whilst one might have expected the Key Competencies to be part of this agenda as the last product of the suite of government tripartite committees from the early 1990s, the nature of debate on school to work transition had broadened into a more general vocational model that served to mediate the employment based fundamentalism of new vocationalist rhetoric. This had the impact of displacing and diluting the Key Competencies, which were rightly or wrongly, associated with the more narrow agenda in the school sector.

In this way then, the policy driver of changing labour markets grew to be a more powerful complement to new vocationalism during this period. Policy debates shifted from seeing transition as an issue primarily for unemployed youth or for those in vocational education programs, to seeing it as an issue for all young people whether work is entered from upper secondary education or from tertiary studies' (2000: 44). Transition became the key issue, with the policy agenda moving away from the acquisition of Key Competencies to a more holistic focus on a range of skills related to successful transition.

The National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty First Century was the centrepiece of this policy shift, with the Key Competencies given some profile into the future, although without the resources to develop into a more significant feature of the policy landscape.

This phase of the Key Competency policy trajectory also saw the ongoing influence of economic rationalism and corporate managerialism. As the Key Competencies came to enter what might be seen as an implementation phase, the impact of these reform agendas in each educational jurisdiction contributed to the varying outcomes for the Key Competencies in each State and Territory. From the ongoing restructure of educational bureaucracies and curriculum support services to the turmoil amongst public VET providers, these key policy drivers came to operate differently in different policy contexts.

Similarly, the ongoing development of an educational market was a more significant policy driver during this period, one whose effect was exacerbated by Commonwealth fiscal restraint and pressure on State systems from growing enrolments and cultural change precipitated by the reform agenda. Coupled with the growing casualisation of the TAFE workforce, quality came to decline markedly in the VET sector, thus further limiting the interest or capacity to invest in generic skills based reform.

During this period, educational federalism again also continued to be a major driver of the Key Competency policy process. Whilst it created positive and negative impacts through both clear progress on VET in schools and minimal cooperation on VET funding, educational federalism was responsible for clear resistance to ANTA's mandate in the VET sector and the continued lack of support for national generic skills agenda by State education authorities.

This phase of the Key Competency policy trajectory also provided further insights on the policy model proposed at the beginning of this thesis. It is clear from the research in this Chapter that other policy streams such as the New Apprenticeship system had a significant impact on the policy trajectory of the

Key Competencies, leading the policy to be rearticulated across the policy cycle as Training Packages and the VET in schools agenda took hold.

Thus, this research has found that whilst the Key Competencies had only limited and localised impact on teaching and learning in schools and the VET sector, they had a more meaningful role in the way that the trials contributed to the success of the VET in schools agenda and the ongoing implementation of industry oriented education and training in Australian schools.

Chapter 7: The Emergence of Employability Skills (2001-2005)

Or how employability skills came to be the new standard bearer of Australia's generic skills movement

Despite a significant investment in Key Competencies over the previous decade, the Commonwealth government proceeded to support Employability Skills as a more relevant set of generic skills within Australian vocational education and training. This process generated another flurry of project activity involving policy work, commissioned research, consultations and consultancies that again sought to establish the most effective way of addressing generic skills within school to work arrangements. Whilst the final outcomes of this work are still being realised at the time of writing, the process sheds light on the shifts in VET policy making that have emerged in the last decade and provides a final perspective on the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies.

a.   <u>The flow of policy:</u>

In Australia, the debate surrounding generic skills has been linked to 'discussions about employability, workplace change, national competitiveness and globalisation' (Callan 2003: 7). These influences were evident again in the final report of the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce, which urged all governments to work with industry, and recommended that ANTA 'develop a nationally agreed set of key employability competencies to reflect changes in the workplace, emerging new industries over the last ten years and projected changes to the year 2010' (Eldridge 2001: 2).

The previous chapter showed that Employability Skills were a product of a new partnership between the Commonwealth government and two key industry organisations, ACCI and the BCA.

Whilst this partnership collectively sought to develop a new skills framework to replace the Key Competencies, it is not clear who took the lead role in this process.

The Employability Skills report (ACCI and BCA 2002) stated that the two industry organisations 'judged that it was timely to obtain the views of industry to assist in the development of a comprehensive framework of Employability Skills' (2002: ii). The report suggested that these two industry bodies sought assistance from the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and ANTA. A Canberra based industry advocate suggested that 'following on from the AIG Training to Compete Report, Colin Thatcher from BCA got together with Steve Balzary from ACCI and started lobbying ANTA to refocus on the issue' (DMWA14). However, at roughly the same time, a project manager within DEST observed that:

> 'ANTA and DETYA arranged a meeting on 16 June 2000 and involved some ITABs and researchers to take stock of work being conducted on the KCs and generic skills generally. There was general agreement that further work in this area was important and necessary, particularly as terms such as soft skills and generic skills and capabilities are all used in an undefined way' (DRRA23).

This course of events was contradicted by a project manager within DEST at the time however, who suggested that 'a letter to DEST from ACCI and BCA proposed in broad terms that discussion take place between these groups to discuss generic skills in relation to the education and training systems' (DRRA13). However whilst this view supports the industry position, other opinions articulated by DEST staff reflect a level of cynicism towards industry's role and give greater prominence to the role of DEST in the initiative. A project manager within DEST suggested that in the case of the Employability Skills project:

> 'there were good working relationships within the department and the various restructures has led to extensive cross fertilisation of

expertise....there's a balance between push and pull with these things, we don't just sit here waiting for industry to call' (DHMA29).

Irrespective of its antecedents, the Employability Skills final report provided a contemporary view of the types of skills required by new and existing employees within Australian industry. The project also produced three supporting research reports comprising a literature review (Curtis and McKenzie 2002), case studies of high performance workplaces (Field 2002) and research into small and medium sized enterprises (McLeish 2002). These papers not only examined contemporary international developments in the field but also provided insights into the realities of local industry practice.

However, the Employability Skills report did not simply arise from the common interests of government and industry. The report itself pointed to influential previous government work, including *Backing Australia's Ability* (Commonwealth 2001), *Knowledge and Innovation* (Commonwealth 1999) and *Investing for Growth* (Commonwealth 1997). These reports were all cited as highlighting Australia's position as an international player, one that was challenged by the need to build 'Australia's capacity to effectively operate in the global knowledge-based economy' (2002: 10). The report also cited literature that showed enterprises were increasingly seeking a more highly skilled workforce with generic and transferable skills broadly distributed across the organisation.[76] The renewed support for generic skills was also reinforced by a separate study of 350 companies that found that generic employability skills were accepted as being important in a competitive business environment, and that greater emphasis was increasingly being placed on these skills (Allen Consulting Group, 1999).

Another contributing factor to the rise of Employability Skills was the DETYA commissioned research into employer satisfaction with the capabilities of both higher education and VET sector graduates (AC Nielsen 2000). In addition to being a review of employer satisfaction with the skills of graduates, it

---

[76] See for example Field (2002).

246

established a list of 25 skills clustered as 'basic competencies; basic skills; academic skills, and other (personal) attributes' (2000: 10).

Whilst generic skills were valued was never really a point of contention, the Employability Skills report should be viewed as representing a clear statement from industry that generic skills required greater prominence in current VET settings.

In examining the changing training practices in large Australian firms, Dawe (2003) found that there was a trend towards increased emphasis on generic skills training, and in examining practices within the Australian construction industry, Hagar et al (2002) also demonstrated that generic competencies were important in the work practices required by any industry undergoing reform.

As generic skills received greater recognition in industry, ANTA CEOs[77] acknowledged a shift in the nature of VET's industry training role, from one which emphasised skilling employees for relatively stable employment, industries and occupations, to one that focused on developing 'employability and life skills for working and living effectively in the more complex and fluid modern workforce' (Veenker 2003: 8). This sense of a more pressing demand for generic skills was also evident amongst members of Australia's parliament, with a member of the ALP opposition front bench noting that 'in the industrial age, workers held a stable set of competencies throughout a working career. In many cases, this gave them jobs for life. The new economy is demanding a revolution in vocational education and training' (*Australian Financial Review* 2000).

Writing in *Campus Review,* Elson-Green argued that 'while the largely industry led reforms of the 1980's and 1990's were undoubtedly important, we are coming into a world that is based more on the knowledge based economy where vocational education and training takes place in a multi dimensional context' (*Campus Review* 2003).

---

[77] The ANTA CEOs group comprises the Chief Executive Officers of ANTA and each State and territory training agency.

In commenting on the timing of this renewed focus on generic skills, a general manager within NCVER noted, 'it was time to dive in because the world had changed, there is greater pressure now than there was in Mayer's time' (DCRA14).

There was clearly support within ANTA at this stage, with a Canberra based industry representative noting that 'Sharon Coates was an advocate within ANTA, her view was that the world wide interest had grown stronger and that issues of the knowledge economy and changing work patterns were more widely known within industry' (DMWA18). Ongoing NCVER work also contributed to the momentum within ANTA, with a project manager within ANTA's Melbourne office indicating that 'ANTA staff read all NREC research submissions to gain insights into policy issues. Generic skills were a high priority at this stage' (DMWA26). Indeed, on the release of the report, the then Minister for Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr, Brendan Nelson noted that:

> 'the *Employability Skills for the Future* report aims to improve understanding of what makes a good employee and to establish a new approach to developing employability skills in the Australian education and training sectors...it confirms that business and industry now require a broader range of skills than the Mayer Key Competencies framework that was developed in the early 1990s' (Nelson 2002).

An important question at this point however is whether economic or social conditions had changed so much that a completely new skills framework was required.

Given the broad relevance of the Mayer Key Competencies and the substantial investments made in them, it is arguable that the Key Competencies could have been enhanced rather than completely replaced. This is particularly the case given that much of the work surrounding the implementation of the Key Competencies identified their weaknesses and proposed strategies to broaden their interpretation and application. Despite this, the views of industry were clearly strong enough to attract fresh Commonwealth funding to address

industry's need for Employability Skills. In particular, the ACCI / BCA work sought to 'provide advice on the new requirements for generic employability competencies that industry required and would require in the foreseeable future since the Mayer Key Competencies were developed' (ACCI and BCA 2002: 2).

Whilst the report also referred to a number of international developments including the work arising from the OECD's DeSeCo Project (OECD 1999 a-c), the configuration and content of the Employability Skills framework was deemed to 'more closely reflect the language and trends in thinking in Australia' (ACCI 2002). Indeed the driver for this thinking may be evidenced from the title of an ACCI issues paper at the time, *Employability skills: Getting what employers want out of the too hard basket.* Whilst presumably being part of the 'too hard basket', the report found that the Mayer Key Competencies were found to have 'provided both Australian industry and the Australian education and training system with a useful starting point and tool for understanding and applying the concepts of generic employability skills' (ACCI / BCA 2002: 6). The report also found that:

- the framework identified by employers through the research with enterprises builds on the Mayer Key Competencies;
- employer recognition and integration of the Mayer Key Competencies in their discussion of the nature of jobs and skills are strong;
- small, medium and large enterprises have identified the same critical mix of skills as being relevant to the employability and ongoing employment of individuals; and that
- the skills identified as critical to employability are broadly consistent across industry sectors, all are important, though the elements would depend on the industry and workplace context (2002: 7).

Some of these findings are reinforced by the comments of a research manager within NCVER who maintained that 'Employability Skills are just an enhancement of the Key Competencies. We're not talking about anything new here, it's what we've been trying to do already' (DJGD27). Indeed, in questioning the innovativeness of the Employability Skills report, Down (2004)

argued that 'the longer one looks at them, the more obvious it becomes that these are basically the Key Competencies re-badged' (2004: 3).

Notwithstanding these views, the Employability Skills framework did identify a number of key skills that were linked for the first time to a range of personal attributes that contributed to overall employability. The key skills were found to be:

- *communication skills* that contribute to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers;
- *team work skills* that contribute to productive working relationships and outcomes;
- *problem-solving skills* that contribute to productive outcomes;
- *initiative and enterprise skills* that contribute to innovative outcomes;
- *planning and organising skills* that contribute to long-term and short-term strategic planning;
- *self-management skills* that contribute to employee satisfaction and growth;
- *learning skills* that contribute to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes; and
- *technology skills* that contribute to effective execution of tasks (ACCI and BCA 2002).

Whilst there exists substantial overlap between the Employability Skills and the Key Competencies, the ACCI / BCA framework is far more enterprise focused, and when viewed alongside attributes that include punctuality and loyalty, it is clear that through the report, industry were sending a more direct message to the education sector about its needs than had been the case with the Mayer Report. Indeed ACCI itself recognised as much, noting that:

> 'the intention has been to add to the richness of understanding of this topic and to inform educationalists about what employers are seeking. There is no prescription for a way forward, but employability skills provide an excellent example of where the interface between the business and

the education sectors produce a tension to create reform and make the education sector more responsive to the needs of industry' (ACCI 2002).

When completed, the Employability Skills report was forwarded to ANTA's National Training Quality Council (NTQC), the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AV-CC) and the MCEETYA Taskforce on Transition from School. The report sought advice from the Taskforce, the AVCC and the NQTC regarding strategies and timelines for implementation of the framework, with an expectation that MCEETYA and ANTA MINCO would consider their views on the possible implementation of Employability Skills later in 2003 (MCEETYA 2002d). Ministers also directed the taskforce to undertake further work on how Employability Skills might be developed and acquired, and in doing so, to take account of associated policy work in the schools, VET and youth sectors (MCEETYA 2002c: 11). Specifically, the work sought to examine pedagogy; assessment and reporting; universal recognition arrangements and their potential for supporting an effective transition system (MCEETYA 2002b: 1)

However, at the 13th MCEETYA meeting in Auckland, Ministers 'requested ANTA to coordinate a collaborative cross-sectoral approach to assessing the feasibility of implementing the employability skills framework in an integrated and phased manner across the formal education and training sectors as well as the broader community' (MCEETYA 2002c: 11).

An NCVER working paper observed this development to involve ANTA coordinating a 'cross education sector approach to employability skills as defined by Australian industry' (NCVER 2003a: 3). However, as noted by a Director within ANTA, 'unlike the Key Competency work the new project will come up through the committees and to the NQTC so it is more likely that it will become policy' (DALA17). This approach contrasts with the treatment of the Key Competencies and in doing so secured its more explicit standing in substantive VET policy developments.

In a synopsis of the developing Employability Skills agenda, an NCVER working paper noted that ANTA took up the issue of Employability Skills by 'pilot testing

various approaches to improving the identification of these skills within training packages, as consultations and research indicated that success in the teaching and learning of these skills depends on them being made more explicit' (NCVER 2003a: 3). The same paper however, fails to query why similar steps were not taken five years earlier when similar advice arose from the Key Competency trials (see for example Gonczi et al 1995, Jasinski 1996 and Hagar et al 1997).

One project developed by the cross sectoral Employability Skills working group examined approaches to support the universal recognition and recording of Employability Skills. The work was jointly funded by DEST and ANTA and completed by a consortium involving The Allen Consulting Group and NCVER (DEST 2004). Whilst this work led to the establishment of a national Employability Skills e-portfolio website, it is unlikely to lead to universal recognition across the sectors.

At the time of writing, the work of the ANTA cross sectoral working group had ended, with ANTA deciding not to submit a proposal to MCEETYA but develop a number of support processes for Employability Skills in consultation with State and Territory training agencies (Down 2004). However, the decision to abolish ANTA and re-absorb its responsibilities into DEST by mid 2005, have delayed progress on this front.

During this period, the release of the Employability Skills report was clearly a major policy event that triggered a range of activities that influenced the trajectory of generic skills in Australia. However, notwithstanding the mechanics of this policy trajectory, the politics of the Commonwealth again influenced the development of the Employability Skills agenda during this period.

b.   The politics of federalism

The year 2001 saw a number of elections in Australia at both the State and federal level. Voters went to the polls in Queensland, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory, either installing or returning Labour governments in each election. Indeed the only State with a

non-Labor government at the end of 2001 was South Australia, a situation that itself changed early in 2002. However, at the federal level, despite the State results, the ALP lost the 2002 federal election to a Liberal – National Party coalition, and as a result, the Commonwealth faced a more hostile federal arena where opposition from the States was more likely to be driven by party political issues.

Superimposed on this shifting political landscape was the renegotiation of the ANTA agreement, which came to significantly influence the policy trajectory of generic skills during this period. The ANTA Agreement required each State and Territory to have appropriate supporting legislation that acknowledged the national role played by ANTA and designated a body to be the State Training Agency for the purposes of the arrangement (ANAO 1996). The agreement also provided the framework for a national VET system, with agreed objectives, priorities, assured funding arrangements and consistent national strategies. State specific plans, or profiles, were negotiated with ANTA to set out how Commonwealth funds were to resource State based VET activity during the following three-year period.

The third Australian National Training Authority Agreement expired on December 31 2001, after State and Territory ministers unanimously refused to sign up to a further three years without growth funds to meet the burgeoning demand for training (Nicholls 2001). The acrimony and disarray of the December ministerial council meeting followed a reported shouting match at the scheduled November meeting where 'Labour States ganged up in an attempt to force Kemp's hand...Kemp remained unmovable, insisting the States should agree to further substantial VET growth with no real funding increase to match it' (Nicholls 2001: 43).

At the December extraordinary council meeting, State and Territory ministers sought $152M extra, arguing that the Commonwealth's policy of growth through efficiencies was now untenable. Then Minister David Kemp offered only an extra $20 million for 2001, an offer that was rejected at that meeting. This

breakdown in Commonwealth State relations was observed by Mark Patterson of ACCI, who noted that:

> 'The crisis facing Australia's vocational education and training system has deepened after State ministers again left a ministerial council meeting on Friday without a solution to an impasse blocking new funding for the triennium. ACCI is very disappointed that training ministers have again failed to sign a new ANTA Agreement today, and it is vital that vocational education and training not be used as a political football and that agreement be reached for the good of all Australians' (ACCI 2001).

An interim four month solution emerged which saw funding continue at 2000 levels, with a commitment to finalise the ANTA negotiations at a subsequent meeting. At that meeting, Nicholls (2001) observed that 'the federal Coalition's remaining allies at that time in South Australia and the territories chose political loyalty over their TAFE systems' needs and sided with Kemp, securing for their TAFE systems a small share of the paltry $20M on offer' (2001: 43).

Kemp's offer of $20M as an inducement to sign off on the ANTA Agreement was fought by the Australian Education Union, who themselves noted that: 'at that time, we knew that a number of States had been close to signing, but the work of the AEU in lobbying these Ministers to hold firm for a more reasonable offer contributed to their resolve. Unfortunately, they held out and got more - but not enough' (AEU 2001). Given that the AEU had earlier argued that the Commonwealth funding freeze has been a 'central element in the resource pressures felt by TAFE institutes and systems around the country' (AEU 2001), it is not surprising that Nicholls (2001) observed that the capitulation of South Australia and the Territories:

> 'angered stakeholders who believe that the ministers should have held out alongside the Labor States. Now, confronted with complete breakdown in the ANTA negotiations, forward planning of any kind is

impossible for TAFE institutes and State systems. When, and whether, a new ANTA agreement will be signed is unclear' (Nicholls 2001: 43).

This set of events not only demonstrated the influence of TAFEs within State training systems but also the level of crisis and budgetary strain public providers were under. These circumstances clearly did not provide for the centralised implementation of a new generic skills framework.

After months of tense negotiations, in June 2001 the ANTA Ministerial Council endorsed in principle a new agreement for the period 2001–03, that included $230 mil of Commonwealth growth funds. This agreement saw growth funds provided for the first time since 1997, and required States and Territories to increase their own funding to match the additional Commonwealth funding. As noted by the NSW Teacher's Federation however, 'the 2001 ANTA Agreement brought Commonwealth funds for vocational education and training back to the levels that the previous Labour Government's last budget projected for 1998' (NSWTF 2001).

However, this volatile period in VET threatened to derail the relatively cooperative federalism evident in the VET sector, a process that Ryan (2001) observed as reflecting 'debate about education and training in terms of a wider discussion of federal-State finance and the future of the federal governance structure' (2001: 133).

Another feature of State / Commonwealth relations that impacted on the generic skills agenda during this period was the work of the Australian Education Systems Officials Committee (AESOC). AESOC was established in 2001 under the auspices of MCEETYA as an amalgamation of the former Conference of Education System Chief Executive Officers (CESCEO) and the MCEETYA Standing Committee of Officials (Schools). AESOC became the forum of Australian and New Zealand Chief Executive Officers with responsibility for education and training, with the charter to 'supervise and co-ordinate the work of the seven schools-related MCEETYA taskforces established at the July 2001 MCEETYA meeting' (MCEETYA 2003).

At the 6th Meeting of the Transitions Taskforce, underlying tensions between the State education bureaucracies and the Commonwealth again came to the fore over the actions taken by AESOC relating to reports from the Transitions Taskforce. In particular, a taskforce report to MCEETYA in May 2002 detailed actions required on a number of fronts including Employability Skills. The minutes of the Taskforce meeting note that the AESOC officials had recommended changes to the MCEETYA report and requested that the AESOC secretariat make the necessary changes. The minutes also note that the Transitions Taskforce Chair was apparently 'taken aback' that the AESOC meeting had even occurred and 'that the taskforce's report had been discussed without him having been advised' (2002e: 2). The minutes also note that 'Ms Whittleson (DEST) voiced the Commonwealth's disapproval of the process used by the meeting of the education officials, and noted that the group was not representative of the Taskforce' (2002e: 2).

Whilst the detail of the changes is not freely available, it is arguable that the emphasis given to Employability Skills by taskforce members Steve Balzary (ACCI) and Bill Healy (ECEF) may have triggered the intervention of AESOC officials. Clearly the role of AESOC to 'supervise and coordinate' the work of the taskforces was not appreciated by all taskforce members, who may have been concerned over ongoing influence of the States on key developments in school to work transition.

Another focal point of Commonwealth State relations that influenced the policy trajectory of generic skills during this period was the development of the new ANTA national strategy for VET 2004-2010. The report, *Shaping our Future,* was endorsed by the ANTA ministerial council at their meeting in June 2003 (ANTA 2003). The objectives of the strategy were for industry to 'have a highly skilled workforce to support strong performance in the global economy', thus requiring 'employers and individuals to be at the centre of vocational education and training' (ANTA 2003: 3). The centrality of employers and the reference to the demands of the global economy clearly link with the focus on Employability Skills that unfolded during this period. More specifically, Strategy No. 11 indicated that ANTA would 'ensure standards and products reflected emerging

skill sets as well as employability, language literacy and numeracy and cross cultural skills' (2003: 3). These issues were also clearly on the agenda of State education authorities during the development of the national strategy and are likely to have been carried forward by them as a result of demands from their constituencies.

Development of the new ANTA strategy involved both broad based regional events and targeted forums for industry and other stakeholders. One such forum brought together State education CEOs with ANTA staff to discuss current and emerging issues and to consider their implications for Australia's VET system. Whilst they noted that 'the VET system can help the economy adjust to changes by focusing on preparing people for the work requirements of the global economy', the CEO's also made the comment that recent changes have affected 'the content of work and the skills required for employability' (ANTA 2002a: 9). In further recognising VET's multiple roles in the knowledge economy, the CEOs also argued that work was still needed to determine the nature of the skill mix required for occupations, industries and organisations and to establish the relative importance of generic, technical and conceptual skills for various occupations and industries' (ANTA 2002a: 17).

However, perhaps in recognition of the issues involved in institutional delivery, they noted that the development of generic skills would 'increasingly be managed by individuals' (ANTA 2003a: 9). Thus whilst a new national strategy came to be developed after the tumultuous renegotiation of the ANTA agreement, generic skills failed to be acknowledged as more than a preferred outcome of vocational education and training.

Another point of tension between the States and the Commonwealth during this period surrounded the role of peak industry bodies and the nature of their input into policy formulation.

Australia's VET system from the early 1990's had relied on tripartite industry advisory arrangements primarily in the form of State and national industry training advisory bodies (ITABs). Whilst the Commonwealth through DETYA

and then DEST subsequently started to favour the large industry associations such as ACCI, BCA and the National Farmers' Federation (NFF), ANTA and the States still relied on the network of ITABs to provide the bulk of their industry advice. In doing so however, ANTA CEOs recognised the limitations of the system in noting:

'the current industry groupings represented by national ITABs tend to lock in already outdated distinctions between industries and occupations and tend to work against the timely recognition of developing skill needs across industries and in new and emerging industries and occupations' (2002a: 10).

To the surprise of ANTA and the States, during this period the Commonwealth decided to withdraw funding for State ITABs and review the operation of the national ITABs. Minister Nelson argued at the time that whilst 'these bureaucratic arrangements' had 'served a useful purpose during the early stages of the vocational education and training reform agenda', they had recently 'become increasingly complex' (Nelson 2002a). Despite widespread criticism from the States and some sections of industry over the Commonwealth's move,[78] in April 2003 the ANTA Board confirmed its decision to mirror these changes and create a new composition for national industry advisory arrangements. In looking to develop more 'streamlined consultative arrangements for the Commonwealth to hear the views of industry', Nelson commented:

'I have asked my Department to oversee consultations with key stakeholders, including the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Australian Industry Group, the Business Council of Australia and the National Farmers' Federation in order to obtain direct advice about providing a modern training system that best meets industry needs' (Nelson 2002a).

---

[78] See for example Labour Council (2002).

This shift also affected ANTA's approach to industry consultations, which saw them introduce two new consultative mechanisms to replace the previous reliance on both State and national ITABs. The first was a high level National Industry Skills Forum led by the ANTA Board and involving key industry stakeholders, such as ACCI, BCA, NFF etc to assist in the development of strategic direction for the VET system. ANTA claimed that this shift 'received widespread support' (ANTA 2003a), although anecdotal evidence suggests that many sections of industry felt that the big end of town was again likely to dominate proceedings (Audley pers.com. 2003).

The second element of ANTA's approach was the creation of 10 Industry Skills Councils with new roles to replace the 29 ITABs and recognised bodies that had existed during the previous decade of reform. This sizeable restructure of industry advisory arrangements created difficulties for State training agencies who were no longer able to rely on resourced local industry networks to assist with the implementation of VET in their jurisdictions. This development also made it easier for national industry initiatives to be progressed without ongoing scrutiny at the local level. Whilst under-resourced and at times ineffectual, State ITABs nevertheless provided an important conduit for industry scrutiny of VET policy and practice.

The withdrawal of effective channels for input at the local level to some extent made Employability Skills a *fait accompli* as local scrutiny was limited by the emasculation of State ITABs. At consultative forums on Employability Skills held in late 2002, local ITAB representatives were generally dismissive of the ACCI / BCA push, arguing that it was not a major VET priority for their industries when compared to user choice and assessment within training packages, issues that were considerable impediments to the delivery of flexible VET at the local level.[79] Whilst the concerns of the States over industry advisory arrangements fell on deaf ears during this period, it remains to be seen how the changes in

---

[79] The author participated at an ANTA forum hosted in Sydney by NSW DET in November 2002.

advisory arrangements will influence industry's approach to generic skills in the long term.[80]

c.   Stakeholder force field

It is arguable that calls from employers for an increased emphasis on generic skills were greater during this period than at the time when the Mayer Committee developed its Key Competency framework. What is less certain however, is whether social and industrial conditions had changed significantly during the intervening years, or whether the calls for reform had simply become more widespread and evident across a wider range of industries.
Whilst it was beyond the scope of this research to fully explore this issue, it is clear that Employability Skills were more directly the result of industry intervention and action than was the case with the Key Competencies.

A consultant to ACCI in Victoria, argued that 'Australia was ahead of the game through the work of Mayer and the pilots, and the same voices led to it being picked up again when it lapsed, you know, trade voices, economic voices in the context of increasing globalisation as well as the OECD's new focus' (DAMC16).

ACCI and BCA argued for the need to more explicitly account for industry views on generic skills. A project manager within ACCI suggested that 'the ACCI / BCA move came about because they felt that the Commonwealth had "dropped the ball" with the Key Competencies by not actively pursuing implementation (DAMA10).

In being 'picked up again' however, a director within ANTA maintained that 'now more so than in the past, Employability Skills are recognised as being important and there is a growing recognition that we need to better address them' (DSCA18). During this period, clearer signals were also evident from the labour market, with Allen Consulting noting that there was 'an increasing premium

---

[80] Whilst a number of new industry skills councils were established in 2004, there is little evidence that generic skills feature amongst their immediate priorities.

being placed on generic skills, both "hard" (notably IT skills) and "soft" (eg: problem-solving, team skills, willingness and ability to adapt) to be developed prior to recruitment' (Allen Consulting Group, 1999: v). This report for the AIG also observed that changes in work organisation were driving the demand for multi-skilled employees and for higher levels of skill, with generic employability skills 'accepted as being important among AIG member companies' (Allen Consulting 1999: vi). ANTA market research also revealed a strong industry preference for Employability Skills, with employers in one of the regional case studies citing these skills as nineteen of the twenty most important skills for their industries (ANTA 2000).

In commenting on the resurgent interest in generic skills however, a director within ANTA noted that 'the employer rhetoric now is about broader things other than skills and competencies and more about values and attitudinal issues' (DALC28). However, in comparing the ACCI work with that of the British Confederation of Industry (BCI), a consultant researcher for NCVER noted that the BCI had a larger, dedicated and active unit looking at issues of skill formation and training with a greater capacity to go into depth on issues, whereas 'ACCI locally didn't have the resources nor the capacity and as a result were less focussed in what they produced' (DPKC14). The variable industry contributions to generic skills policy were also noted by OECD policy analysts, who commented that 'calls from employers follow the cycles of economic growth, so in slow times there is no dialogue, but in times of growth, employers argue that educators don't provide the required skills mix' (DPWC41). Indeed, when asked about changes to industry demand, a representative of ACCI in Victoria observed that 'industry had been saying the same things over the last few years, Employability Skills were a rehash of what was around with Mayer' (DAMC24).

However, employer demands for improved generic skill outcomes were not consistent. Smith and Comyn (2003) found that on the one hand, employers want novice workers to come ready-made with employability skills, and on the other, employers of apprentices are fully aware of the shortcomings of novice

workers but commonly find great fulfilment in their role in developing these skills.[81]

Regardless of these variations, an ACCI project manager observed that as a direct result of the ACCI / BCA report:

> 'ACCI sent out 8,000 brochures on Employability Skills based on requests from members and others in the educational community. The Employability Skills report had the effect of a pebble in a pond with the ripples affecting practice in really diverse ways' (DMNC17).

Steve Balzary from ACCI foreshadowed ongoing industry engagement with Employability Skills during a Transitions Taskforce meeting, when he noted that 'now that the report has been tabled, ACCI and BCA will need to keep promoting the issue to their constituents and engage with the schools and other education and training sectors to progress the initiative' (MCEETYA 2002b: 6). In commenting on Balzary's commitment to the agenda, a Section Head within DEST observed that whilst the report would go to the NQTC in ANTA, 'Balzary wanted it to go to MCEETYA as well as to DETYA for some further policy work' (DMJC21). Clearly, Balzary sought to exert considerable influence on the policy trajectory of Employability Skills, a point reinforced by the experience of a Sydney based consultant who contributed to the report and observed that:

> 'I'd finished my project before they'd even got a steering committee together. It was a shambles, and because my report wasn't what they were expecting they rewrote it to suit what they wanted to hear. The final report was written by the committee' (DLFC01).

The motivations of senior ACCI and BCA staff to influence the policy system at this time are complex and difficult to ascertain. A key member of one of the ACCI / BCA research teams suggested that 'industry tried to influence the focus of the NREC projects.

---

[81] See also Smith (2000) and Harris et al (1998).

They made direct contact with NCVER and sought to foreground definitional issues within the funded projects' (DAMA26). Similarly, they noted that 'there were personal agendas and a lot of positioning going on, shaping the agenda in order to place ACCI in the best light' (DAMA27).

In a speech to the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies, Balzary noted the 'growing confusion over what is meant by generic skills, key competencies, enterprising skills, and what these skills should be in the context of challenges facing Australian industry' (Balzary 2003: 3). This complexity was also recognised by the MCEETYA Transitions Taskforce who attempted to clarify the extent of current work on these frameworks within the States and territories. An industry representative on that taskforce observed that whilst generic skills and enterprise education both 'had their place in the sun via the VET in Schools Framework', the various jurisdictions 'did not have a comprehensive picture of how they were dealing with them or how they were best integrated' (DMNC11). Initial suggestions from within the taskforce that each jurisdiction should document what they were doing with the different frameworks 'wasn't followed through', with industry influencing the taskforce to proceed with a tender to 'directly proceed with trial implementation work' (DMNC12).

This process was directly influenced by industry taskforce members who, as observed by an ANTA director, 'were doing major lobbying to have national Employability Skills qualifications' (DALC15), qualifications that would have been additional to existing arrangements, thus posing a considerable challenge and threat to existing State based school education examination systems. In further reflecting on the dynamics within the Taskforce, a DEST section head noted that 'the schools wanted a national symposium on Employability Skills but it was opposed by ACCI' (DCMC30).

Whilst industry was keen to progress the agenda with as little direct input from the States, there were also tensions within the industry camp itself. A DEST section head noted that 'there were tensions between ACCI and the ECEF over the project, with ECEF wanting a slower more cautious approach so that the

States could have some ownership' (DCMC41). These dynamics reflect Schofield's (2002) observations that many national industry stakeholders place problems related to policy formulation and policy implementation at the feet of State training authorities. In many cases, she observed that State training agencies are seen as:

'non-strategic, reluctant to work with industry in any meaningful way, and weak in the face of pressure from the public TAFE system, teacher unions and other interest groups when it comes to planning and resource allocation' (Schofield 2002: 11).

Perhaps because of this, Schofield also observed that

'the boundaries of policy participation by industry are still being negotiated and that relationships between industry and government officials are not yet as robust or as constructive as they need to be to take VET policy to its next level of achievement' (Schofield 2002: 12).

The development of these relationships has over time been further limited by the fact that employers have 'given mixed messages about what they meant in this area' (Balzary 2003: 3). This assertion was supported by a former head of the NCVER who observed that the ACCI / BCA report finally represented 'business getting their act together and telling government what they want. If clearer statements come from business then the leadership of the schools and State training agencies will recognise current demand. They didn't with Mayer' (DCRC20). Whilst some educationalists take the view that industry has no role in setting educational standards, Schofield's (2002) work found that neither the industry or government respondents to her questioning believed that VET had 'yet found the right relationship between industry and government in policy-making' (Schofield 2002: 11).

In addition to the findings of the AIG industry survey, VET teachers also came to more clearly acknowledge industry's views on the importance of these skills.

Callan (2003) found that teachers in the VET sector 'were quite critical of the performance of training packages in embedding generic skills and in helping students to be employable in a range of jobs in different industries' (2003: 6). Callan also noted that teachers themselves understood that employers wanted graduating students who 'have core skills that are transferable from one job or position to another, and good interpersonal and team skills so that they can add value from their first day at work' (2003: 21). This awareness was also evident across universities where the increasing focus on generic skills within universities was also clearly in response to employer demands for more balanced graduate skills (see for example Griffith University 2003).

Reflecting this ongoing interest amongst educators, a Reframing the Future Program[82] policy forum held in Adelaide during October 2001 chose generic skills as its focus (ANTA 2001a). In his work examining teacher views on generic skills, Callan (2003) also found that 'most teachers believed that employers were most dissatisfied with the interpersonal, team and general communication skills of recent graduates from the VET system' (2002: 5). Arising from local communities of practice, these teacher views reinforce the calls of industry during this period for a stronger focus on generic skills in schooling. However in commenting on the role of teachers in policy making, an industry based consultant suggested that 'Mayer involved practicing teachers and that was important but it's something that's lacking in the current work being done by ACCI and BCA' (DAMA19).

So whilst many VET teachers may have been supportive of their efforts, ACCI and BCA were clearly more focussed on developing their own singular agenda that could then be pushed through against the conservative educational elites. This reality was noted by a researcher involved in one of the major NCVER studies who noted that in relation to generic skills, 'there is an inherent conservatism in education and training. The forces of conservatism are prominent and it is difficult to make societal change without there being a sense of crisis' (DPKA25).

---

[82] Reframing the Future was a Commonwealth funded staff professional development program that mainly supported action learning initiatives within VET sector RTOs.

Although individual educators may have acknowledged industry calls for generic skills, employers and unions had markedly different views on Employability Skills. Whilst a former head of NCVER suggested that 'politics is generally not a prevalent dynamic in the dialogue between employers and unions over generic skills' (DCRC46), at the ACTU "Unions in VET Conference" in August 2002, delegates voted that:

> 'the development of a draft Employability Skills framework without the involvement of the ACTU and unions representing employees is of great concern. The ACTU / unions reject the inclusion of the "attributes" of potential employees in Employability Skills and call for full involvement of the ACTU / unions in any further consideration of this matter. State labour councils and affiliates should lobby State education Ministers to oppose the development of Employability Skills as they currently exist as part of the Skills framework. The ACTU supports the Mayer Key competencies as a more balanced proposal than the ACCI / BCA Employability Skills' (NSWIEU 2002).

The tensions evident from this statement are clearly in response to the decision of ACCI and BCA to pursue the Employability Skills agenda on their own terms, and not through the broader consultative approaches embodied by the Mayer process. This shift extended the trend away from major tripartite review committees that dominated the late 1980's and early 1990's, particularly in the form of Karmel, Finn, Mayer, Carmichael et al.

Whilst the final implementation framework for Employability Skills has not been resolved as at the time of writing, it appears likely that industrial issues will arise if attributes from the ACCI / BCA report are emphasised within any VET sector arrangements.[83] These industrial tensions are also likely to be heightened by the Commonwealth's decision in late 2004 to establish a network of national technical colleges, a move that is seen by some as a direct move to dilute union

---

[83] An indication of the sensitivity surrounding attributes is evident from the scope of a tender document to develop a jobseeker Employability Skills Assessment Tool for the Commonwealth

influence in TAFE.[84] As noted by Forward, 'the long term viability of the public provider is an issue', one linked to the 'rampant culture of entrepreneurialism and competitiveness which accompanied the marketisation of the sector' (*Campus Review* 2003b).

In addition to industrial parties, the role of ANTA as a stakeholder was also clearly a major influence on the development of Employability Skills during this period. As a project manager within ANTA noted:

> 'with training packages basically bedded down, and the emphasis within ANTA shifting away from development to implementation, attention shifted to the question of generic skills. But given the fact that ANTA had clearly aligned themselves with business and industry, it was felt that the agenda needed to be moved forward as a business case relating to a business need. People might have wanted to push it sooner but this needed to be sorted out' (DMWC31).

Consistent with that view, but contrary to those within DETYA, a Director within ANTA argued that 'the project was conceived within ANTA but there was concerns that it should be seen to be coming from industry so the BCA / ACCI consortium was developed' (DALC26). Indeed, once ANTA was committed to the process, they implemented a parallel strategy that saw funding flow to ACCI and BCA projects, in addition to the Kearns work funded through NREC projects.[85] However, as a project manager within ANTA noted:

> 'resources within ANTA were redirected to manage the ACCI / BCA project because we felt that some effort was required to get more closely involved and redirect the focus of the program away from the notion

---

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR 2004). The request clearly states that attributes are not to be incorporated due to the lack of clear operational definitions.

[84] The Prime Minister John Howard was quoted as saying that 'the schools will deliver academic and vocational education' with an emphasis on 'trade and essential employability skills'. Howard commented that students enrolled in the new technical colleges would 'get greater assistance from employers', a view that Maslen noted would 'probably send shivers of apprehension down many a TAFE teacher's spine'. (Campus Review 2004)

[85] ANTA's National Research and Evaluation Committee (NREC).

expressed by Balzary that they would be developing a new set of skills with separate qualifications across the sectors' (DMLC49).

However, whilst a new set of skills did eventuate, there is evidence of tensions surrounding the ACCI approach. Initially, the focus on Employability Skills within ANTA was strongly connected to the needs of "at risk students" and their role within transition arrangements signalled by *Footprints for the Future* (Eldridge 1999). However, ANTA's work on Employability Skills at this time was influenced by the review of pre-vocational qualifications conducted during this period. In March 2000, MCEETYA endorsed a National Youth Development Strategy that sought amongst other things to recognise the skills achieved by young people who participate in youth development programs. In response to that strategy, ANTA released *Due Credit* (ANTA 2002), a report that proposed a framework for recognising the skills achieved by young people participating in youth development programs. Whilst not formally proposing a recognition framework, it argued that:

> 'generic skills are clearly the most universal outcomes sought in youth development programs, yet, because the formal education sector generally does not describe such skills in outcome terms, there is difficulty in providing a formal avenue for their recognition' (ANTA 2002: 17).

However, in response to ongoing interest within ANTA to develop a VET qualification based on generic skills, DEST in 2004 provided funding to develop models for Certificate I that covered Employability Skills along with appropriate technical skills. The ANTA Pathways Certificate I Project developed draft models involving four industries[86] that are expected to be available in 2007 following trialing in 2006.

---

[86] The industry groupings were AgriFood, Manufacturing and Transport and Logistics.

Another major driver for the focus on pre-vocational qualifications was the huge growth that they had experienced since the introduction of Training Packages. Whilst VET in schools programs generally sought to deliver outcomes required by industry, much post-school VET delivered through second chance and pre-vocational labour market programs sought to avoid the restrictions of Training Packages and their emphasis on workplace assessment. Consequently, the Transitions Taskforce noted that the Pre-Vocational Pathways and Qualifications project was a 'major activity that will inform the ANTA approach to generic and Employability Skills' (MCEETYA 2002a: 6).

Whilst the pre-vocational project linked Employability Skills with debates surrounding transition, in a review of enterprise and vocational learning within existing transition arrangements, the Allen Consulting Group took the view that Employability Skills also had the potential to provide a much needed conceptual framework in this area (Allen Consulting 2003).

Clearly, the Employability Skills framework was seen as different things to different stakeholders, and despite the pre-vocational focus within ANTA, the ACCI / BCA consortium argued that ANTA should maintain a broader focus on the agenda. In particular, Balzary at a meeting of the Transitions Taskforce in 2002 argued that 'it will be important to engage all education and training sectors in order to promote Employability Skills in a consistent way as being essential for all young people regardless of their pathway' (Balzary cited in MCEETYA 2002b: 6). Consequently, as a result of pressure from ACCI and the ECEF, at its June meeting in 2002, MCEETYA requested ANTA to coordinate a new collaborative cross-sectoral approach to generic skills (MCEETYA 2002c).

The ANTA Employability Skills Cross Sectoral Coordination Group was thus established with representatives from ACCI, ECEF, the MCEETYA Transitions Taskforce, the AVCC, ANTA and DEST. Whilst the terms of reference and minutes of the group are not publicly available, it has been noted that the group's work was to 'assess the feasibility of implementing the ACCI / BCA Employability Skills Framework in an integrated and phased manner across the formal education and training sectors as well as the broad community' (NCVER 2003a). Whilst reporting to ANTA MINCO and through them to MCEETYA, the

group worked closely with the Transitions Taskforce as it constructed its project agenda.

From ANTA's perspective, 'the main focus of their work was the integration of Employability Skills within Training Packages' (DSCB16), drawing on consultancy input from the RATIO group and Cathy Down from RMIT. Industry however had a different view, with a director within ANTA commenting that 'Bill Healy and Steve Balzary were keen on universal recognition' (DSCB17). To that end, DEST and ANTA funds were provided for a project to explore the potential for universal recognition of Employability Skills across schools, the VET sector and universities. The project, conducted by The Allan Consulting Group in consultation with NCVER, 'provided an opportunity to progress practical approaches for the recognition and recording of Employability Skills that could be useful across sectors' (DEST 2004: *v*). In essence, the report proposed the use of portfolios and recommended the:

- trialing a model of an Employability Skills portfolio;
- promoting the benefits of Employability Skills portfolios; and
- further consultation, particularly with industry and businesses (2004: *x*).

Whilst the project did trigger the development of a national e-portfolio website,[87] further cross-sectoral developments remained unclear. Indeed, the likelihood of formal cross sectoral recognition is unlikely given the ongoing resistance from universities and the sweeping nature of the proposal.

Whilst Employability Skills did influence the pre-vocational project work around AQF levels 1-2, ANTA's support for cross-sectoral recognition did not extend to articulation with universities. In the UK, Britain's Education and Employment Secretary David Blunkett argued that universities should develop foundation degrees to develop key and generic skills because 'these are areas employers say are of greatest concern' (Moodie 2000: 39). Local institutions however,

---

[87] DEST funded education.au to develop and trial a website for e-portfolios. The e-portfolio is a skills portfolio database that will allow students, graduates and mature aged people to easily

270

were under less pressure to embrace the findings of ACCI / BCA report. Indeed, in commenting on the content of the report itself, Sydney University staff noted that 'the report focuses on the perceptions of employers and includes only limited discussion of the role of universities in providing graduates who possess employability skills' (USYD 2002).

Whilst downplaying the significance of the report and stressing that different institutions would have different perspectives on Employability Skills, the USYD report did note that it would be 'beneficial for those involved in the development of university courses to be aware of the Employability Skills, which are valued by employees'. However, in assessing the suggestion of a common reporting framework, the report also suggested that:

> 'it is not clear how regulation through a formal mechanism would help either universities or employers. An alternative approach would be for universities to develop their own responses to employability skills within a broader quality assurance framework' (USYD 2002).

Despite this cautious reaction, the extent of interest in generic skills amongst universities prompted the Business and Higher Education Round Table to develop a position paper on the topic, one that called amongst other things for further work to be undertaken to 'investigate, document and disseminate how employers recognize and value generic skills incorporating the findings from the ACCI / BCA survey' (Hager et al 2002: 14). Curtis and McKenzie (2002) have suggested that the dialogue between business and higher education communities did 'trigger some action within universities to use generic skills as an overt outcome and to respond to the skill requirements of the business community' (2002: 25).

Whilst schools during this period were primarily engaged with Enterprise Education and Key Competencies within the vocational learning area of the VET in Schools Framework, there was evidence that some schools did respond

---

record their academic, vocational and employability skills to support job applications, career planning, and entry into further education and training (DEST 2005).

to Employability Skills prior to the school sector's formal engagement with the policy process facilitated by ANTA.

The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) sought to give students 'Employability Skills and the skills to go onto further training in the workplace or at a TAFE' (VQA 2002), an outcome that can also be traced to that State's involvement in the Key Competency trial program and their subsequent interest in generic skills assessment[88]. Indeed, this outcome led to further work by the Victorian Association of Independent Schools, which mapped Employability Skills against the Victorian Curriculum Standards Framework and other secondary education programs (AISV 2004).

During this period, ANTA was at least attempting to balance the more pressing industry generic skills agenda with a pragmatic view of change, an approach sadly lacking at the time of Mayer and the subsequent pilot projects. Whilst conceding that universal recognition was 'more of a problem that a hot issue', a member of the cross sectoral working group commented that 'ANTA is taking a pragmatic approach because we can't afford to be held up by the other sectors. They have their own issues' (DWKB18). Consequently, ANTA's approach to generic skills in schools was strongly influenced by views such as those held by one director, who maintained that:

> 'in schools there's always going to be trouble between those who look for more options for students that aren't going to uni versus those that believe the curriculum is crowded enough as it is and don't want to overcrowd it with non core elements' (DSCC15).

Consequently, in terms of the school sector at least, ANTA downplayed the significance of the Employability Skills work, with a director conceding that universal recognition was indeed 'unlikely' (DSCB11). However, it is interesting to note that this more pragmatic approach prevailed primarily through the direct

---

[88] See for example the work of McCurry and Price (1997) and McCurry (2002) for the Victorian Board of Studies.

involvement of ANTA, that as an agency, had more experience of cross sectoral policy challenges than ACCI.

In particular, ANTA appeared to recognise its own limited potential, with one of its senior staff involved with the group noting that 'at the end of the day implementation rests with the States and we've got limited scope with VET in Schools, that's why we're just focussing on the VET sector' (DWKB20).[89]

In the VET sector, which is arguably more aligned with the interests of industry, there was further evidence of the growing recognition that generic skills were an integral part of the policy and program mix. In 2003, the national Student Outcomes Survey for the first time included questions related to Employability Skills. NCVER's reporting regime asked TAFE graduates and other VET students to rate their satisfaction with how their courses helped them to solve problems, be analytical, work as part of a team, communicate in writing and plan their work (NCVER 2003). The questions from the TAFE Student Outcomes Survey will be the same questions as those asked of higher education graduates in the course experience questionnaire, a development that will eventually allow comparisons between the two sectors, and no doubt place more pressure on providers across the sectors to place greater emphasis on generic skills within their programs.

However, the funding of any generic skills initiative remained an issue for ANTA and its plans for VET. An ANTA director noted that 'qualifications will only be funded to the extent that they are now; there won't be any more money from the Commonwealth or at the State level, so we have to be more flexible with packaging generic skills within training packages' (DSCC40).

ANTA's more pragmatic approach was reflected in the decision to only trial the inclusion of the skills and not the attitudes from the ACCI / BCA framework, a decision that clearly acknowledged educator concerns over their inclusion.

---

[89] The decision to close ANTA by the middle of 2005 saw the educational media spell out the major criticisms of the national body. Chief amongst those was that ANTA was too bureaucratic and paid too little emphasis on developing generic skills (Campus Review 2004b).

When asked to forecast the future of generic skills in VET, a director closely involved with the cross-sectoral working group suggested that:

'there are now over 70 training packages with overlap and duplication of skills within the frameworks, so we'll be asking the ITABs to rationalise qualifications, particularly at the lower AQF levels. That'll allow Employability Skills to become electives, and if you then pick up on the broader debate about the balance of skills needed, then you might see Employability Skills being chosen ahead of technical skills' (DSCB12).

This consolidation may ultimately lead to a reduction in the number of industry training packages to 'ensure that they reflect new work organisation models and define adaptive and flexible skill outcomes' (ANTA 2003b). ANTA's high-level review of training packages[90] resulted in part from pressure from the States via the CEOs of State training agencies who argued that there was a need to 'find practical ways to introduce greater flexibility to modify and adapt training packages without sacrificing the core elements necessary for national consistency' (ANTA 2002a: 11). The CEOs also called for the number and specificity of Training Packages to be reduced, demands that provided a clear opportunity for Employability Skills to be factored in from the outset and not sidelined from the process as occurred when training packages were implemented at the end of the Key Competency pilot phase.

The Commonwealth's approach to implementing Employability Skills during this period was considerably different to that pursued during the work of the Mayer committee. A director within ANTA observed that:

'the successful way to implement this is going to be by doing it quietly rather than imposing an agenda. We're looking to develop good examples of how to build them into training packages so we can show people that they're worth it' (DSCC38).

---

[90] *Strategic Evaluation of the Qualitative Impact of the Introduction of Training Packages on Vocational Education and Training Clients* (ANTA 2004).

This approach required less funding and involved a more narrow consultative scope, but in doing so, reflected ANTA's 'more considered approach' (DSCC39).

The need for this approach was recognised by a former head of NCVER who observed that 'the federal system needs longer lead times, it's a dispersed system, there's an evolutionary nature to the process and it requires a thousand blooming flowers of good practice to shape policy rather than the educational mafia of RTOs and ITABs' (DCRC29). Schofield cited a DEST official as suggesting that:

> 'public policy is now far more complex than it was when the VET reforms were first initiated. The grand narrative is dead as a public policy mechanism. The world moves too fast and it moves in different ways and public policy is now a different beast to what it was in the mid 1990s even' (Schofield 2002: 11).

The influential role of the NCVER during this period is a reflection of this increasing complexity, with funded research and other activities being driven by this key stakeholder agency. As the ACCI / BCA project was underway, NCVER pursued an active research agenda by directly commissioning projects and contracting research through NREC. Generic skills were identified as research priorities for NREC during its 2001 and 2002 calls for proposals, with work undertaken to examine:

- generic skills and training packages (Dawe 2002);
- approaches to generic skills by learners, employers and providers (Hawke et al 2002);
- generic skills and the displaced worker (Virgona et al 2003);
- assessing and certifying generic skills (Clayton et al 2003);
- generic skills and novice workers (Smith and Comyn 2003); and
- teacher and student attitudes to generic skills (Callan 2003).

Notwithstanding their project on employability skills in Britain (Turner 2002), the NCVER research agenda focussed solidly on the applied dimensions of generic skills, arising in part from a desire to balance the overt policy push by industry through the ACCI / BCA work.

As noted by a former head of the research centre, 'NCVER wanted a broader picture, so they were doing their bit by funding the NREC projects and maintaining a focus on generic skills. They were wanting to move away from Mayer, to update it and renew it' (DCRC18).

The main audience for the NCVER projects were educators, an approach reflected in the comments of a research manager who noted:

> 'The main aim of the research was to develop our understanding of how to work with generic skills and we backed that up with some forums across the country to get people talking about it. Planting the seeds of awareness so that they could go back to their workplace and have more in depth discussions about what they were going to do and how they were going to do it. It's really just the start of the debate' (DJGC11).

Throughout this period, NCVER did not fully embrace the ACCI / BCA framework, showing particular caution towards the inclusion of attitudes and emphasising the need to 'foster and develop generic skills for employability' as opposed to 'teaching Employability Skills', which was emphasised in industry's approach.[91] Finally, in the middle of 2003 NCVER held a series of research update forums on generic skills and proceeded with the publication of two how-to guides and a book of research readings (NCVER 2004).

This agenda of wide ranging activity in many ways contributed to generic skills becoming more centrally integrated within VET policy and practice than at the time of Mayer when a more centralist approach was attempted.

---

[91] See for example ACCI (2002).

It is evident that the policy stakeholder 'force-field' continued to influence the policy trajectory of generic skills during this period. However, as was the case with the Mayer Key Competencies, conceptual issues continued to influence how policy makers and practitioners responded to Employability Skills.

d.   The Complexity of Generic Skills

During the 1990's, considerable resources were devoted to embedding the Mayer Key Competencies into Australian vocational education and training. However, as noted by Curtis and McKenzie (2002), 'in part because of all this activity and the shifts in thinking that have resulted, there is lack of clarity in the field' (2002: vii). Whilst perhaps neglecting program limitations that constrained much of that activity, Curtis and McKenzie argue that this lack of clarity was primarily the result of 'a lack of consensus about what skills were required in light of the challenges facing Australian industry' (2002: vii).

In commenting on the lack of depth in local debates, Schofield (2003) argued that in many other countries, debates on skill formation are usually integrated with questions of how those skills are used and therefore relate to broader questions of work organisation, job design and employee relations. In citing Coleman and Keep (2001), she argues that Australia should 'link the need for enhanced skills with the need to achieve wider changes in the way work is organised in order to produce high performance workplaces in which skills and worker capabilities more broadly can be used to maximise competitive advantage' (2003: 11). This argument can also be traced to the work of Kearns (2000) who claimed earlier that a number of key contextual shifts raised a 'broad spectrum of issues relating to the essential generic skills required by enterprises, individuals and communities' (2001: 1).

Kearns' work for NCVER was commissioned by ANTA and involved a review of the literature and research on generic skills in VET. In presenting his 'key contextual shifts', Kearns argued for a wider set of generic skills that would embrace the 'mounting imperatives for lifelong learning' along with 'policies that

277

foster a learning culture in the workplace' (2001: 4).[92] Commenting on the emergence of the ACCI / BCA Employability Skills framework, Kearns commented that 'there is nothing that links lifelong learning with Employability Skills, nothing that truly provides a cross sectoral framework' (DPKD11).

Beyond questions on the place of Employability Skills within an overarching coherent educational policy, issues also existed around the skills themselves. At the first meeting of the then new MCEETYA Task Force on Transition from School, it was noted that 'while there is general agreement that all young people need an appropriate set of skills that will prepare them for working life and enhance their employability, there is ongoing debate as to what these skills should be' (MCEETYA 2001d).

For the ACCI / BCA project, the definition agreed on for Employability Skills was 'skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions' (ACCI / BCA 2002: 3). The Reference Group decided to use the term skill because it was used in enterprises and was more commonly accepted than other terms in the literature.

However, as there was a need to differentiate between technical skills, job specific skills and the more general skills and personal attributes related to employment, the Reference Group developed the following working terminology and definition for the project:

- 'skills are commonly understood to refer to an ability to perform a specific task;
- competency is used to refer to an observable behaviour performed to a specified level and therefore provides a basis for the assessment of performance; and

---

[92] Kearns has been responsible for a number of reports and articles on lifelong learning. See for example Kearns et al (1999) and Kearns and Papadopoulos (2000).

- attributes, qualities and characteristics refer to those capabilities of an individual in most instances although *"characteristics"* is sometimes used to describe a workplace/job-specific requirement' (2002: 7).

However, an industry consultant involved in the ACCI / BCA project suggested there was an 'unnecessary obsession with definitional issues, and by not involving teachers and their work and views, there's a danger of creating a worse framework than the one developed by Mayer' (DAMD21). Similarly, a consultant involved in the ANTA pre-vocational qualifications project observed that 'people aren't really interested in pursuing definitional issues at this stage because they know it doesn't really add value to what goes on in the classroom' (DCDD20). Perhaps more significantly, whilst recognising that definitional issues around Employability Skills were a 'key challenge', a member of ANTA's cross-sectoral working group maintained that it was only so 'to the extent that people are comfortable to work with them so that we can move forward with them' (DWKD14). Similarly, during a research update forum on generic skills, a research manager for NCVER stated that 'the focus is on the learner, not on definitions, that's why we're talking about creating the environment to foster the development of generic skills' (DJGD30).

In considering definitional issues, Field (2002) maintained that an important element of discussions on the type of skills required were attributes. He noted that:

> 'Employability Skills cannot be fully understood without considering the context in which work occurs, and without acknowledging the important ways in which one's values and character attributes impact on skills development and application' (2002: 10).

This view was shared by ACCI/BCA who included the following attributes in the Employability Skills framework:

- loyalty;
- commitment;
- honesty and integrity;

279

- enthusiasm;

- reliability;

- personal presentation;

- commonsense;

- positive self-esteem;

- sense of humour;

- balanced attitude to work and home life;

- ability to deal with pressure;

- motivation; and

- adaptability.

Whilst industry saw the inclusion of these attributes as a new and essential component of Employability Skills, it was contentious. An ACCI policy document at the time noted that:

> 'personal attributes are likely to be the area that will cause the biggest rethink for the education sector. How to get personal attributes out of the too hard basket and incorporate them in a systematic way, into teaching, assessing and reporting, will provide a challenge to educationalists that will question the core of what they are doing. Already there have been suggestions of social engineering and economic rationalism gone mad. But the core of the debate is how to move the agenda forward to continue to strive for the goals of economic benefits and improvements in the quality of living for all Australians' (ACCI 2002).

The inclusion of attributes within the ACCI / BCA framework did represent the most significant challenge to Employability Skills during this period. Notwithstanding the history of the Key Competencies and the emphasis on generic skills within VET in school programs, many providers and educationalists reacted with concern. Schofield (2003) argued that Employability Skills needed to be treated with caution. She observed that the concept of Employability Skills had become fashionable in VET, 'replacing the more rigorous distinction between technical, cognitive and behavioural skills'. Schofield also argued that 'personal attributes are not amenable to structured

learning and should lie outside the scope of a formal skills formation system' as they were 'deeply-rooted in class distinctions' (Schofield 2003: 10).

Similarly, Smith (2002) argued that 'employer preferences for certain attitudes, personality attributes and employee behaviours within their workforces should not be confused with or translated into government policies for and funding of skills development' (2002: 1).

Clearly the call for development of attributes added some difficulty to the prospect of implementing Employability Skills. Regardless, ANTA, in its first report on the high level review of Training Packages, proposed that VET pedagogy must become more 'attribute centred' in order to address skill needs related to 'a variety of generic, key and employability skills as well as other qualities, attitudes and dispositions' (ANTA 2003c: vii).

Whilst debate also surrounded some of the skills themselves[93], overall the introduction of Employability Skills generated less conceptual debate than at the time of Mayer. However, as was the case with the Key Competencies, the MCEETYA Transitions taskforce noted in March 2002 that 'assessment and reporting of the skills will be a complex issue and have significant implications for school systems in relation to curriculum frameworks, teacher professional development and resourcing' (MCEETYA 2002a: 3).

Thus despite the intervening years and a different skills framework being applied, difficulties surrounding the implementation of generic skills continued to present a challenge for education systems and policy makers alike.

During this period, the OECD initiated a major international program on generic skills. However, like its Australian equivalent, the OECD's DeSeCo project also failed to reach agreement on a range of practical and conceptual issues.[94]

---

[93] See for example Down (2004). In this summary paper, Down argues that 'the ACCI/BCA report has received a mixed reception with the controversy centred on a number of key elements, namely, the term employability skills, the skills identified, the proposed recognition of attributes as well as skills, and the perceived lack of consultation within the VET community' (2004: 2).
[94] DeSeCo sought to build a broad theoretical consensus prior to developing generic skill indicators for international comparative assessments. Whilst a range of views were expressed

Goody (1999) for example, argued that it was not feasible to define universal key competencies at all, with Haste (1999) challenging the terms of reference arguing that the five key competencies should be:

- Technological competence;
- Dealing with ambiguity and diversity;
- Finding and sustaining community links;
- Management of motivation, emotion and desire; and
- Agency and responsibility (1999: 103-117).

Whilst the DeSeCo project did go on to generate an agreed framework (see Rychen and Salganik 2003), the Australian VET sector paid only scant regard to the OECD work and its implications for international comparative generic skill assessments. Consequently, the link between the Employability Skills and the revised OECD PISA testing regime is unknown at this stage.

However, whilst their was relatively little conceptual debate over Employability Skills compared to the Key Competencies, it can be argued that this was due to the limited program development and implementation work surrounding the new set of generic skills. In commenting on common threads within debates on generic skills over a decade of policy activity, Eunson (2002) observed that:

> 'universities and TAFEs have attempted to come to terms with this general skills model, but the challenge so far appears to be too great. This is hardly surprising. The generic skills model strikes at the heart of the entire post-secondary system, because the heart of that system is specialised knowledge... This is not simply because of the political dynamics of empire building and turf wars, but because of the ways in which learning has differentiated itself in the past century via increasing specialisation practices' (2002).

---

during the DeSeCo project, it appears that the Key Competencies they developed will be incorporated within a broader PISA testing regime of which Australia is a participant.

This view suggests that there will always be irresolvable issues surrounding the nature of generic skills and the best way to integrate them within education systems, irrespective of the framework used or the approaches developed. Indeed Stasz (1998) maintains that 'the lack of a clear and common conceptual framework for defining and assessing skills is especially problematic for school reformers' (1998: 189).

An example of the practical consequences of conceptual issues surrounding Employability Skills is evident from the ANTA Pre-Vocational Pathways and Qualifications project which sought to integrate Employability Skills within a selection of seven Training Packages. The head of the small team of consultants observed that whilst working with Training Packages it became apparent that:

> 'the Employability Skills framework needed further work. It was OK at a conceptual level, but when we started working with the different models it proved difficult. One of the main reasons was because of the implied levels built into the skill descriptors. But ACCI and BCA didn't want to change anything. As far as they were concerned, that's what they wanted and they weren't going to dilute the message' (DTJD02).

Similarly, when a pre-vocational model was developed for trialing and agreed to by the States, the same consultant argued that:

> 'ANTA didn't know what they were doing. They sat on it for seven months even though all the States were keen for it to go. They were either too busy or they didn't know what they wanted, but I really think it's because they don't understand it because they haven't worked with it like we have' (DTJD04).

However, interest in the Employability Skills agenda appeared broader than at the time of Mayer.

NCVER argued that:

> 'in Australia, as it is internationally, there also is increasing emphasis being placed on active citizenship and community capacity to influence social and economic development. This is reflected in the extensive work on learning communities where generic skills are being thought of more broadly than in terms of just work' (NCVER 2003a).

In a way that did not occur in the time of Mayer, there was greater evidence of a whole of government approach to Employability Skills. Whilst this may have been in part driven by the coordinated response to the report of the Prime Minister's Youth Action Task Force (Eldridge 1999), ANTA's representative on the cross sectoral working group on Employability Skills observed that 'there has been plenty of interest from the Department of Family and Community Services, and Employment Services, so there's pressure building to tackle Employability Skills through a number of service providers' (DWKC25).

An example of the type of work emerging during this period was the project of the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), which sought to develop an Employability Skills Assessment Tool. Whilst excluding the measurement of attributes, the assessment tool aimed to provide job seekers and employers with judgements about the generic skill levels of potential employees.

This broader interest clearly reflected a higher level of acceptance within policy domains, a fact no doubt facilitated by the experience with Key Competencies over the preceding decade and a developing level of understanding and awareness. Indeed, the DEWR request for tender went so far as to suggest that the Key Competencies 'played a significant role in the development of government policy in this area' (1994: 37).

Whilst this research would suggest that claims of this nature are arguable, it is clear that the definition and conceptual foundations of Employability Skills were

less of an issue than at the time of Mayer, and thus a less significant influence on this phase of the generic skills policy trajectory within Australian VET. Whilst this might have been the case because of the minimal engagement by practitioners, it might also be due to the fact that many of the conceptual debates occurred when the Key Competencies first appeared on the scene.

Similarly in relation to assessment and reporting, there appeared less concern regarding Employability Skills, although this might not be a true indication of debates yet to come.

Consequently, this situation appears to be partly a by-product of changes to policy making during the period, where more diffused and pragmatic approaches to implementation deflected any concerns with the framework itself. Employability Skills represented a more reasonable policy initiative than the Key Competencies had a decade earlier.

Conclusion:

This final phase of the Key Competency policy trajectory was characterised by a more coherent VET in schools policy framework and more clearly articulated industry views on generic skills.

Another important difference between this phase and earlier periods involving the development and trialing of the Key Competencies was the greater involvement of ANTA. This shift saw the agency move from being practically disengaged, as was the case with the Key Competencies, to actively driving the generic skills agenda through Employability Skills.

Despite ANTA's greater involvement, Employability Skills were also clearly the result of a more explicit business agenda, which suggests that not only had generic skill issues become more acute within industry, but that the Key Competencies were in fact ahead of their time.

Furthermore, through the inclusion of attributes, Employability Skills were clearly more oriented towards enterprise needs compared with the Key Competencies, which were broader and arguably more influenced by educational goals such as lifelong learning. This difference led to tensions between industry and government during this period, tensions over the nature and scope of educational reform that might be achieved by implementing Employability Skills.

This industry influence clearly reflected the ongoing impact of the new vocationalist policy driver, which however, came to be partially mediated during this period by ANTA, DEST and NCVER who arguably had a greater understanding of teaching and learning and a broader conception of the role of education and training in society.

This final phase of the Key Competency policy trajectory also witnessed the ongoing impact of shifting labour markets on generic skills policy. The development of ANTA's new national strategy for VET triggered much discussion on the role of VET and how it should best respond to emerging labour market trends. The issue of labour markets was also clearly articulated in the Employability Skills Report itself, which discussed at length labour market dynamics and emerging skill needs as a rationale for renewed focus on generic skills. These factors combined to give greater emphasis to graduate satisfaction surveys and other measures of generic skills performance, such as the Graduate Skills Assessment Test.

This final phase of the Key Competency policy trajectory also provided further insights on the policy model proposed at the beginning of this thesis.

It is clear from the research that the development of Employability Skills was a significant policy development that again highlights how policy is rearticulated across the policy cycle and progressed at certain stages due to the convergence of interests around a certain form of policy action.
It is also evident that the politics of federalism reached a new low, affecting the capacity of training providers to implement generic skills, and reinforcing the

power of centralised national business groups to push through reform initiatives that increased policy pressure for a replacement to Key Competencies.

Whilst the focus on generic skills strengthened during this period, so did the impact of educational federalism. Although the political balance of educational federalism was no more affected by elections and party politics during this period than in others, it continued to be a major policy driver that affected the trajectory of the Key Competencies. The major crisis surrounding the renewal of the ANTA agreement in 2001 came to characterise the now less co-operative form of federalism that existed in the VET sector, a situation that has recently deteriorated even further as the Liberal-National party coalition establish Australian technical colleges to break the hold of State TAFE systems and move to implement new industrial arrangements in the VET sector.

Conclusion

This thesis sought to analyse the policy trajectory of generic skills within Australian VET in order to consider the implications for our understanding of policy making. It involved a critical assessment of the development, trailing and implementation of the Key Competencies and an analysis of the emerging Employability Skills framework. In doing so, it enabled an assessment of whether that process supports a new model for VET policy making in Australia.

This section provides a summary of the research results and a discussion of how they answered the research questions.

This research was significant because it analysed a major educational initiative in detail, provided new insights into contemporary Australian VET policy making, and generated different perspectives on the policy process. As a result, it has developed a detailed record of the complex processes involved in contemporary education policy making, a record that is often missing from research on vocational education and training in Australia.

Given that the research analysed generic skills reform initiatives, it also provided insights into a range of implementation issues associated with developing the range of skills and attributes demanded by contemporary workplaces.

The outcomes of this research are also considered significant because of the continuing focus by policy makers and other stakeholders on the transition from school to work for young people. Generic skills are primarily a policy response to the challenge of developing skills that best prepare students for the world of work. However, generic skills are also used as an instrument of school reform, one that provides an opportunity for the state to satisfy the concerns of business, by linking education and training with the quest for ever increasing industrial competitiveness.

The development of generic skills in Australia occurred in a contested education and training landscape during the 1990's, where dominant policy drivers came to produce reform initiatives that influenced the policy landscape for decades to come.

This research has demonstrated that it is not possible to consider the policy trajectory of Key Competencies and Employability Skills without considering these policy drivers in some detail.

The research has shown that the re-emergence of human capital theory amongst new vocationalists was a major policy driver between 1985 and 1993. Questions over the purpose of education were central to the work of not only the Finn and Mayer Committees, but also that of the Karmel Committee that preceded them. Thinking on generic skills was directly influenced by the literature on emerging forms of work and work organisation, views that were given greater force by the realisation that labour markets were changing and that the transition from school to work was an emerging social and political issue of significance. It was in this context that a case for improved links between the education system and the world of work was most strongly made.

Despite industrial rhetoric to the contrary, piecemeal industry support for the Key Competencies threw into question the extent of their engagement, demonstrating that in the early 1990's, industry were not yet able to clearly articulate their expectations of the education system and the importance that they placed on generic skills. The research suggests that this void was initially filled by the work of Carmichael, whose more pragmatic AVTS proposal presented a far simpler policy initiative, one that reinforced the primacy of employment based pathways at the same time as securing additional Commonwealth funding for TAFE.

The influence of new vocationalism was also apparent through the emergence of Enterprise Education, a set of skills that came to compete with the Key Competencies as a potential driver of curriculum reform.

However, during the implementation phase, the impact of new vocationalism on the generic skills agenda was fundamentally weakened by the failure of industry to voice any ongoing support for Key Competencies, an outcome that further questioned the level of support that actually existed during development.

As Key Competencies entered the period of piecemeal implementation, the emergence of Employability Skills illustrated a more explicit expression of enterprise needs and a clearer indication of new vocationalist intentions. This clear focus led to tensions between industry and government during this period, tensions over the nature and scope of reform that might be achieved by implementing Employability Skills. Despite this, the ongoing impact of the new vocationalist policy driver was clearly illustrated through changes to advisory arrangements, which saw growing influence of national industry organisations such as ACCI, BCA and the NFF, influence that has more recently become even more acute (Campus Review 2005).

Regardless, evidence that the new vocationalism was a constant policy driver across the trajectory of the Key Competencies is illustrated by the raft of key policy events that continued to champion employment based pathways and support for other initiatives that sought to introduce a more direct relationship between industry competency standards and the assessment of educational outcomes. Chief amongst those were the New Apprenticeship System, Training Packages and the School to Work Program.

Clearly these developments also reflected the ongoing impact of changing labour markets, which in itself was another key policy driver that came to influence the policy trajectory of generic skills during 1990-2005. Not only did the shifting youth labour market shape the emergence of Key Competencies, it continued to be a key policy driver for the rise of the ASTF and the development of an alternate model of vocational preparation that came to challenge the importance of the Key Competencies.

In this way then, the policy driver of changing labour markets grew to be a more powerful complement to new vocationalism during the period of Key

Competency trials and implementation, one that shifted transition as an issue primarily for unemployed youth or for those in vocational education programs, to being an issue for all young people whether work is entered from upper secondary education or from tertiary studies. This had the impact of displacing and diluting the Key Competencies, which were rightly or wrongly, associated with a more narrow vocationalist agenda in the school sector.

Transition became the key issue, with the policy agenda moving away from the acquisition of Key Competencies to a more holistic focus on the broad range of skills and attributes related to successful transition. The National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty First Century was the centrepiece of this policy shift, with the Key Competencies given some profile into the future, albeit without the resources to develop into a more significant feature of the policy landscape.

The demands of changing labour markets were also clearly articulated in the Employability Skills report, which discussed at length labour market dynamics and emerging skill needs as the rationale for a renewed focus on generic skills. The impact of this policy driver was also evident through the development of ANTA's new national strategy for VET, which triggered much discussion on the role of VET and how it should best respond to emerging labour market trends. Clearly, this research demonstrates that educational policy has become inexorably linked with the demands of labour markets and their constituencies.

The marketisation of education itself was also a key policy driver that affected the trajectory of generic skills. The impact of this occurred most during the Key Competencies implementation phase, when the capacity of public providers to integrate generic skills was limited as a result of the pressure they faced to reinvent themselves in the face of user choice and the creation of an educational market.

Thus whilst not directly influencing the conduct of the trials themselves, this policy driver had a strong indirect effect on the VET sector's capacity to progress the Key Competencies.

During the implementation phase in particular (1997-2000), the impact of the developing educational market was exacerbated by ongoing Commonwealth fiscal restraint and growing pressure to State systems from increasing enrolments and demands to change Training Package delivery and assessment. Coupled with the growing casualisation of the TAFE workforce, quality came to decline markedly in the VET sector, further limiting the interest or capacity to invest in generic skills based reform.

Not only did the doctrine of economic rationalism contribute to the development of an educational market, it was also in itself a key policy driver that affected the trajectory of Key Competencies. This occurred during the development phase, when new vocationalism came to prominence and introduced generic skills as a key policy initiative. However, it had the greatest effect on the trajectory of the Key Competencies through its ongoing impact on institutional arrangements throughout the period covered by this research. Economic rationalism and corporate managerialism led to the continued restructuring of State and Commonwealth agencies, which resulted in further destabilisation of public providers and the dilution of institutional capacity to deal with implementation of the Key Competencies.

Economic rationalism also influenced the operation of various Commonwealth policy fora during this period. The restructuring of MCEETYA committees during the implementation phase led to the re-introduction of sectoral boundaries between education and training which further weakened the Key Competencies by isolating them as separate issues for both State school and VET systems. To a lesser extent, the policy driver of economic rationalism and corporate managerialism also operated on State policy systems, influencing the trajectory of the Key Competencies through ongoing restructures of educational bureaucracies and curriculum support services.

These effects were magnified by policies of the Commonwealth government that sought to further decentralise control of funding and program delivery from State bureaucracies to the hands of industry.

Consequently, whilst the impact of these changes varied from State to State, it is clear that economic rationalism and corporate managerialism contributed to the varying outcomes for the Key Competencies in each State and Territory.

In summary, this analysis has demonstrated that the impact of these different policy drivers varies across the different stages of the policy process, in response to the interaction of individual, institutional and political relationships that fuel the policy system. This understanding is an important element of any future modelling of the policy process.

The final policy driver relevant to generic skills is arguably the most important. Indeed, assessing the influence of educational federalism was central to one of the research questions framing this investigation.

The research sought to establish the extent to which federal education politics influenced the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies.

Over the last two decades, political and constitutional tensions between State and Commonwealth governments have ensured that educational federalism has had a significant influence on funding arrangements, the nature of curriculum and the whole system for school to work transition. The research found that from the time of the Mayer report, State governments failed to adequately support the Key Competencies both in the school and VET sectors. Mayer's proposed program of national assessment threatened the State's rigid school testing regimes and their investments in curricula, a challenge that guaranteed that there would be no State government support for the Mayer proposal itself. From then onwards, lingering fear of a narrow competency agenda and growing anxiousness over the resource implications of generic skills based school reform ensured that Key Competencies were given minor status in that sector, despite the Commonwealth's considerable enthusiasm.

The political dynamics of Australia's federalism was no more starkly illustrated than at the 69th AEC/MOVEET meeting in Perth in 1993, where conservative State governments rejected the Key Competency implementation proposal as a

way of signalling their lack of enthusiasm for the Commonwealth government's school reform agenda. From that time onward, this antagonism continued to influence the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies initiative both directly and indirectly. Whilst cooperation on VET in schools was a positive feature of educational federalism in the schools sector, the potential of generic skills reform was never likely to be realised, not only due to the mixed results of the pilot program, but also because of the long standing and fundamental antagonism towards the Commonwealth and its plans to reform State school systems, antagonism that was clearly demonstrated by the impasse over the national profiles and statements for schools.

Whilst the lack of recurrent Commonwealth funding at the end of the trials was another reason for the lack of State support for the Key Competencies, the financial implications of generic skills reform was amplified by the introduction of user choice in the VET sector and the emergence of fiscal restraint across a wide range of Commonwealth portfolio areas.

Whilst different forms of federalism have been seen to operate in the different education sectors (Lingard 1995), during the period of the Key Competencies and Employability Skills, cooperative federalism in the VET sector was gradually replaced by more open antagonism, driven by funding disputes and exacerbated by a shifting political landscape. Disagreements over the funding of VET and the New Apprenticeship System, coupled with tensions over priorities for the national VET strategy and ANTA itself, all had implications for the Key Competencies, Employability Skills and generic skills more broadly. Whilst it created both positive and negative impacts, educational federalism was responsible for clear resistance to ANTA's mandate in the VET sector, and the continued lack of support for national generic skills agenda by State education authorities. Indeed, the major crisis surrounding the renewal of the ANTA agreement in 2001 came to characterise the now less co-operative form of federalism that exists in the VET sector, one that has recently deteriorated even further as the Liberal-National party coalition establishes Australian technical colleges to break the hold of State TAFE systems and introduce new industrial arrangements in the VET sector.

Whilst the research considered the extent to which educational federalism influenced the Key Competencies, it also addressed a second research question that sought to identify the key policy events that influenced the policy trajectory of generic skills within Australian education and training.

The research found that whilst the four influential VET committees of the early 1990s provided the initial direction for the Key Competencies initiative, the key policy events that influenced Australia's ongoing generic skills agenda in the school sector was the creation of the ASTF in 1994 and the development of a new Framework for Vocational Education in Schools in 2000.

The formation of the ASTF triggered an explosion of VET in schools programs that culminated in the implementation of a national framework six years later. Whilst that framework finally secured a role for the Key Competencies as a component of vocational learning within school based VET, it also signalled the extent of influence for the Key Competencies to a point far less than that envisaged by the Mayer Committee.

In the VET sector, the key policy events that influenced the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies, were the introduction of the New Apprenticeship System in 1996, and the release of the Employability Skills report in 2002. The introduction of the New Apprenticeship System and associated Training Packages was a major shift for vocational education and training, one that limited the capacity of training providers and policy institutions at both the State and Commonwealth level to adequately respond to the opportunities presented by the Key Competencies.

Indeed, the lack of engagement with Key Competencies from 1996 onwards was in itself a trigger for the development of Employability Skills, which themselves clearly altered the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies and ultimately came to replace them.

A third research question addressed by this thesis was the extent to which inadequate conceptualisation of the Key Competencies limited their impact in Australia's vocational education and training system.

The literature and research clearly demonstrate that the Key Competencies, and generic skills more broadly, are contested concepts. In Australia, conceptual difficulties were encountered as first the Mayer Committee, and then teachers and trainers tried to define the Key Competencies, grapple with the concept of transferability, and understand how the different Key Competencies related to each other. As was the case with other countries that embraced generic skills, inadequate theorisation meant that the Key Competencies were variously considered as commonly occurring skills, generic skills, skills of transfer and skills required by workplaces of the future.

These issues were compounded by a number of practical matters, including the challenge of assessment and reporting within existing curriculum structures, and the links with effective workplace performance through competency standards. All these issues combined to cast doubt on the completeness of the Mayer proposal, and its ability to be nationally implemented. These unresolved matters made the Mayer proposal more complex than it might have been, and led to uncertainty that restrained progress in both schools and the VET sector.

Whilst many of these issues were resolved through the pragmatic efforts of teachers and trainers, the challenge of assessment continued to significantly limit the scope of implementation for the Key Competencies.

Whilst the Key Competencies and generic skills more broadly did challenge traditional curriculum and assessment practices and structures, in the school sector, much of the challenge related to how the Key Competencies could best be integrated with existing State based examination systems.

Although the Key Competencies did find a central role in some State curriculum structures, in most cases they were not integrated to the extent that they became part of centralised assessment and reporting arrangements.

However, it is clear that across the country, individual teachers and schools did recognise the value of the Key Competencies by including them in local reporting arrangements.

In the VET sector, the greatest challenge to trainers was how to integrate the Key Competencies within the competency based delivery and assessment arrangements used for Training Packages.

In that controversial and challenging operational context, practitioners struggled to give voice to the Key Competencies. Not only did Training Packages inadequately represent the Key Competencies, the lack of financial and human resources in the system at the time effectively sidelined generic skills in most TAFE colleges. Inadequate professional development, marketing and resource materials, meant that across the VET system, employers and providers did not recognise Key Competencies nor integrate them within their programs. These outcomes were less about poor conceptualisation, and more about the lack of support for colleges and trainers looking to deal with generic skills.

Whilst the implementation of Employability Skills was not completed at the time of writing, evidence to date suggests that apart from the inclusion of attributes, conceptual issues have not been a barrier.

Consequently, it is clear that whilst inadequate conceptualisation did influence the initial response to generic skills, the lack of widespread implementation has been more the result of political and institutional barriers.

The fourth and final research question addressed by this thesis was the extent to which institutions and policy actors influenced the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies. Given that this research has viewed policy as a process operating across a range of different policy contexts, it is not surprising that the role of individuals and organisations was central to the generic skills agenda in Australian VET. This research has demonstrated that from the individual actions of Finn, Carmichael, Mayer and Balzary, to the reactions of teachers during the trials, individual policy actors have fundamentally shaped the policy trajectory of

generic skills. Indeed, at key times during the last decade, influential individuals effectively determined the path of the Key Competencies at a macro or national level through their own actions.

In particular, the intervention from senior DEET staffer Allan Ruby was the major reason that funds were provided to enable the States to proceed with the trials. His activism within DEETYA and with the States ensured that the Mayer proposal was not scuttled, which was the expected outcome of the 69th MOVEET meeting in Perth. Similarly, the influence of Steve Balzary was central to the development of Employability Skills, and the subsequent program of implementation within vocational education and training. Through his influence in the MCEETYA Transitions Task Force, Balzary ensured that Employability Skills were acknowledged by ANTA and DEST, and that resources were available to develop them as the next standard bearer for generic skills.

Without the actions of these and other key policy actors, the policy trajectory of generic skills would have been markedly different.

At the local level, evidence from each State indicates that in the absence of centralised arrangements, teachers and school principals across the country did decide that the Key Competencies were to feature in their community of practice, albeit in an ad hoc and dissipated way. Whilst the extent of this impact has not been assessed by this research, there is evidence that the Key Competencies did positively influence classroom practice in schools beyond those directly involved in the program of trials.

With regard to policy institutions, ANTA was a major influence on the trajectory of generic skills through both act and omission. ANTA did not engage sufficiently with the Key Competencies during development and trialing. Indeed, the introduction of the New Apprenticeship System at a time when the pilot projects were drawing to a close meant that ANTA had no time and resources to strengthen generic skills in the VET sector, as it was totally absorbed by issues surrounding the implementation of Training Packages and the burgeoning VET in schools activity. By omission, ANTA allowed the Key

Competencies to wither on the vine, which created a vacuum that was filled by industry and DEST through the development of the Employability Skills initiative.

Whilst State education departments and school assessment agencies also had a significant role in actively influencing the policy trajectory of the Key Competencies during development and trialing, after the trials were complete, by omission these institutions failed to support the Key Competencies, thus ensuring their limited treatment within individual state systems for vocational education and training.

These institutional responses illustrate a key issue surrounding the Key Competencies, which was the question of who had responsibility for generic skills development. The hierarchical and complex nature of the VET system is a factor, one neatly captured in the exacerbated comments of a trade union official:

> 'You get the feeling that the bureaucrats are in control, but in fact nobody's in control. ANTA doesn't really control what the State bureaucracies do, but the State bureaucracies don't really fully control it, nor do the individual TAFE systems or colleges. The Federal government doesn't control it either. They've all got their points of influence ...you've got these competing bureaucracies and the actual level of control that each of these bureaucracies has is somewhat limited and strained' (Schofield 2002: 12).

This view neatly captures the inefficient interactions between organisations that characterise the VET system in Australia and which have contributed to the limited impact within policy and practice.

However, by the time of the Employability Skills initiative, it is worth noting that industry had become more active in VET than at the time of Mayer and Carmichael. In particular, ACCI and BCA moved to become key partners in the

Commonwealth government's VET agenda, further diluting the influence of VET practitioners and State education departments.

As stated earlier, in answering these research questions, the evidence also provides an opportunity to reflect on current models of policy, and consider whether the case study of generic skills supports a new model of education policy to better understand vocational education and training in Australia.

The literature review in this thesis suggests that current models of policy are inadequate as a means of accurately explaining Australian vocational education and training.

From the models reviewed however, a number of key features were identified as being especially relevant to the policy trajectory of the generic skills in Australia. These features acknowledge that:

1. policy is a process rearticulated across the policy cycle (after Fulcher 1989);
2. the role of policy actors is fundamental to the policy process (after Yeatman 1998);
3. politics is central to the policy process (after Kingdon 1984);
4. the role of institutions is significant (after Considine 1994);
5. the trajectory of a policy can be tracked across different policy contexts (after Ball 1994);
6. conceptual issue surrounding generic skills hampered the implementation of the Key Competencies;
7. different policy streams impact on outcomes (after Kingdon 1984); and
8. educational federalism is a major driver in Australian educational policy (after Lingard 1991).

These features were reviewed as the research results were reported.

In summary, that review has illustrated that these key features are relevant to the case of the Key Competencies. For example, policy came to be rearticulated across the policy cycle from Karmel, to Finn, to Mayer; different policy streams

such as VET in Schools and Training Packages came to impact on the trajectory of the Key Competencies; politics was central to the Key Competencies policy process and both the process and outcomes of the Key Competencies policy process were influenced by corporate federalism operating at that time.

Generic skills policy in Australia has demonstrated that change cannot be produced by government decisions alone. Although government legislation, policies and programs are important, they can be interpreted in a variety of ways as they are influenced by a complex of cultural, social and political forces during development, implementation and reinterpretation. It is also argued here that the seven assumptions identified above inform a new model of VET policy. It is argued that these features reflect the nature of the policy process in general, and address the particular characteristics of the Key Competencies initiative evident from the literature and my own personal professional experience.

Figure 1 overleaf provides a graphic interpretation of the model, which has been developed in response to the overarching question of whether the Key Competencies initiative suggests the need for a new model of education policy to understand VET in Australia.

Whilst the proposed model simplifies the policy environment and the political system that characterises Australian VET, it aims to provide a fresh view of how VET policy operates within vocational education in Australia. In doing so, it may prove useful in highlighting areas that need more attention when considering a particular policy initiative.

The model draws on Ball (1997) and his notion of multiple policy contexts, in particular, the contexts of influence, text production, practice and outcomes.

Figure 1: A POLICY FORCE FIELD MODEL
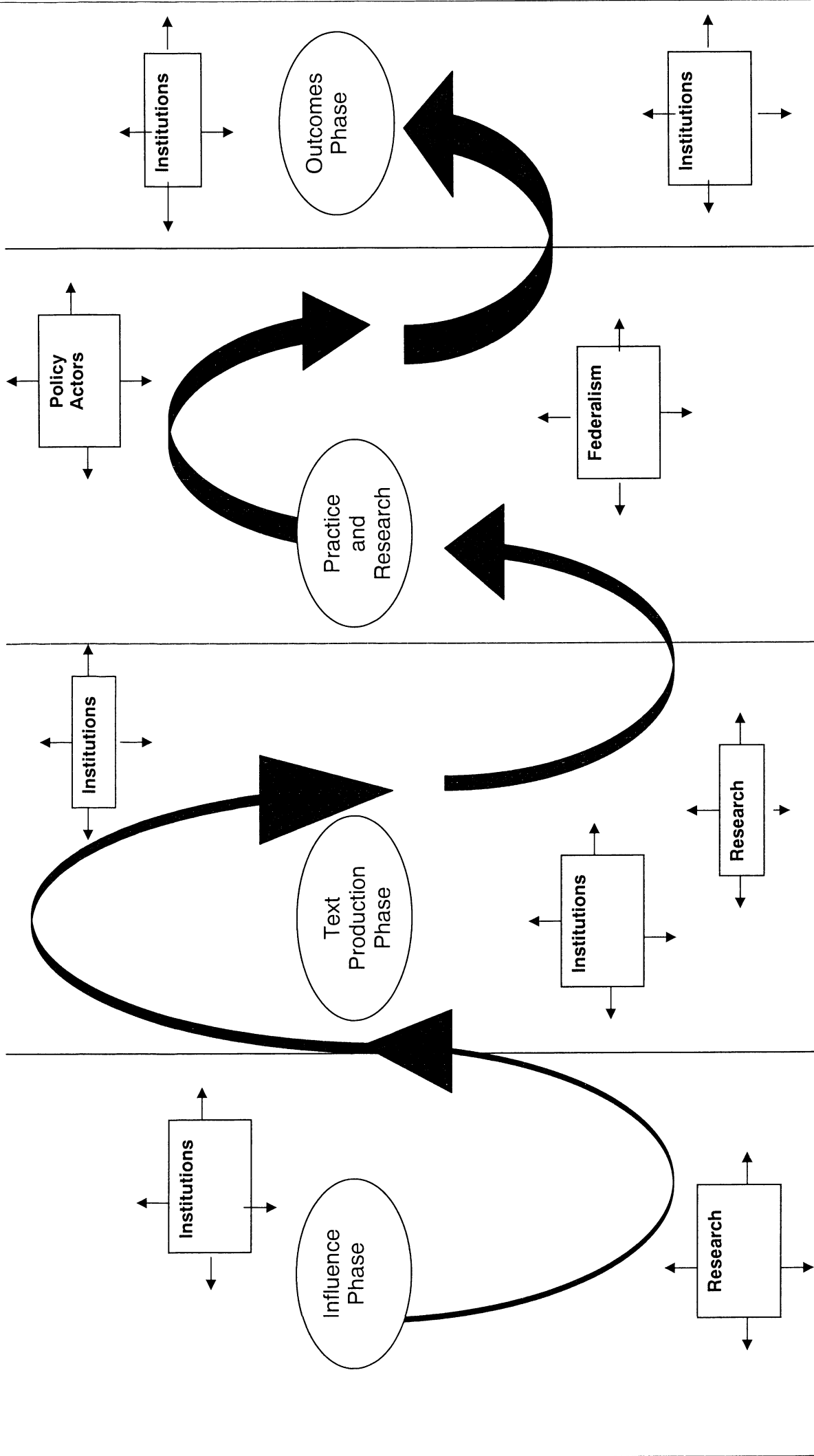
However, by applying the idea of a policy trajectory, the new model translates these contexts into the phases of a spiral, as illustrated by the loops shown in Figure 1. Each loop of the spiral represents a phase of the policy trajectory and the beginning and end of a policy context. The path of the spiral represents the policy trajectory.

Drawing on Considine (1994) and his systems approach to policy, the new model also shows that as the policy initiative moves along its trajectory, a range of forces influences it. These forces, borrowing from Lewin (1952), are either driving forces or restraining forces ie: they enable the policy to continue or lead it to stop, depending on the where they are along its policy trajectory.

These forces operate at the micro, meso and macro level of policy, and combine to produce the final policy trajectory. The forces reflect the influence of politics and other policy streams (after Kingdon), the influence of policy institutions (after Considine), the influence of corporate federalism (after Lingard) and the influence of policy actors and policy activism (after Yeatman).

These different forces combine to create a policy stakeholder force field through which the policy trajectory occurs.

However, as a policy initiative generates a policy trajectory across the various contexts of policy, it becomes increasingly complex, laden with concepts and meanings. It also becomes bound by what is possible or not possible at the micro, meso and macro levels of practice. As it becomes more laden with meanings and practices, it is less able to alter its path and may eventually come to a halt or be reconfigured and re-energised through different policy streams. This reducing frequency is represented in Figure1 by the flattening curves of the spiral.

The research has demonstrated that different policy drivers have varying effects and influence according to the policy context and stage of policy development or implementation that they apply to. The model can also accommodate different drivers and the extent of their influence in the policy force field.

Whilst the model attempts to apply some logic to the policy process, it remains relatively unstructured in order to reflect the inherently chaotic nature of policy.

Furthermore, whilst not fully developed, it can be argued that the new model warrants further consideration and should be tested by further policy examples. Indeed, ongoing research is likely to more closely map the drivers apparent from this and other research as a way of further validating the model.

Conclusion

This study on generic skills in Australian vocational education and training has opened a fascinating window into the contested terrain of education at the turn of the 20th century. It sheds light on the challenges that society continues to face in determining the purposes and responsibilities presumed of education.

The Key Competencies, and Employability Skills that followed them, represent Australia's attempts to address those skills that apply to work generally. They reflect established international interest in generic skills, and demonstrate that employer needs are now central to contemporary educational debates.

The Key Competencies emerged as a result of various key policy drivers. Regardless, industrial indifference, educational federalism and conceptual uncertainties came close to scuttling the initiative, and if it had not been for the personal influence of key policy actors and the availability of supplementary funding, the Key Competencies would not have featured in one of the country's largest ever educational trials.

Despite this opportunity, the Key Competencies were a policy initiative that came to be overlooked and bypassed, relegated to a second order priority by more pressing policy concerns and the inherent difficulties that they posed as a reform initiative. Consequently, the Key Competencies, and generic skills more broadly, no longer hold the promise of being a vehicle for cross-sectoral articulation, nor the passport for entrée into high performance workplaces.

Instead they are recognised primarily as being connected with good practice vocational learning, and thus in some ways, beyond the reach of centrally imposed policy initiatives and widespread adoption. Embedding or mapping generic skills are clearly elementary and superficial approaches, akin to intentionally sidelining them in policy and practice.

However, whilst the Key Competencies had only limited and localised impact on teaching and learning in schools and the VET sector, they did contribute to the success of the ongoing implementation of industry oriented education and training in Australian schools.

Most educators value being able to link their teaching with real world contexts so that students can learn how certain skills are used in the workplace and can start to practice them in a range of settings. However, despite a decade of generic skills initiatives, the challenge remains to find ways of doing this more effectively.

Whilst Employability Skills have been introduced as a way of refocusing attention on generic skills, as noted by Down (2004) 'the longer one looks at them, the more obvious it is that these are basically the Key Competencies re-badged' (2004: 3). Clearly, unless the concerns of the VET community are listened to and a mutually agreed final position is reached, there is a real danger that the Employability Skills will become as impotent after ten years as the Key Competencies have proven to be.

Bibliography

Abbott, C. (1998) 'Mentoring Pilot Projects in South Australia', paper presented at the *2nd Regional Tutoring and Mentoring Conference*, accessed on August 23, 2002 from
http://www.about.murdoch.edu.au/star/conference_proceedings/abstracts_pape rs/abbott.html

ACBP (1993) *Industry Consultation on Key Competencies,* Australian Centre for Best Practice, Melbourne: ACBP.

ACCI (1999) *Linking Education and the Labour Market – the need for an integrated approach*, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Barton: ACCI.

----- (1999b) *Priorities for the Training System*, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Barton: ACCI.

----- (2001) *Opportunity Lost*, Statement by Mark Paterson, Chief Executive, 16 March 2001, accessed on July 9 2003 from
http://www.acci.asn.au/text_files/media_releases/2001/17-01.PDF

----- (2002) *Employability Skills – An Employer Perspective: Getting What Employers Want Out Of The Too Hard Basket*, issues paper June 02, accessed on March 21, 2003 from http://www.acci.asn.au/index_policypapers.htm

ACCI and BCA (2002) *Employability Skills for the Future,* Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, Canberra: DEST.

AC Neilson Research Services (2000) *Employer Satisfaction with Graduate Skills - Research Report 99/7*, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra: DETYA.

ACER (2000) *Graduate Skills Assessment Test*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne: ACER.

ACTDET (1997) *Work Education Curriculum Support Paper: ACT Across Curriculum Perspectives,* Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training, Canberra: ACDET.

ACTU and TDC (1987) *Australia Reconstructed: A Report by the Mission Members to the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Trade Development Commission*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

AEC (1989) *Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia*, Australian Education Council, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

AEC (1991) *Minutes of the 66th Meeting of the Australian Education Council*, Melbourne October 1991, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (1992) *Minutes of the 67th Meeting of the Australian Education Council*, Melbourne, June 1992, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (1992a) *Minutes of the 68th Meeting of the Australian Education Council*, Auckland, September 1992, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (1993) *Minutes of the 69th Meeting of the Australian Education Council*, Perth, July 1993, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

AEU (2000) *Submission by the Australian Education Union to the Senate Inquiry into Quality in Australia's VET System*, accessed on 20 May 29, 2002 from http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/history/index.htm#Employment

----- (2001) 'The Commonwealth Role in Funding TAFE', *AEU TAFE Funding Campaign Fact Sheet,* No. 8 September 2001 accessed on 9 July 2003 from http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Tafe/documents/TAFEFundingCampaignSheetNo 8.pdf

---- (2002) 'Report to the National TAFE Council AGM', *AEU News*, January 31, 2002, Vol. 8 No. 1, accessed on 12 July 2003 from http://www.aeuvic.asn.au/2002%20News%201%20-%20TAFE%20council%20AGM.doc

AISV (2004) *Employability Skills*, Association of Independent Schools of Victoria and Simpson Management, Melbourne: (AISV).

Allen, S. (1993) 'National Curriculum: A parent perspective', *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 18(4), 3-8.

Allen Consulting Group (1994) *Successful Reform: Competitive Skills for Australians and Australian enterprises*, Australian National Training Authority, Brisbane: ANTA.

----- (1999) *Training to Compete: The Training Needs of Industry*, report to the Australian Industry Group (AIG) by Allen Consulting Group, Melbourne: AIG.

----- (2000) *Review of the ANTA VET in Schools Program*, final report by the Allen Consulting Group to the Australian National Training Authority, Brisbane: ANTA.

----- (2003) *Overview of Transition Programs: Policies and Programs*, a report prepared for the Business Council of Australia, Canberra: BCA.

ANAO (1996) The Administration of the Australian National Training *Authority*, Australian National Audit Office, accessed on July 2 2003, from http://www.anao.gov.au/WebSite.nsf/Publications/4A256AE90015F69B4A2569 0B0002E6BC

Anderson, D. (1998) 'Chameleon or Phoenix: the metamorphosis of TAFE', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Vocational Education Research,* Vol. 6, No. 2, 1998: 37-49.

----- (2000) 'Quasi markets in vocational education and training in Australia', *Learning Together Working Together: Building Communities for the 21st Century, Proceedings of the 8th Annual Conference on Post Compulsory Education and Training,* Brisbane: Australian Academic Press.

Anderson, G.L. (1989) 'Critical ethnography in education: Origins, current status and new directions', *Review in Educational Research*, 1989, 59 (3): 249-270.

Anderson, J. (1979) *Public Policy Making*. New York: Rinehart and Wineston.

ANTA (1996) *Training Packages in the National Training* Framework, Australian National Training Authority, Brisbane: ANTA.

----- (1998) *Updated guidelines for Training Package Developers*, Australian National Training Authority, Brisbane: ANTA.

----- (2000) *Employer Research Report*, Australian National Training Authority, Brisbane: ANTA.

----- (2001) 'Generic / Key Competencies', unpublished paper tabled at the National Training Quality Council meeting on July 13 2001, Melbourne: ANTA.

----- (2001a) *Reframing the Future: More People, Places and Projects*, Australian National Training Authority, Brisbane: ANTA.

----- (2002) *Due Credit: Examining the Potential to Recognise the Skills Achieved by Young People Participating in Youth Development,* Australian National Training Authority, Brisbane: ANTA.

----- (2002a) *Report of ANTA Chief Executive Officers' Committee members' perspectives on vision, future directions and priorities for VET for 2004 – 2010*, accessed on 30 June 2003 from http://www.anta.gov.au/pubBundle.asp?qsID=26

----- (2002b) *Environmental Scan for the National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004 – 2010*, accessed on 30 June 2003 from http://www.anta.gov.au/pubBundle.asp?qsID=26

----- (2003) *Shaping Our Future - Draft National Strategy for VET 2003-2010*, Australian National Training Authority, Brisbane: ANTA.

----- (2003a) 'New composition for national industry advisory arrangements', media release dated 26.5.2003 accessed on 20 July 2003 from http://www.anta.gov.au/news.asp?ID=221

----- (2003b) 'Project Tender Brief for Phase 3 of the High Level Review of Training Packages', accessed on 20 July 2003 from http://www.anta.gov.au/download/_Toc47151375

----- (2003c) *High Level Review of Training Packages Phase 1 Report: An analysis of the current and future context in which Training Packages will need to operate*, Australian National Training Authority, Brisbane: ANTA.

Apple, M. (1989) 'Critical Introduction: Ideology and the State in education policy', in Dale, R. (ed.) *The State and Educational Policy*, Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press.

Apple, M. (1993) 'Thinking "Right" in the USA: Ideological transformations in an age of conservatism', *in Lingard, B. et al (eds.) Schooling Reform in Hard Times*, London: Falmer Press.

Applebaum, E. and Batt, R. (1994) *The New American Workplace: Transforming work systems in the United States*, New York: ILR Press.

Aquilina, J. (1995) *Review of Implementation of Profiles and Outcomes*, Minister's Press Release, April 27, 1995, NSW Department of Training and Education Co-ordination, Sydney: DTEC.

Artcraft Research (1995) *The Key Competencies Promotional Strategy*, mimeo, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra: DETYA.

Ashworth, P. and Saxton, J. (1990) 'On Competence', *Journal of Further Education and Higher Education,* Vol.14, No2: 59-68.

Askov, E. and Gordon, E. (1999) 'The Brave New World of Workforce Education', *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, No. 83 (Fall 1999): 59-68.

Aspland, T. (1995) 'Using an NPDP experience to propose a changing conception of professional development', paper accessed on 21 September 2002 from http://cunningham.acer.edu.au/dbtw-wpd/exec/dbtwpub.dll

The Australian (1991) 'States Cry Foul', Rann, M., p.6, 1410/1992. Sydney: News Limited.

----- (1992), 'Unis Speak Out', Pennington, D., p.8, 23/7/1992, Sydney: News Limited.

Australian Financial Review (2000) 'Revolution in vocational education and training', Latham, M. p.7, 19/06/2000, Sydney: News Limited.

Bailey, T. (1997) 'Changes in the Nature of Work: Implications for Skills and Assessment', in O'Neil, F. and Mahwah, N. (eds.) *Workforce Readiness: Competencies and Assessment*, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates.

Baldwin, P. (1991) *Higher Education: Quality and Diversity in the 1990's,* policy Statement by the Hon, Peter Baldwin, MP, Minister for Higher Education and Employment, Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service.

Ball, S. (1990) *Politics and Policy Making in Education: Explorations in Policy Sociology,* London: Routledge.

----- (1993) 'What is policy: texts, trajectories and toolboxes', *Discourse*, Vol. 13, no.2, 10-18.

----- (1994) *Education Reform: A Critical and Post-Structuralist Approach,* Buckingham: Open University Press.

----- (1998) 'Big policies / small world: an introduction to international perspectives in education policy', *Comparative Education* 34, 2: 119-30.

Balzary, S. (2003) 'Skills for the future – an employer perspective', speech to the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies accessed on June 13, 2003 from http://www.fasts.org/site/Balzary_speech.pdf

Bartlett, V., Knight, J., Lingard, R., Porter, P. (1994) 'Redefining a national agenda in education: The States fight back', *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 21(2), 29-44.

Batrouney, T. (1985) *The national co-ordination of technical and further education*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, Monash University.

Becker, S. (1976) *The Economic Approach To Human Behaviour,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Beevers, B. (1992) 'Competency based training in TAFE: Rhetoric and Reality', in Collins, C. (ed.) *Competencies: the competencies debate in Australian education and training*, Canberra: Australian College of Education.

Bereiter, C. and Scardamalia, M. (1996) 'Rethinking learning', in Olson, D. and Torrance, N. (eds.) *The handbook of education and human development: new models of learning, teaching and schooling*, Cambridge Mass., Blackwell.

Beven, F. (1994) 'Pressing TAFE Learners into far transfer within a CBT framework', in Stevenson, J. (ed.) *Cognition at Work*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Biddle, B. and Saha, L. (2002) *The Untested Accusation: Principals, Research Knowledge and Policy Making in Schools*, Westport: ABLEX Publishing.

Billett, S. (1994) 'Authenticity in workplace learning settings', *Cognition at Work*, Stevenson, J. (ed), National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), Leabrook: NCVER.

Billett, S., McKavanagh, C., Beven, F., Angus, L., Seddon, T., Gough, J., Hayes, S., Robertson, I. (1999) *The CBT decade: teaching for flexibility and adaptability*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Leabrook: NCVER.

Blom, K. and Clayton, B. (2003) 'We can't teach them that!: reinstating the place of generic skills in VET', *Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association Conference*, 6th March 2003, Sydney: AVETRA.

Borthwick, A. (1993) 'Key competencies – uncovering the bridge between general and vocational, in Collins, C. (ed.) *Competencies: the competencies debate in Australian education and training*, Canberra: Australian College of Education.

Bowden, J. Hart, G., King, B., Trigwell, K., Watts, O. (2000) *Generic capabilities of ATN University Graduates*, accessed on 15 December 2002 from http://www.clt.uts.edu.au/ATN.grad.cap.project.index.html

Bowe, R., Ball, S., Gold, A. (1992) *Reforming Education and Changing Schools: Case Studies in Policy Sociology*, London: Routledge.

Brieschke, P. (1990) 'The surprise side of policy analysis', *Policy Studies Journal* 18, 2: 305-23.

Briggs, C. and Kittay, J. (2000) 'VET, Skill Formation and the Labour Market: an overview of the Major Contemporary Studies', Working Paper No. 1 for the Future of Work Project, NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training, Sydney: BVET.

Brockman, J (2003) *The New Humanists: Science at the Edge*, New York: Barnes and Noble Books.

Broughton, D. (1994) 'Education, Politics and Pragmatism in the Art Classroom of the National Profiles', paper presented to the *Australian Institute of Art Education National Conference*, 12 May 1994.

Brown, T. (1999) 'Challenging globalisation as discourse and phenomenon', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, Vol.18, No. 1: 3-17.

Bruner, J. (1990) *Acts of Meaning*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

BRW (1987) 'Business Steps in to help mould the class of '88', Duncan,T., 15 May 1987, pp. 20-26, *Business Review Weekly*: Sydney.

Butterworth, P. (1992) 'Is CBT the answer?', *Australian Training Review*, No.4, 1992.

Callan, V. (2003) *Generic skills: Understanding vocational education and training teacher and student attitudes*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Campus Review (2002) 'Credit Due for Pre-Voc Programs', Elson-Green, J. *Campus Review*, June 17-21, 2002, p.6.

----- (2003) 'VET system needs to be nimble on its feet to face the challenges that lay ahead', Elson-Green, J. *Campus Review*, February 19-25, 2003, p.17.

----- (2003a) 'Need for more focus on teachers skills', Elson-Green, J. *Campus Review,* May 4-30, 2003, p.8.

----- (2003b) 'A new national strategy?', Forward, P. *Campus Review*, February 19-25, 2003, Vol. 13 No. 5.

----- (2004) 'Return of the doctor in the house: Nelson's back', Maslen, G. *Campus Review*, October 27-November 2, 2004, Vol. 14 No. 42.

----- (2004a) 'Are soft skills merely a fad?', Eunson, B. *Campus Review*, September 29-October 5, 2004, Vol. 14 No. 38.

----- (2004b) 'ANTA: A potted history', Healy, G. *Campus Review*, October 27-November 2, 2004, Vol. 14 No. 42.

----- (2005) 'Critical Condition', Simon, L. *Campus Review*, August 24, 2005, Vol. 15 No. 33.

Candy, P., Crebert, G., O'Leary, J. (1994) *Developing Lifelong Learners through Undergraduate Education*, National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET), Commissioned Report No: 28, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Capelli, P. (1997) *Change at Work*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Capelli, P. and Rogovsky, N. (1994) 'New work systems and skill requirements', *International Labour Review*, vol. 133, No. 2: 205-220.

Carley, M. (1980) *Rational Techniques in Policy Analysis*, Aldershot: Gower.

Carmichael, L. (1992) *The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System*, report of the Employment and Skills Formation Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Carnevale, A. (1991) *America and the New Economy*, San Francisco: Jossey Boss.

----- (1995) 'Enhancing Skills in the New Economy', in Howard, A. (ed.) *The Changing Nature of Work,* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Carnevale, A. and Rose, S. (1998) *Education for what? The new office economy*, New Jersey: Educational Testing Service.

Castells, M. (1993) 'The information economy and the new international division of labour', in Carno, M. et al (eds.) *The New Global Economy in the Information Age: Reflections on Our Changing World*, University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

CEDA (1994) *From Education to Employment in a Global and Competitive Economy: An Australian Viewpoint*, Committee for the Economic Development of Australia, Melbourne: CEDA.

----- (1995) *Training for a Skilled Workforce: Review of the National Training Reform Agenda*, Committee for the Economic Development of Australia, Melbourne: CEDA.

Chappell, C. (1999). *The policies and discourses of vocational education and training and their impact on the information of teacher's identities*, Ph.D Thesis, University of Technology, Sydney.

------ (1999) 'Issues of teacher identity in a restructuring VET system', Working Paper RP90, Research Centre for Vocational Education Research, Sydney: RCVET.

Chappell, C. Gonczi, A., Hager, P. (1995) 'Competency based education', in Foley, G. (ed.) *Understanding Adult Education and Training*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Churchland, P. (1986) *Neurophilosophy: Toward a unified science of the mind brain: Computational models of cognition and perception*, Cambridge: MIT Press.

Clayton, B., Blom, K., Meyers, D., Bateman, A. (2003) *Assessing and Certifying Generic Skills*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Codd, J., Harker, R., Nash, R. (eds) (1990) *Political Issues in New Zealand Education*, Palmerston North: Dunmore.

Coleman, S. and Keep, E. (2001) *Background Literature Review for PIU Project on Workforce Development*, Performance Improvement Unit, UK Cabinet Office.

Collins, A., Brown, J. and Newman, S. (1989) 'Cognitive Apprenticeships', in Resnick, L. (ed.) *Knowledge learning and instruction: Essays in honour of Robert Glasser,* Hillsdale: L. Erlbaum Associates.

Collins, C. (1993) 'Introduction', in Collins, C. (ed.) *Competencies: the competencies debate in Australian education and training*, Canberra: Australian College of Education.

Colvin, P. (1996) 'Project Update: Queensland Key Competencies Project', unpublished report from the Queensland Department of Education tabled at a meeting of Key Competencies Project Officers, 23 May 1996, Canberra 1996.

Commonwealth of Australia (1997) *Investing for Growth*, Canberra: AusInfo.

----- (1999) *Knowledge and Innovation: Policy Statement on Research and Research Training*, Canberra: AusInfo.

----- (2001) *Backing Australia's Ability: An Innovation Plan for the Future*, Canberra: AusInfo.

Comyn, P. (1995) *Key Competencies in Industry Standards: Draft Facts Sheet and Technical Guidance,* Melbourne: ANTA Curriculum and Standards Council.

Considine, M. (1994) *Public Policy: A critical approach*, Melbourne: Macmillan.

Cook, C. (2004), 'Central problems of economic policy', *Pear's Cyclopaedia 113th Edition*, London: Penguin.

Cropley, A. (ed.) (1979) *Lifelong Education: A Stocktaking*, Hamburg: UIE Monongraphs.

Crouch, C. Finegold, M., Sako, M. (1999) *Are Skills the Answer? The Political Economy of Skill Creation in Advanced Industrial Countries*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Crump, S. and Walker, K. (1996) *NSW Key Competencies Pilot Project Evaluation*, NSW Department of Training and Education Coordination, Sydney: DTEC.

CTEHP (1999) *The Changing Nature of Work: Implications for Occupational Analysis,* The Committee for Techniques to Enhance Human Performance, Washington DC: National Capitol Press.

Cumming, A. (Chair) (1996) *Coordinating Diversity: Directions for post-compulsory school education in Queensland*, report of the Post-Compulsory Task Group, Brisbane: The State of Queensland.

Cunningham, G. (1963) 'Policy and practice', *Public Administration* 41: 229-38.

CURASS (1993) *National Statements and Profiles*, report of the Curriculum and Assessment Committee of the Australian Education Council, Melbourne: AEC.

Curtis, D. and McKenzie, P. (2002) *Employability Skills for Australian Industry: Literature Review and Framework Development*, report to the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Australian Council for Education Research, Camberwell: ACER.

Cutler, T. (1992) 'Vocational Training and British Economic Performance: A Further Instalment of the British Labour Problem?', *Work, Employment and Society,* vol. 6 (2).

Dale, R. (ed.) (1989) *The State and Educational Policy,* Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press.

Davis, G., Wanna, J., Warhurst, J. and Weller, P. (1993) *Public Policy in Australia*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Dawe, S. (2001) 'How do we teach generic skills in 2001', National Centre for Vocational Education Research, accessed on 20 November 2001 from http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/core/cp0004.pdf

----- (2003) 'The changing training practices in large Australian firms', *Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association Conference*: 6th March 2003, Sydney: AVETRA.

Dawkins, J. (1987) *Higher Education: A Policy Discussion Paper*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

----- (1998) *Strengthening Australian Schools*, Department of Education, Employment and Training, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Dearden, R. (1984) *Theory and Practice in Education*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

DEET (1993) 'Working Even Smarter', *The Gen*, Department of Employment, Education and Training Gender Equity Network, Jan / Feb 1993.

----- (1994) *Assessment: Technical Manual*, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

DEETYA (1996) *Principles and Guidelines for Improving Outcomes for Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Schools*, Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra: DETYA.

----- (1997) *School to Work Program*, accessed on December 12, 2001 from http://www.detya.gov.au/schools/guidelines/quadrennial/1997-2000/content.htm

Deshler, D. and Hagan, N. (1989) 'Adult Education Research', in Merriam, S. and Cunningham, P. (eds.) *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education*, Oxford: Jossey – Bass.

DEST (2004) *Development of a Strategy to Support the Universal Recognition and Recording of Employability Skills: A Skills Portfolio Approach*, Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Technology, Canberra: DEST.

----- (2005) *Development of a national employability skills e-portfolio website*, accessed August 26, 2005 from http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/career_development/programmes_funding/progr amme_categories/key_career_priorities/employability_skills.htm

DETYA (2000) *Learning for the Knowledge Society*, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

----- (2000a) *Participation in post-compulsory schooling*, IAED Occasional Papers Series 3/2000, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Deveson, I. (1990) *Training costs of award restructuring: report of the Training Costs Review Committee*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

DEWR (2004) *Request for Tender for the provision of Employability Skills Assessment Tool*, RFT 04/05-0009, Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra: DEWR.

DIRETFE (1994) *Details of Strand Objectives from Commonwealth and NSW Key Competencies Agreement*, NSW Department of Industrial Relations, Employment, Training and Further Education, Sydney: DIRETFE.

Down, C (1997) 'Tapping into Commonsense and Experience: Using the Key Competencies to Enhance Workplace Experience', *Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association Conference* 23 March 1997, Sydney: AVETRA.

----- (1998) 'Maximising Learning: Integrating the Key Competencies into VET practice', *6th Annual International Conference on Post-Compulsory Education and Training,* 15 December 1998, Centre for Learning and Work Research, Brisbane: Griffith University.

----- (2000) 'Key Competencies in Training Packages', *NCVER Annual Research Update Conference*, 25th May 2000, Coffs Harbour, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

----- (2000b) *Key Competencies in Training Packages*, Australian National Training Authority, Brisbane: ANTA.

----- (2004) 'Employability Skills: Revisiting the Key Competencies or a new way forward?', *Seventh Australian VET Research Association Conference,* 17 – 19 March 2004, Rydges Eagle Hawk Resort, Canberra: AVETRA.

Down, C. and Figgis, J. (2000) 'Underpinning knowledge in Training Packages', *6th Annual International Conference on Post-Compulsory Education and Training,* 15 December 1998, Centre for Learning and Work Research, Brisbane: Griffith University.

Downs, J. (1997) *Teaching and Learning the Key Competencies in Vocational Education and Training: A Professional Development Strategy*, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra: DETYA.

Dudley, J. and Vidovich, L. (1995) *The Politics of Education: Commonwealth Schools Policy 1973-1995*, Melbourne: ACER.

Duke, C. (1982) 'Evolution of the Recurrent Education Concept', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 1: 4, 323-40.

Dye,T. (1978) *Understanding Public Policy,* New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

ECEF (2001) *Our Role*, the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation, accessed on February 20 2003 from http://www.ecef.com.au/web/ab_home.nsf/ECEF/ab_ourrole

EDQLD (1999) *Joint Policy Statement: Vocational Education and Training in Schools: future directions,* accessed on 23 October 2002 from http://education.qld.gov.au/students/placement/vet/pdfs/vetinschool.pdf

----- (2000) *The New Basics Project*, Education Queensland, accessed on 23 October 2002 from http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/newbasics/html/trial/trial.html

Edwards, R. (1979) *Contested Terrain: the transformation of the workplace in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Basic Books.

Edwards, T., Whitty, G., Fitz, J. (1989) *The State and Private Education: An Evaluation of the Assisted Places Scheme*, London: Falmer Press.

Eldridge, D. (1999) *Footprints to the Future*, the Report from the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce, accessed on 20/6/02 from http://www.youthpathways.gov.au/documents/summary.pdf

Eltis, K. (1995) *Focussing on Learning: Report of the Review of Outcomes and Profiles in New South Wales Schooling*, Sydney: NSW Department of Training and Education Coordination.

Eunson, B. (2002) 'Off to work we go, lacking basic skills', The Australian, 11 December 2002, Page 26, Sydney: News Limited.

Evans, G. (1994) 'Learning in apprenticeship courses', in Stevenson, J. (ed.) *Cognition at Work,* National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Evers, C. (2000) 'Connectionist modelling and education', *Australian Journal of Education*, 44, 3: 209-225.

Fairclough, N. (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*, Cambridge, Mass: Polity Press.

Field, L. (1995) *Organisational learning and CBT,* unpublished monograph.

----- (2002) *Industry speaks! Skill requirements of leading Australian workplaces*, Department of Education, Science and Training, Canberra: DEST.

Field, L. and Mawer, G. (1996) *Generic Skill Requirements of High Performance Workplaces*, Sydney: DTEC.

Finegold, D. (1999) 'Creating self sustaining high skill ecosystems', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, vol.15 (1): 27-39.

Finn, B. (Chair) (1991) *Young People's Participation in Post-compulsory Education and Training*, Melbourne: Australian Education Council.

Flinders University (1998) *Graduate Employers Survey 1998,* Adelaide: Flinders University.

Foley, G. and Morris, R. (1995) 'The history and political economy of Australian adult education', in Foley, G. (ed.) *Understanding Adult Education and Training*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Fookes, D. (1994) 'The life and times of Cinderella', in Kearns, P. and Hall, W. (eds.) *Kangan: 20 years on*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

----- (1996) 'Training frustrated at every point by self serving parties', *The Australian*, 2 May: 12, Sydney: Fairfax.

Foucault, M. (1980) *'Power / Knowledge'* in Gordon, C. (ed.) *Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, Brighton: Harvester Press.

Freedland, J. (1992) 'Education and Training for School to Work Transition', in Seddon, T. and Deer, C. (eds.) *A Curriculum for the Senior Secondary Years,* Melbourne: ACER.

Fulcher, G. (1989) *Disabling Policies? A Comparative Approach to Education Policy and Disability,* London: Falmer Press.

Gardiner, P. and Johnson, S. (1996) 'Thinking Critically about Critical Thinking: An unskilled enquiry into Quinn and McPeck', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 30(3), 441 - 456.

Garrick, J. (1996) *The Dialectic of Informal Learning: A study of the discursive effects on the workplace learning of trainers situated within post industrial corporate agendas*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Technology, Sydney.

Gewirtz, S. and Ozga, J. (1990) 'Partnership, pluralism and educational policy: a reassessment', *Journal of Educational Policy*, Vol. 5, No.1: 37-48.

Ghost, S. (2002) 'VET in schools: the needs of industry', in *Unicorn: Journal of the Australian College of Educators*, Vol. 28, No.3, December 2002: 61-64.

Gillespie, P. and Lee, S. (1996) *Key Competency Training and Recognition Service Pilot Project,* a report by the Canberra Institute of Technology under the Commonwealth Key Competencies Program, Canberra: CIT.

Goddard, D. and Ferguson, F. (1996) *Small Business Owners, Their Employment Practices and Key Competencies*, a report by Business in the Community Ltd., Canberra: DETYA.

Gonczi, A., Curtin, R., Hager, P., Hallard, A., Harrison, J. (1995) *Key Competencies in On the Job Training*, a report by the Research Centre for Vocational Education and Training (RCEVT), University of Technology, Sydney: UTS.

Goody, J. (1999) 'Education and Competences: An Anthropological Perspective', in Rychen, D. and Salganik, L. (eds.) *Defining and Selecting Key Competencies*, Gottingen: Hogrefe and Huber.

Goozee, G. (1993) *The Development of TAFE in Australia*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Grant, G. (1979) 'Implications for Competence Based Education', in Grant, G. (ed.) *On Competence*, Jossey Bass: San Francisco.

Grant, P. and Moy, J. (1996). *Teaching and Learning the Key Competencies: A resource kit,* Sydney: NSW TAFE Commission and NSW Department of Training and Education Co-ordination.

Green, F. (1999) 'The Market Value of Generic Skills', Skills Task Force Research Paper 8, *British National Skills Task Force* accessed on 1 December 2002 from http://www.dfee.gov.uk/skillsforce

Green, F., Ashton, D., Felstead, A. (2000) 'Estimating the Determinants of Supply of Computing, Problem Solving, Communication, Social and Team Working Skills', conference proceedings, *Skill Measurement and Economic Analysis,* University of Kent at Canterbury, 27-29 March 2000.

Griffith University (2003) 'Why should generic skills be articulated in program and course outlines?', *The Griffith Graduate for Educators*, accessed on June 13, 2003 from http://www.gu.edu.au/centre/gihe/griffith_graduate/programs_courses/content1.html

Habermas, J. (1971) 'Towards a Theory of Communicative Competence', *Inquiry*, 1970b, (13), pp. 360-75.

----- (1971a) *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Boston: Beacon Press.

Hackman, R. and Oldham, G. (1980) *Work Redesign*, Menlo Park, CA: Addison Wesley Publishing Company.

Handy, C. (1994) *The empty raincoat: making sense of the future*, London: Hutchinson.

Hager, P and Gonczi, A. (1993) 'Attributes and Competence', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Vocational Education Research*, 1:1, pp. 36-45.

----- (1997) *Piloting the Key Competencies in the Australian Vocational Education and Training Sector and Workplaces – A Synthesis Report,* report by the Research Centre Centre for Vocational Education and Training, University of Technology, Sydney: DTEC.

----- (2003) *Generic competencies and workplace reform in the Australian construction industry*, OVAL Research working paper; 03-01, University of Technology, Sydney: OVAL Research.

Hager, P., McIntyre, J., Moy, J., Comyn, P. Stone, J., Schwenke, C., Gonczi, A. (1996) *Workplace keys: Piloting the key competencies in workplace training*, Research Centre for Vocational Education and Training, University of Technology, Sydney: DTEC.

Hager, P. (1997) *Learning in the Workplace,* Review of Research Monograph Series, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

----- (1998) 'On-the-job and off-the-job assessment: Choosing a balance', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Vocational Education Research*, Vol.6, No.2: 87-103.

----- (1998a) 'Developing judgement: A proposal for facilitating the implementation of the Key Competencies', paper at the *7th VET Research Conference*, 14–17 July 1998, Wagga Wagga.

----- (2000) 'Know how and practical workplace judgement', *Journal of Philosophy of Education,* Vol. 34, No. 2: 281-296.

Hagar. P., Holland, S. and Beckett, D. (2002) *Enhancing the Learning and Employability of Graduates: The role of Generic Skills,* Business Higher Education Round Table Position Paper No. 9, Melbourne: BHERT.

Halpin,D. (1995) 'Practice and Prospects in Education Policy Research', in Halpin, D and Troyna, B. (ed.) *Researching Education Policy: Ethical and Methodological Issues*, London: Falmer Press.

Hargreaves, A. (1996) 'Transforming knowledge: blurring the boundaries between research, policy and practice', *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* Vol. 18, No. 2: 105-22.

Harman, G. (1984) 'Conceptual and Theoretical Issues', in Hough, J. (ed.) *Educational Policy: An International Survey*, London: Crom Helm.

Harris, R., Willis, P., Simons, M., Underwood, F. (1998) *Learning the job: Juggling the messages in on-and-off-the-job training*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Harris, R. (2000) *More than meets the eye: Rethinking the role of workplace trainer,* National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Haste, H. (1999) 'Competencies; psychological realities. A psychological Perspective', in Rychen, D. and Salganik, L. (eds.) *Defining and Selecting Key Competencies,* Gottingen: Hogrefe and Huber.

Hattam, R. and Smyth, J. (1998) 'Competing logics in the Key Competencies: A sociological reading of post-compulsory education and training in Australia', *Research in Post-Compulsory Education,* Vol. 3, No. 2: 124-144.

Havelock, R. (1969) *Planning for Innovation through Dissemination and Utilisation of Knowledge,* Michigan: University of Michigan Institute for Social Research.

Hawke, G. and Cornford, I. (1998) 'Australian vocational education policy change: But will the revolution improve the quality of training?', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Vocational Education Research*, Vol 6, No 2: 58-65.

Heclo, H. (1978) 'Issue networks and the executive establishment', in King, A. (ed.) *The New American Political System*, Washington: American Enterprise Institute.

Hilmer, F. (1993) *National Competition Policy: Report of the Independent Committee of Inquiry into Competition Policy in Australia*, Canberra: Australian Govt. Pub. Service.

Hocking, H. (1993) 'The Relationship Between Research and Policy: Case Studies in a State Department of Education', in Walker, J. (ed.) *Educational Policy Development and Implementation,* Canberra: AARE.

Horton, M. (2002) personal communication, telephone dated 14 May 2002.

House of Representatives (1998) *Today's Training: Tomorrow's* Skills, Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training Inquiry into the Role of Institutes of TAFE, Canberra: House of Representatives.

Howes, D. (1997) 'Implementing the Curriculum Standards Framework in Victoria', in Lokan, J. (ed.) *Describing Learning: Implementation of Curriculum Profiles in Australian Schools 1986-1996,* Camberwell: ACER.

Husen, T. (1984) 'Issues and their Background', in Husen, T. and Kogan, M. (eds.) *Educational Research and Policy: How do they relate*, Stockholm: Pergammon.

Hyland, T. (1993) 'Competence, Knowledge and Education', *Journal of Philosophy of Education,* Vol. 27, No. 1: 93-107.

Hyland, T. and Johnson, S. (1998) 'Of cabbages and key skills: exploding the mythology of core transferable skills in post school education', *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* Vol. 22, No. 2: 163-172.

Institution of Engineers Australia (1996a) *Changing the culture: Engineering education into the future: Report summary,* Barton: Institution of Engineers Australia.

Jacobs, S. (1997) 'From Piloting to Mainstream: the Northern Territory journey', in Lokan, J. (ed.) *Describing Learning. Implementation of Curriculum Profiles in Australian Schools 1986-1996*, Camberwell: ACER Press.

Jakupec, V. and Roantree, B. (1993) 'Impact of the Martin report on technical and further education', in Meek, L. and Harman, G. (eds.) *The binary experiment for higher education: An Australian perspective,* Armidale: University of New England.

Jasinski, M. (1996) *Teaching and Learning the Key Competencies in Vocational Education and Training*, Western Adelaide Institute of TAFE, Adelaide: DETFE.

Jessop, B. (1990) *State Theory: Putting the Capitalist State in Its Place*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Johnston, D. (2000) *The New Economy*, unpublished monograph.

Johnston, N. (1992) *The Universities and the Competency Movement*, Canberra: Australian National University.

Joyce, D. (2001) 'Taking a hard look at soft skills', *HR Monthly*, April 2001, pp.28-30, Australian Human Resources Institute.

Kamarainen, P. (1999) 'Key qualifications and new learning concepts', paper at *IVETA '99 Conference: Skilling for a Small Planet*, International Vocational Education and Training Association, Sydney, 11-13 August 1999.

Kamarainen, P. and Cheallaigh, M. (2000) 'Key Qualifications: From Theory to Practice', paper at *Transforming Learning in Education and Training* seminar, Center for Vocational Education and Training in Europe, Thessaloniki: CEDEFOP.

Kangan, M. (1974) *TAFE in Australia: Report on needs in technical and further education*, Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Karaolis, J. (1995) 'Recent change in Australian education: A view from the schools', accessed on 5 September 2002 from http://www.gse.ecel.uwa.edu.au/gse/erp/vol24no2/3Karaolis.htm

Karmel, P. (1985) *Quality of education in Australia*, a report of the Review Committee into the Quality of Education in Australia, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

----- (1994) 'Education and the economic paradigm', paper at *Confusion Worse Confounded - Australian Education in the Nineteen Nineties Conference*, Canberra, 23rd June 1994, Canberra: Academy of Social Sciences in Australia.

----- (1995) 'Education and the economic paradigm', *Canberra Bulletin of Public Administration*, No. 78, August 1995: 34-39.

----- (1996) 'Desirable outcomes - Australian education policy in the nineties', *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management,* Vol. 18, No. 1: 23-33.

Karpin, D. (1995) *Enterprising nation: Renewing Australia's managers to meet the challenges of the Asia-Pacific century,* report of the Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills, Canberra: Australian Govt. Publishing Service.

Kearns, P. (2000) *Generic Skills for the New Economy: A Review of Research Relating to Generic Skills*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Kearns, P. and Papadopoulos, G. (2000) *Building a Learning and Training Culture: The Experience of Five OECD Countries*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Kearns, P., McDonald, R., Candy, P., Knights, S., Papadopoulos, G. (1999) *VET in the Learning Age*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Keating, P. (1994) *Working Nation – Policies and Programs*, Canberra: Australian Government. Publishing Services.

Kemp, D. (1997) 'National Literacy Plan Adopted', media release by the Hon. Dr David Kemp MP, Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, March 14, 1997 K9/97.

----- (1997a) 'Retention Rate Fall Highlights Need for Government Reforms', media release by the Hon. Dr David Kemp MP, Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, January 23, 1997 K1/97.

----- (1997b) 'New Competitive Training Market', media release by the Hon. Dr David Kemp MP, Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, July 10, 1997 K35/97.

----- (1998) '$176 Million For Literacy Programmes', media release by the Hon. Dr David Kemp MP, Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, May 12, 1998 K35/98.

----- (1999) Keynote address by the Hon. Dr David Kemp MP, Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, to the Curriculum Corporation 6th National Conference, 6-7 May, 1999.

----- (1999a) 'Considering Three Sector Partnerships: Government, Corporate, Community – Breaking the Barriers', keynote address at the *Civics National Forum on Civil Society*, 26 March Sydney, accessed on 23 October 2001 from http://www.detya.gov.au/archive/ministers/kemp/ks260399.htm

----- (1999b) 'Preparing Youth For The 21st Century: The Policy Lessons From The Past Two Decades', address to the OECD by the Hon. Dr David Kemp MP, Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Washington, D.C., 23-24 February 1999 accessed on 23 October 2001 from http://www.detya.gov.au/archive/ministers/kemp/ks240299.htm

----- (2000) 'Business sees need to lift graduate skills', media release by the Hon. Dr David Kemp MP, Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 8 February 2000, K002 8.
http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/ministers/kemp/feb00/k002_080200.htm

Kenway, J. (1990) *Gender and Education Policy: A Call for New Directions*, Geelong: Deakin University Press.

Kenway, J. Bigum, C., Fitzclarence, L. (1993) 'Marketing education in the 1990's: An introductory essay', The Australian Universities Review 36, 2: 2-6.

----- (2003) *Reshaping Education in Globalising, Tribalising, Hybridising Times*, Hawke Research Institute, Working Paper Series No 22 accessed on July 9 2003, from http://www.hawkecentre.unisa.edu.au/institute/

Kerka, S. (2000) *Future Work: Myths and Realities*, ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, delivered on December 2000 from ericave@lists.acs.ohio-State.edu

Keys Young (1999) *Evaluation Of The Enterprise Education In Schools Element Of The School To Work Programme,* report for the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra: DETYA.

Kingdon, J. (1984) *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, Boston: Little Brown.

Kirby, P. (1985) *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Labour Market Programs*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

----- (2000) *Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria*, Department of Education, Employment and Training, Melbourne: DEET.

Knowles, M. (1991) 'Creating Lifelong Learning Communities', *New Education,* Vol. 13, No. 1: 69-75.

Labor Council (2002) 'Labor Council of NSW Annual Report 2002', accessed on July 23, 2003 from http://www.council.labor.net.au/reports/2002/2002-Michael.html#Heading441

Lather, P. (1991) *Feminist research in Education: Within / Against*, Geelong: Deakin University Press.

Lawson, T. (1992) 'Core Skills 16-19', in Whiteside, A. et al (eds.) *16-19 Changes in Education and Training*, London: David Fulton.

Lawnham, P. (2000) 'National Strategy on VET Vetting', *The Australian*, 1/7/2000, Sydney: News Limited.

Levin, B. (1998) 'An epidemic of education policy: (What) can we learn from each other?' *Comparative Education* 34, 2: pp. 131-141.

Lewin, K. (1952) *Field theory in social science : selected theoretical papers by Kurt Lewin,* London: Tavistock Publishers.

Lewis, A. (2002) personal correspondence, email dated 14 May 2002.

Lincoln, Y. and Guba, E. (1990) 'Judging the quality of case study reports', *Qualitative Studies in Education,* 3(1).

Lingard, B., Bartlett, V., Knight, J., Porter, P. (1995) 'Federal/State mediations in the Australian national education agenda: From the AEC to MCEETYA 1987-1993', *Australian Journal of Education*, Vol. 39, No. 1: 199-230.

Livingstone (1999) 'Lifelong Learning and Underemployment in the Knowledge Society: A North American Perspective', *Comparative* Education, Vol. 35, No. 2: 27-35.

Lohrey, A. (1995) *A Report on Transferability in Relation to the Key Competencies*, report by the NLLIA Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture, University of Technology, Sydney: UTS.

Luke, A. (1997) 'New narratives of human capital: Recent redirections in Australian educational policy', *Australian Educational Researcher*, Vol. 24, No. 2, August 1997.

Lukes, S. (1973) *Individualism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Maglen, L. (1996) 'VET and the University', *Inaugural Professorial Lecture*, Department of Vocational Education and Training, Melbourne: University of Melbourne.

Maguire, M. and Ball, S. (1994) 'Researching politics and the politics of research: Recent qualitative studies in the UK,' *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, Vol. 7, No. 3: 269-85.

Malley, J. and Keating, J. (2000) 'Policy Influences on the Implementation of Vocational Education and Training in Australia', *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, vol 52, No. 4: 627-652.

Malley, J. (2000) 'Education, Training and Employment: tectonic plates of doctrine, policy and change in the creation of a knowledge based society', *Australian Economic Review*, Vol. 4: 431-442.

Malley, J., Ainley, J., Robinson, L. (2001) *Witnessing Evolution: A report on the growth of workplace learning in Australian schools to 1999*, Enterprise and Career Education Foundation, Sydney: ECEF.

Marginson, S. (1992) 'Education as a branch of economics: The universal claims of economic rationalism', *Melbourne Studies in Education*, Vol. 26: 1-14.

----- (1993) *Education and Public Policy in Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

------ (1994) 'The problem of transferable skills', *Melbourne Studies in Education*, pp. 4-28.

----- (1997) *Educating Australia: Government, Economy and Citizen since 1960*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

----- (2000) *The Changing Nature and Organisation of Work and the Implications for Vocational Education and Training in Australia*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Marett, A. and Hoggard, L. (1996) *Key Competencies and Transfer of Learning...Perceptions from the Workplace*, NSW TAFE Commission Assessment Centre for Vocational Education, Sydney: NSW TAFE.

Marsh, C. (1995) *Foundation Knowledge and the Key Competencies*, Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Training, Canberra.

Martin, L. (1964) *Tertiary education in Australia: Report of the Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia to the Australian Universities Commission,* Melbourne: Government Printers.

Mayer, E. (Chair) (1992) *Putting Education to Work: The Key Competencies report*, Australian Education Council and Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training, Melbourne: ACE.

----- (1992a) *Employment-related Competencies: a Proposal for Consultation*, Mayer Committee, Australian Education Council and Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training, Melbourne: ACE.

----- (1992b) 'Key Competencies unlock the future', *The Australian*, 14/10/1992, Sydney: New Limited.

----- (1992c) *Employment – Related Key Competencies for Post Compulsory Education and Training: A Discussion Paper,* Melbourne: ACE.

McCurry, D. (1995) 'Assessment and Reporting Key Competencies: Questions and Options', unpublished paper for the ACACA National Meeting on 28-29 July 1995.

----- (1996) *Approaches to Assessing the Key Competencies*, a report by the Australian Centre for Educational Research, Melbourne: ACER.

----- (2002) *Methods of Assessing and Reporting Student Achievement of Key Competencies*, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, Melbourne: VCAA.

----- (2002a) *Notes Towards a Model of Cognitive abilities within an Overarching Model of Performance*, unpublished monograph, Melbourne: ACER.

McCurry, D. and Bryce, J. (1997) *The school-based key competencies levels assessment project,* Department of Education, Employment and Training, Canberra: DEETYA.

McDonald, R. (2000) 'Towards General Vocational Qualifications', unpublished monograph, Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), Brisbane: ANTA.

McDonald, R. (1999) *The Transition from Initial Education to Working Life: A Status Report on Australia's Progress*, Australian National Training Authority, Brisbane: ANTA.

MCEETYA (1989) *Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia*, Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (1994) *Minutes of the 2nd MCEETYA Meeting,* Alice Springs 3-4 November 1994. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (1995) *Minutes of the 3rd MCEETYA Meeting,* Canberra May 26, 1995. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

------ (1995a) *Minutes of the 4th MCEETYA Meeting,* Adelaide 7-8 December 1995. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

------ (1996) *Minutes of the 5th MCEETYA Meeting,* Brisbane, 17-18 July 1996. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

------ (1997) *Minutes of the 6th MCEETYA Meeting,* Melbourne, 14 March 1997. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (1997b) *National Report On Schooling In Australia: 1997,* accessed on September 12, 2002 from http://www.curriculum.edu.au/.trashes/501/mctyapdf/anr1997/sect7.pdf

----- (1997c) *Minutes of the 7th MCEETYA Meeting,* Darwin, 12 June 1997. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (1998) *Review of the 1989 Common and Agreed Goals for Schooling in Australia,* Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (1998b) *National Report On Schooling In Australia: 1998,* accessed on September 28, 2002 from http://www.curriculum.edu.au/.trashes/501/mctyapdf/anr1998/sect5.pdf

----- (1998c) *Minutes of the 9th MCEETYA Meeting,* Hobart 23-24 April, 1998. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (1999) *Adelaide Declaration on the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty First Century,* Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (2000) *New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools: Policy Directions,* Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (2000b) *Minutes of the 11th MCEETYA Meeting,* Sydney 30 - 31 March, 2001, Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (2001) *New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools: Implementation,* Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (2001b) *Minutes of the 12th MCEETYA Meeting,* Melbourne 26-27 July, 2001. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (2001c) *Terms of Reference for the Transitions From School Taskforce,* Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA, accessed on 20 February 2003 at http://www.curriculum.edu.au/mceetya/taskfrce/task2213.htm

----- (2001d) 'The Acquisition of Employment Related Skills by Secondary School students', briefing paper for the 1st meeting of the Transitions From School Taskforce, Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (2002) *Stepping forward - improving pathways for all young people*, a Joint Declaration by Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers for Education, Training, Employment, Youth and Community Services, Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA, accessed on 20 June 2003 at http://www.curriculum.edu.au/mceetya/stepping_forward.htm

----- (2002a) *Minutes of the Transitions From School Taskforce*, meeting 2 held on March 1, 2002, Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (2002b) *Minutes of the Transitions From School Taskforce*, meeting 4 held on May 3, 2002, Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (2002c) *Minutes of the 13th MCEETYA Meeting,* Auckland, 18-19 July, 2002. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (2002d) *Minutes of the Transitions From School Taskforce*, meeting 8 held on September 10, 2002, Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (2002e) *Minutes of the Transitions From School Taskforce*, meeting 6 held on June 24, 2002, Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

----- (2003) Australian Education Systems Officials Committee, Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, accessed on June 21, 2003 from http://www.curriculum.edu.au/mceetya/aesoc.htm#dec

----- (1996) *Their Future: Options for Reform of the Higher School Certificate*, NSW Department of Training and Education Co-ordination (DTEC), Sydney: DTEC.

----- (1997) *Securing Their Future: the New South Wales Government's reforms for the Higher School Certificate*, Sydney: NSW Minister for Education and Training.

McIntyre, J. (1994) 'Researcher Understandings and Qualitative Methodology', in Neville, B. et al (eds.) *Qualitative Research in Adult Education: A colloquium on theory practice, supervision and assessment,* Underdale: University of South Australia.

----- (1998) 'What do we mean 'research influences policy?', *Inaugural conference of the Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association*, University of Technology Sydney, February 16-17 1998.

----- (1998b) 'Arguing for an interpretive method', in Higgs, J. (ed.) *Writing Qualitative Research*, Sydney: Hampden Press.

----- (2000) 'Generic skills and the performative workforce: employment context, occupational field and vocational expertise', unpublished funding proposal from the University of Technology, Sydney to NCVER, Sydney: UTS.

McIntyre, J. and Wickert, R. (2000) 'The negotiated management of meanings', in Garrick, J. and Rhodes, C. (eds.) *Research and Knowledge at Work: Perspectives, Case-studies and Innovative Strategies*, New York: Routledge.

McLaughlin, M. (1987) 'Learning from experience: Lessons from policy implementation', *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 9, (2): pp. 171- 8.

McLeish, A. (2002) *Employability skills for Australian small and medium sized enterprises: Report of the interviews and focus groups with small and medium enterprises,* Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, Canberra: DEST.

MERS (1998) *Metal and Engineering Training Package*, Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Industry Training Advisory Body Ltd, Sydney: MERSITAB.

Mertens, H. (1972) 'Schlüsselqualifikationen', Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, Bonn: BIBB.

MEST (1995) *Major Reforms to Training Systems in Five Countries,* Ministry of Education and Training, Province of British Columbia, Vancouver: MEST.

Misko, J. (1995) *Transfer – using learning in new contexts*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Moodie, G. (2000) 'Laying the foundation for change', *The Australian*, Wednesday 19/5/2000, p. 39, Sydney: News Limited.

Moran, T. (1993) 'Meeting the challenges in vocational education', *Unicorn,* Vol. 19, No. 4: 9-17.

Moy, J. (1999) *The Impact of Generic Competencies on Workplace Performance*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Murnane, R. and Levy, F. (1996) *Teaching the New Basic Skills, Principles for Educating Children to Thrive in a Changing Economy*, New York: Free Press.

Murray-Smith, S. (1966) 'A history of technical education in Australia', unpublished thesis, Monash University.

NBEET (1990) *Advice of the Employment and Skills Formation Council July 1998 – June 1990*, National Board of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra: NBEET.

NCS (1995) *Evaluation of the National Professional Development Program*, report by National Curriculum Services for the Department of Education, Employment and Training, Canberra: DEET.

NCVER (2000) *Australian Apprentice and Trainee Statistics 1995 – 1998*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

----- (2003) 'The growing significance of generic skills', *Insight*, Issue 10, May 2003, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

----- (2003a) 'Developments in generic skills in Australia', working paper distributed at the Generic Skills Research Update Forum in Melbourne on June 27th 2003, Leabrook: NCVER.

----- (2004) *Generic Skills in Vocational Education and Training: Research Readings*, Gibb, J. ed. National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Nelson, B. (2002) *Employability Skills For The Future*, media release by Dr Brendan Nelson, Minister for Education, Science and Training, MIN 77/02, 23 May 2002, accessed on 3 June 2003 from http://www.acci.asn.au/text_files/reports/Media_Release_DEST.pdf

----- (2002a) *Strong Foundation For Australia's Future Skill Needs* media release by Dr Brendan Nelson, Minister for Education, Science and Training, MIN 65/02, 14 May 2002, accessed on 30 June 2003 from http://www.dest.gov.au/ministers/nelson/may02/n65_140502.htm

Neville, J. (1993) *Economic Rationalism: On Throwing Out the Bathwater, But Saving the Baby,* Working Paper No 3, New College Institute for Values Research, University of NSW, Sydney: UNSW.

Nicholls, J. (2001) 'Vocational Success Story Steeped in Chaos', *The Australian*, Wednesday 21/3/2001, p.43. Sydney: News Limited.

NIEF (1995) *Business, Industry and Key Competencies*, a report for the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs by the National Industry Education Foundation, Melbourne: NIEF.

Nijhof, W. (1998) 'Qualifying for the future', in Nijhof, W. and Streumer, J. (eds.) *Key Qualifications in Work and Education*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Nijhof, W. and Streumer, J. (eds.) (1998) *Key Qualifications in Work and Education,* Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

NPITC (1993) 'Key Competencies', unpublished monograph on the Key Competencies by the National Printing Industry Training Council.

NSW IEU (2002) ACTU Unions In VET Conference Outcomes, Sydney, August 1-2, accessed on June 13, 2003 from
http://www.ieu.asn.au/issues/general/46.html

NSW DET (2001) *Newsletter of Vocational Education and Learning,* Issue No 18 September 2001, NSW Department of Education and Training accessed on 28 November 2002 at
http://www.zip.com.au/~jsst/publications/novel/novel_18.pdf

NSW TAFE (2000) submission by the NSW TAFE Managers Association to the Senate Inquiry into Quality in Australia's VET System, accessed on 23 January 2003 at
http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/history/index.htm#Employment

NSWTF (2001) 'TAFE-coalition offers more of the same', accessed on July 21 from http://election.nswtf.org.au/news/policies/same.html

NTB (1992) *Industry Competency Standards and Key Competencies,* National Training Board, Canberra: NTB.

Oats, T. (2001) 'Key Skills / Key Competencies: avoiding the pitfalls of current initiatives', paper presented at the 2nd *International DeSeCo Symposium,* February 14-16, Geneva.

Obeng, E. (1996) *Putting Strategy to Work: The Blueprint for Transforming Ideas into Action,* London: Pitman Publishing.

OECD (1973) *Recurrent Education: A Strategy for Lifelong Learning,* Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris: OECD.

----- (1975) Education and Working Life in Modem Society, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris: OECD.

----- (1985) *Becoming an Adult in a Changing Society,* Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris: OECD.

----- (1989) *Education and the Economy in a Changing Society,* Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris: OECD.
----- (1989a) 'Enterprise Education', OECD Education Monograph, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris: OECD.

----- (1991) *Linkages in Vocational-Technical Education and Training,* Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris: OECD.

----- (1999a) *Definition and Selection of Key Competencies,* (DeSeCo*),* Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris: OECD.

----- (1999b) *Projects on Competencies in the OECD Context: Analysis of Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations* (DeSeCo), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris: OECD.

----- (1999c) *Comments on the DeSeCo Expert Opinions* (DeSeCo), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris: OECD.

----- (2000a) *Is There a New Economy?*, First Report on the OECD Growth Project, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris: OECD.

----- (2000b) *Knowledge Management in the Learning Society*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris: OECD.

Packer, A. (1998) 'The End of Routine Work and the Need for a Career Transcript', *Hudson Institute's Workforce 2020 Conference,* Indianapolis, Indiana, October 1998.

Palmer, G. and Short, S. (1994) *Health Care and Public Policy: An Australian Analysis*, Melbourne: Macmillan.

Perkins, D. and Salomon, G. (1989) 'Are cognitive skills context bound', *Educational Researcher*, Vol 18, 1: 16-25.

Pettigrew, M. (1995) 'Coming to Terms With Research: The Contract Business', in Halpin, D. and Troyna, B. (ed.) *Researching Education Policy: Ethical and Methodological Issues*, London: Falmer Press.

Pickette, R. (1992) 'The national training reform agenda – the key role for industry', *What Future for Technical and Vocational Education*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Pusey, M. (1991) *Economic Rationalism in Canberra: A Nation-building State Changes its Mind,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Prunty, J. (1985) 'Signposts for a critical educational policy analysis', *Australian Journal of Education,* Vol. 29, No. 2: 133-139.

Ramsey, G. (1994) 'Future directions for technical and further education', in Kearns, P. and Hall, W. (eds.) *Kangan: 20 Years On,* National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Randall, R. (1993) 'Linking Key Competencies and the National Curriculum Agenda', in Collins, C. (ed.) *Competencies: the competencies debate in Australian education and training*, Canberra: Australian College of Education.

Rann, M. (1991) 'Canberra's Clammy Hands', South Australian Minister for Employment and Further Education, 16 October 1991.

RATIO (2002) 'Building pathways and linkages to Training Packages', unpublished report for the Australian National Training Authority, Brisbane: ANT.

Reich, R. (1991) *The Work of Nations*, New York: Simon and Schuster.

Rein, M. (1983) *From Policy To Practice*, London: McMillan.

Resnick, L. (1987) *Education and Learning to Think*, Washington DC: National Academy Press.

Richards, C. (1996) 'Training's New Future', *The Age*, 27/5/1996, p.18, Sydney: Fairfax.

Ridge, J. (2001) 'We Need Outcomes Based Funding in our Training System', *The Australian*, 14/8/2001, p.43, Sydney: News Limited.

Rist, R. (1994) 'Influencing the policy process with qualitative research, in Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks California: Sage Publications.

Rowland, M. and Young, B. (1996) *Report on the Outcomes of the Key Competencies Pilot Phase*, MCEETYA Schools Taskforce, Canberra: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

Rowland, M. (2002) personal communication, email dated 21 March 2002.

Royer, J. (1979) 'Theories of the transfer of learning', *Educational Psychologist,* no 14, pp. 23 - 29.

Ruby, A. and Wildermuth, C. (1994) 'The emerging national perspective in education', in Crowther, F. et al (eds.) *The Workplace in Education: Australian perspectives, national agenda*, Sydney: Edward Arnold.

Rumelhart, D. (1989) 'The architecture of mind: A connectionist approach' in Posner, M. (ed.) *Foundations in Cognitive Science*, Cambridge: MIT Press.

Rumelhart, D. and Smolensky, J. (1986) 'Schemata and sequential thought processes in PDP models', *Parallel distributed processing: Volume 2 – Psychological and Biological Models*, PDP Research Group, Cambridge: MIT Press.

Rumsey, D. (1995) *The Key Competencies in Industry Competency Standards,* The National Training Board, Canberra: NTB.

Ryan, C. (1997) *NSW Key Competencies Pilot Project Report*, NSW Department of Training and Education Co-ordination, Sydney: DTEC.

Ryan, R. (2001) 'Master concept or defensive rhetoric: Evaluating Australian VET policy against past practice and current international principles of Lifelong Learning', *International Education Journal* Vol. 2, No. 3: 98-120.

Rychen, D. (2001) 'Introduction', in Rychen, D. and Salganik, L. (eds.) *Defining and Selecting Key Competencies*, Gottingen: Hogrefe and Huber.

Rychen, D. and Salganik, L. (eds.) (2003) *Key Competencies for a Successful Life and a Well-Functioning Society*, Gottingen: Hogrefe and Huber.

Ryle, G. (1949) *The Concept of the Mind*, London: Hutchinson.

SA (2000) *South Australian Government Submission to the Senate Enquiry into the Quality of VET in Australia*, Government of South Australia, accessed on February 4 2003 from http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/EET_CTTE/submissions/eet_vet/129%20SA%20Govt.doc

Salier, M. (1996) letter to the Chair of the MCEETYA Standing Committee on Schools dated 22 November 1996, cited in Rowland and Young et al (1996) *Report on the Outcomes of the Key Competencies Pilot Phase*, MCEETYA Schools Taskforce, Canberra: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

SCANS (1992) *Learning a Living: A Blueprint for High Performance*, Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, Washington, Department of Labour.

----- (1991) *What Work Requires from Schools*, Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, Washington, Department of Labor.

Scarino, A. (1994) 'The National Statements and Profile for Languages', *Babel*, Vol.29, No. 1: 23-34.

Schofield, K. (1994) 'The clash of the titans', in Kearns, P. and Hall, W. (eds.) *Kangan: 20 Years On*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Scribner, S. (1984) 'Cognitive Studies of Work', *The Quarterly Newsletter of the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition*, Vol. 96: 11-2.

SEA (undated) *Key Competencies Project Report*, Secondary Education Authority of Western Australia, Perth: SEA.

Selby Smith, C., Hawke, G., McDonald, R., Selby Smith, J. (1998) *The Impact of Research on VET Decision Making*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Seddon, T. (1992) 'An historical reckoning: Education and training reform', *Education Links* Vol. 44: 5-9.

----- (1994) 'Reconstructing social democratic education in Australia: versions of vocationalism, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, Vol. 26: 63-82.

----- (1995) 'Educational leadership and teachers work', in Smyth, J. (ed.) *Educational leadership: political, cultural, critical and gendered perspectives*, Adelaide: Flinders Institute for the Study of Teaching.

----- (2000) 'Redesigning Collective Educational Capacity: From Integrated Public Systems to Capacity Building Enterprises', paper at the *8th Annual Conference on Post Compulsory Education and Training*, Brisbane: Australian Academic Press.

Senate References Committee (2000) *Aspiring to Excellence: Report into the Quality of Vocational Education and Training in Australia*, Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

----- (1995) *Report of the inquiry into the Australian National Training Authority*, Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Schofield, K. (1999) *A Risky Business - Review of the Quality of Tasmania's Traineeship System*, Tasmanian Office of Post Compulsory Education and Training, Hobart: OPCET.

----- (1999a) *Independent Investigation into the Quality of Training in Queensland's Traineeship System*, Queensland Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, Brisbane: DETIR.

----- (2000) *Delivering Quality: Report of the Independent Review of the Quality of Training in Victoria's Apprenticeship and Traineeship System*, Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training, Melbourne: DEET.

----- (2002) *An Industry-Led System: Issues for policy, practice and practitioners, Report 2, Issues For Policy, OVAL Research Working Paper 03-02, Sydney: UTS.*

----- (2003) 'Notes for the Inquiry Hearing: Sydney, 6 May 2003', Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee Inquiry into Current and Future Skill Needs, accessed on June 20 from http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/EET_CTTE/submissions/eet_vet/129%20SA%20Govt.doc

Schon, D. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner*, New York: Basic Books.

Scott, B. (1990) *TAFEs Commission for the 1990s: Restructuring Vocational, Basic and Adult Education in NSW*, Sydney: NSW Government Printing Service.

Shreeve, R. (1995) 'User Choice and the Training Market', paper presented at the *Australian National Training Authority's 1995 National Conference*, Brisbane, 8-10 February 1995.

Silver, H. (1990) *Education, Change and the Policy Process*, London: Falmer Press.

Smith, E. (2000) 'The first job: Experiences of young Australians starting full-time work', *Youth Studies Australia*, Vol. 22, No. 1: 11-17.

----- (2002) 'Attitudes and Employability Skills', unpublished monograph.

Smith, E. and Comyn, P. (2003) *The development of employability skills in novice workers*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Smith, J. and Marsiske, M. (1997) 'Abilities and competencies in adulthood: Lifespan perspectives on workplace skills', in Tuijnman, A. et al (eds.) *Adult basic skills: Innovations in measurement and policy analysis*, Cresshill NJ: Hampton Press.

Smith, L. (2000) *Issues Impacting on the Quality of Assessment in Vocational Education and Training in Queensland*, report for the Queensland Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, Brisbane: DETIR.

Sociology Central (2005) 'Post-Fordism', accessed on 3 March 2005 from http://www.sociology.org.uk/p1ne4a.htm

St. Julien, J. (2000) 'Changing conceptions of human intelligence and reasoning: Implications for the classroom', *Australian Journal of Education*, Vol. 44, No. 3: 254-271.

Stake, R. (1994) 'Case Studies', Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds.) Handbook of Qualitative Research, Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Stanley, G. (1993) Competencies: the competencies debate in Australian *education and training*, Collins, C. (ed.), Canberra: Australian College of Education.

Stasz, C. (1997) 'Do employers need the skills they want? Evidence from technical work', *Journal of Education and Work*, Vol. 10, No. 3: 205-223.

----- (1998) 'Generic Skills at work: implications for occupationally oriented education', in Nijhof, W. and Streumer, J. (eds.) *Key Qualifications in Work and Education*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Stevenson, J. (1991) 'Cognitive structures for the teaching of adaptability in TAFE', in Evans, G. (ed.) *Learning and Teaching Cognitive Skills*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne: ACER.

----- (1992) 'Performance of the cognitive holding power questionnaire in Queensland schools', *Australian Association for Research in Education and the New Zealand Association for Research joint conference in Education*, 1992.

----- (1993) 'Competency based training in Australia: an analysis of assumptions', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Vocational Education Research*, Vol 1, No: 1: 87-104.

----- (1995) 'The Metamorphosis of the Construction of Competence', *Studies in Continuing Education*, Vol.18, No. 1: 24-42.

----- (1998) 'Finding a basis for reconciling perspectives on vocational education and training', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Vocational Education Research*, Vol. 6, No. 2: 134-165.

Stronach, I. and MacLure, M. (1997) *Educational Research Undone*: *The Postmodern Embrace*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Stronach, I. and Morris, B. (1994) 'Polemical notes on educational evaluation in the age of policy hysteria', *Evaluation and Research in Education* Vol. 8, No. 12: 5-19.

Sweet, R. (1991) 'Submission to the Finn Review on behalf of the Dusseldorp Skills Forum', *Young People's Participation in Post-compulsory Education and Training*, Melbourne: Australian Education Council.

----- (1995) 'Linking schools and workplaces: Lessons from Australia and overseas', paper from the *Second World Convention of the International Confederation of Principals*, Sydney, August 1995.

----- (2000) 'The Jigsaw Revisited: Comparative Perspectives on Transitions', paper presented to *Victorian Industry Education Partnerships Forum*, 26 April 2000.

Sydney Morning Herald (1986) 'Education or Bust' by Ross Gittens, March 23, p. 17. Fairfax: Sydney.

----- (2001) 'The new illiteracy', by Peter Vincent, February 28, p.6. Fairfax: Sydney.

TAFESA (1997) *Key Competencies: Current Activities*, quotes from project officers accessed on 13 October 2002 from http://www.dino.tafe.sa.edu.au/vet_div/irsi/key_comp/htm/kcindex.html

TASED (2000) *Strategic Development and Evaluation Services: Major Issues and Initiatives for 1999-00*, Tasmanian Education Department Budget Papers, accessed on October 27, 2002 from http://www.education.tas.gov.au/budget/99-00/op4mii.htm

Taylor, R. (1996) *Report of the Review of the ANTA Agreement*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra: AGPS.

Taylor, S., Rizvi, F., Lingard, B. and Henry, M. (1997) *Education Policy and the Politics of Change*, London: Routledge.

Thomson, P. and Murphy, J. (1987) *Transferable Skills in technical and further education and training*, Adelaide: TAFE National Centre for Research and Development.

Townsend, M. (1993) *Generic Skills and Transfer*, report for the Policy, Research and Development Division of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, Auckland: NZQA.

Trow, M. (1991) *University and society: essays on the social role of research and higher education*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Troyna, B. (1994) 'Reforms, Research and Being Reflexive About Being Reflective', in Halpin, D and Troyna, B (eds.) *Researching Educational Policy*, London: The Falmer Press.

----- (1994a) 'Critical social research and education policy', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2: 70-84.

Turner, D. (2002) *Employability Skills Development in the United Kingdom*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Usher, R. (1989) 'Locating Experience in language: Towards a post structuralist theory of experience', *Adult Education Quarterly,* Vol. 40, No. 1: 23-32.

Usher, R. and Edwards, R. (1994) *Postmodernism and Education*, London, Routledge.

USYD (2002) 'Employability Skills for the Future: Comments from the University of Sydney', *Minutes of the Undergraduate Studies Committee*, accessed on June 13, 2003 from http://www.usyd.edu.au/su/ab/committees/USC/2002/USCJul02.pdf

Vanstone, A. (1997) *Getting Young People Competent for Work* media release, V18/97, Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra: DEETYA.

Varghese, J. (2003) 'VET system needs to be nimble on its feet to face the challenges that lay ahead', *Campus Review*, February 19-25, 2003.

VCAA (2000) *Key Competencies Assessment and Reporting Trial*, Victorian Board of Studies Memorandum to Schools No: 109/2000 accessed on 23 October 2002 from
http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/publications/ARCHIVE/2000%20Memoranda/DOCS/Memo_109.doc

Veenker, P. (2003) 'All of VET's roles must be acknowledged', *Campus Review*, February 19-25, 2003.

VICDET (2002) *Regional Development Through School Industry* Partnerships, Victorian Department of Education and Training, accessed on 23 October 2002 from http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/rdsip/index.htm

Vickers, M. (1995) 'Cross-national exchange, the OECD and Australian education policy', *Canberra Bulletin of Public Administration,* No 78: 52-63.

Virgona, C., Waterhouse, P., Sefton, R., Sanguinetti, J. (2003) *Making Experience Work: Generic Skills through the Eyes of Displaced Workers*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

VQA (2002) *VCAL - The Hands-on Option for Year 11 and12 Students*, Victorian Qualifications Authority, accessed on June 3 2003 from http://www.vqa.vic.gov.au/vqa/vcal/default.htm

Vygotsky, L. (1986) *Thought and Language*, (A. Kozulin, Trans.), Cambridge: MIT Press.

WACC (1998) *Post-Compulsory Education Review Discussion Paper*, Western Australia Curriculum Council, Perth: WACC.

----- (2001) *Our Youth Our Future: Post Compulsory Education Review*, Western Australia Curriculum Council, Perth: WACC.

----- (2002) *Our Youth Our Future: Summary of the Directions Endorsed by The Western Australian Government*, Western Australia Curriculum Council, Perth: WACC.

WADOT (2002) *Employment Directions: Employability Skills Framework*, accessed on June 3 2003 from http://www.wqa.wa.gov.au/wqa/wacal/default.htm

Walters, S (ed.) (1997) *Globalisation and Adult Education*, London: Zed Press.

Weber, M. (1949) *Methodology of the Social Sciences*, Glencoe: Free Press.

----- (1978). 'Politics as a vocation', in Runciman, W. (ed.) *Max Weber Selections in Translation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Weinert, F. (2001) 'Concept of Competence: A Conceptual Clarification', in Rychen, D. and Salganik, L. (eds.) *Defining and Selecting Key Competencies*, Gottingen: Hogrefe and Huber.

Weiss, C. (1979) 'The Many Meanings of Research Utilisation', in Anderson, D. and Biddle, B. (eds.) *Knowledge for Policy: Improving Education through Research,* London: The Falmer Press.

----- (ed.) (1992) *Organizations for policy analysis: helping government think*, Newbury Park : Sage.

Welch, A. (1996) *Australian Education: Reform or Crisis*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Werner, M. (1995) *The development of generic competencies in Australia and New Zealand*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook: NCVER.

Wickert, R. (1998) *Adult literacy in Australia: questions of politics, activism and the processes of policy production*, Sydney: University of Technology Sydney.

Williams, B. (1979) *Education, Training and Employment: Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Education and Training*, Canberra: AGPS.

Williams, K. and Cutler, T. (1987) 'The end of mass production? *Economy and Society,* Vol.16, No. 3: 23-33.

Willis, M. (1997) 'The National Agenda in the National Capital', in Lokan, J. (ed.) *Describing Learning: Implementation of Curriculum Profiles in Australian Schools 1986-1996,* Camberwell: ACER Press.

Wilson, B (1992) 'Higher Education', conference proceedings, *Higher Education and the Competency Movement*, Canberra: Australian National University.

Winchester, J. and Comyn, P. (1997) 'Using generic skills in action learning: Bridging the gap from CBT to organisational learning', paper at the *Capability in Action Conference*, University of Sydney, September 23-24.

Winchester, J. and Sheridan, P. (1997) 'Action Learning at Bristol-Myers Squibb', paper at the *Capability in Action Conference*, Sydney University, 27-28 October 1997.

Wolf, A. (1991) 'Assessing Core Skills: wisdom or wild goose chase?', *Cambridge Journal of Education,* Vol. 21, No 2: 120-136.

Yates, L. (1993) *The education of girls: Policy, Research and the Question of Gender,* Australian Council of Education Research, Hawthorn: ACER.

Yates, L. (1995) 'Just what sort of endeavour is policy research in education?', Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference, Hobart November 1995.

Yeatman, A. (1987) 'The concept of public management and the Australian State in the 1990s', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 46, No. 4: 339-53.

----- (1990) *Bureaucrats, Technocrats, Femocrats: Essays on the Contemporary Australian State*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

----- (1994) *Postmodern revisionings of the political*, New York: Routledge.

----- (1996) 'The contractualism: Management reform or a new approach to governance?', in Weller, P. and Davis, G. (eds.) *New Ideas, Better Government*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

----- (1998) *Activism and the Policy Process*, Melbourne: Allen and Unwin.

Appendices:

A.   Researcher Reflexivity

B.   Interview Consent Form

C.   Interview Schedule

D.   NSW Department of Education and Training Research Clearance

A.   Researcher Reflexivity

'there is no it, no obdurate social world, there are only different tellings of different stories, and these are organized under the headings of the same tale' (Denzin 1993: 125)

My involvement with the Key Competencies commenced around the middle of 1995 when I applied for an internally advertised position within the NSW Department of Training and Education Co-ordination (DTEC). That Department was the recently created entity formed from the merger of the NSW Department of Industrial Relations, Employment, Training and Further Education (DIRETFE) and NSW TAFE. It was a time of considerable change. The position involved responsibilities associated with managing the workplace component of the NSW Key Competency Project which formed part of the national trial of the Key Competencies conducted 1994-97. Delays associated with my appointment could be interpreted as a symptom of the attitude towards the pilots as simply being another project 'that would come and go like so many other ideas'. Suffice to say, the general environment created by restructuring meant that most staff were not interested in moving to new roles (possibly away from their substantive position) which might expose them as allegiances and priorities shifted within the organization.

Whilst initially collocated with the TAFE project team, it was clear to me from the outset that the project did not rate highly on the 'radar' of those to whom I reported, one of whom was a recently displaced staffer from the Minister's office who clearly did not see the Key Competencies as being a major feature of her next career move.

Regardless, I commenced work and soon became involved in the tasks of the job. Organising the consultancies, attending management meetings and working with the project staff from the other sectors. The challenges associated with the Key

Competencies soon became apparent in the first stage of the project which focused primarily on mapping curriculum and identifying the presence of the KCs in school, TAFE and workplace training curriculum. A strong memory of this part of the project relates to the seemingly endless meetings of the cross sectoral NSW project team which struggled over questions of definition and classification. A feature of the NSW project that differentiated it from other State projects was the fact that there was cross-sectoral collaboration and co-operation involving the project staff (approx. 30). Working definitions, mapping criteria, discussion papers and the other products of work were all shared as part of the professional development of the project team. However, these processes highlighted the conceptual difficulties around the development and implementation of a generic skills agenda within schools, TAFE and workplace training. It was a contested field, but I soon became one of the 'converted', who saw the Key Competencies as a way of improving the quality of teaching and learning. In essence I believed that the Key Competencies had the potential to live up to the policy rhetoric that surrounded them.

As the project proceeded and the ideas surrounding the KCs became more developed, it became clear that the consequences of a KC system would involve considerable costs associated with professional development, curriculum revision and administration in order to more explicitly focus on the delivery, assessment and reporting of these generic skills.

Being part of the 'VET sector', there were particular implications for those systems and procedures that were different to those being considered by the schools and TAFE alone.

One of those surrounded the registration of training organizations and the accreditation of courses that formed part of the 'open training market' being developed through user choice. In early 1996, I naively prepared a paper making recommendations to the Director responsible for this aspect of training reform, (the

NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board) proposing a number of changes that would be required to the guidelines governing providers and courses in order to ensure delivery, assessment and reporting that better provided for the development of the KCs. Similarly, a paper was prepared and sent to the Standards and Curriculum Council (SCC) who were responsible, amongst other things, for the format and development of competency standards that underpinned the development of VET at that time. That paper outlined a more substantial approach to integrating KCs within the performance criteria of units of competency, and then recording them as part of the unit template. Of course such recommendations from a grade 9/10 clerk within the State bureaucracy were never going to have the effect that was intended and my policy activism did not travel far.

As the projects were completed, and the new framework of Training Packages became apparent, the finishing touches were made to project reports. At this time there was growing recognition that the views and concerns of the VET sector were not being adequately addressed nor heard within the overall project that was managed by the schools Division within the Commonwealth's Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET). Consequently, some last minute manoeuvring was attempted to raise the implications of the project with staff within the relevant agencies. Resoundingly, there was no impact, and in most cases it was suggested that no steps would be taken until the projects were completed and policy recommendations made.

It became obvious at the time thought that in the VET sector at least, there were bigger issues being considered at the time, and that the findings of the Key Competency trials were not going to change the major policy frameworks that were being contested at that time, most notably, the National Training Framework (including Training Packages), the Australian Recognition Framework (ARF) and the further implementation of User Choice.

The completion of the trial projects led me to review my position with the effect that I took a position outside of the bureaucracy and became involved with the network of industry training bodies focused on the rural industries. At that time, as part of the development of the Agriculture Training Package, the rural ITABs (Industry Training Advisory Bodies) were revising the competency standards that underpinned the delivery of VET for their industries. As the Executive Officer of the NSW ITAB, I soon became involved in discussions around the standards template and the approach to be taken when writing the content of those standards. Fresh from KC experience, I made efforts to revive my proposal for integrating KCs into standards. This in effect took the position that vocational competence was simply the application of a combination of key competencies in a particular context, and that the KCs could be used as the basis upon which to describe that context. Whilst I developed some draft units using this format, it was not enough to convince the Executive Officers of the other rural ITABs, and ultimately the approach was rejected on the basis that the standards were not technical enough and didn't foreground the industry specific aspects of the competency being described.

Around this time I came to be interested in the question of why the Key Competencies had not had a greater impact on policy. In effect, the situation had changed from one that that envisaged a national cross-sectoral framework for assessing and reporting generic skills to one where the Key Competencies were simply noted after the event, as an add on, something that was necessary to comply with the 'regulations' of the day.

This process energized my interest in the processes of policy that created this situation, and ultimately provided me with the vehicle to 'theorise' this development and analyse the policy process it embodied.

This practical experience with generic skills in Australian vocational education and training clearly influenced my approach to collecting and analysing the data during this research.

Whilst conscious of the limits of the data and my interpretation of it, my analysis doe focus more on understanding the events and the outcomes of the policy process as a means of developing an alternate view of policy making in Australian vocational education and training.

It is by no means a comprehensive telling, containing as it does different accounts from different policy arenas. Regardless, I acknowledge that my role as researcher has constructed the account as a result of my interpretive approach to the management and analysis of data.

B. Interview Consent Form

**UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY
CONSENT FORM – STUDENT RESEARCH**

I _____ *(participant's name)* agree to participate in the research project Key Competencies: Policy or Plaything? Being conducted by Paul Comyn, a PhD student at the Faculty of Education, University of Technology, Sydney (Ph: ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓)

I understand that the purpose of this study is to examine the policy processes surrounding the development, railing and implementation of the Key Competencies, Australia's initial response to the challenge of developing generic skills within education.

I understand that my participation in this research will involve one or more interviews of approximately one hour's duration.

I am aware that I can contact Paul Comyn, or his supervisor Prof. Andrew Gonczi, (Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Technology, Sydney, PO Box 123, Broadway NSW 2007; Ph: 02 9514 3808) if I have any concerns about the research. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this research project at any time I wish and without giving a reason.

I agree that Paul Comyn has answered all my questions fully and clearly.

I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way.

_____   ____/____/____
Signed by

_____   ____/____/____
Witnessed by

NOTE:
This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer, Ms Susanna Davis (ph: 02 – 9514 1279). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.
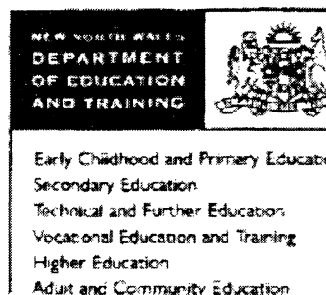
C. Interview Schedule

Not all questions will be asked of all participants. The questions asked will be determined by the roles the participants have had as actors in the Key Competencies policy process.

- What sector were you working with ie: schools, TAFE, industry or cross sectoral?

- What role did you have in the developing and or trailing of the Mayer Key Competencies?

- How did that role shape the development of approaches to delivery, assessment and reporting of the Key Competencies within the pilots you were involved in?

- How effective as a concept do you think the Key Competencies are?

- Do you think that the limitations identified during the pilot phase were significant enough to limit the implementation of the Key Competencies?

- What do you think was the most significant problem surrounding the Key Competencies?

- What are the policy settings in your area of professional practice in relation to the Key Competencies?

- Why do you think these policy settings were adopted?

- Do you think they are adequate? If not, why not?

- What political dynamics affected these settings?

- What other issues affected the final approaches adopted by the systems in your jurisdiction?

- How much of an effect did your own attitudes and values have on your role in shaping the outcome of the pilots you were involved in?

- Despite the settings at the system level, can you comment on how the Key Competencies have been implemented within your jurisdiction

- What did you learn about policy making in VET from your involvement in the Key Competencies Pilots?

D. NSW Department of Education and Training Research Clearance

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR-GENERAL
TAFE EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

NEW SOUTH WALES
DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION
AND TRAINING

Early Childhood and Primary Education
Secondary Education
Technical and Further Education
Vocational Education and Training
Higher Education
Adult and Community Education

Mr Paul Comyn
SmithComyn & Associates
93 Bream Street
COOGEE NSW 2034

Dear Mr Comyn   SERAP Number 01 1

I refer to your application to conduct a research project in TAFE NSW and NSW government schools, entitled *Key Competencies: Policy or Plaything*.

Your application was referred to Mr Robin Shreeve, Deputy Director-General of TAFE NSW for approval, based on the significant involvement of TAFE NSW envisaged in the research proposal. Mr Shreeve has asked me to reply on his behalf.

I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved subject to the following protocols.

- All contact with TAFE personnel to be negotiated through Ms Cathy Barry, Director of TAFE Access Educational Services Division and, where appropriate, TAFE institute directors.

- Notification of all activity to be provided to Ms Barry one week in advance

- A schedule of interviews proposed to be provided to Ms Barry

- Interviews with staff should be taped and a transcript or copy of the tape be provided to interviewees for their records

- The Deputy Director-General of TAFE NSW be given the opportunity to read and comment on the sections of the research report that relate to TAFE NSW

- Submission of all material in relation to TAFE NSW prior to publication to a committee of Paul Brock and Cathy Barry

- Agreement to omit all material deemed damaging and/or unfair by a committee of Paul Brock, Director Strategic Research and Cathy Barry, Director Access Division

- Information and/or resources gathered in the course of the research are to be used expressly and only in relation to the research.

This approval will remain valid until 16/03/02.

I also draw your attention to the following requirements for all researchers when undertaking research in NSW government schools:

- School Principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time. The approval of the Principal for the specific method of gathering information for the school must also be sought.

- The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.

- The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school's convenience.

When your study is completed please forward your report marked to Strategic Research Directorate, Department of Education and Training, Level 6. 35 Bridge Street, Sydney. NSW 2000

To indicate your agreement to the protocols outlined in this letter, please sign this letter below and return the original to this office. Please retain a copy for your own records.

Yours sincerely

Jozefa Sobski
Assistant Director-General TAFE Educational Services
26 March 2001

SIGNATURE

NAME *PAUL COMYN*

DATE *9 April 2001*