



Improving participation and success in VET for disadvantaged learners: provider survey findings

Centre for International Research on Education Systems

Victoria University

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Introduction

This report presents results from a national registered training organisation (RTO) vocational education and training (VET) provider survey conducted as part of the ‘Improving student participation and success in vocational education and training’ study commissioned by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). The project is being conducted by the Centre for International Research on Education Systems at Victoria University.

The project’s overall aim is to gain a better understanding of ways to widen the participation and success of disadvantaged populations in vocational education and training. It seeks to develop a picture of practice in the sector that will give policy makers and practitioners alike a better understanding of how learners from different backgrounds and locations may successfully engage in and complete programs that are most appropriate to their needs.

To do this the study has involved a mixed method and staged approach to data collection that involves:

- 1 development of an initial literature and policy review,
- 2 the undertaking of an intensive analysis of national administrative data on VET learner outcomes with a particular focus on the participation and performance of disadvantaged learners,
- 3 the administration of a national online survey of all VET registered training organisations (RTOs) to understand practices employed with such learners at the provider level and finally
- 4 the undertaking of regional case studies to investigate identified instances of strong performance.

This report deals with the third stage of the study—the national survey of key VET providers, undertaken as a census. The survey of TAFEs and skills institutes, polytechnics, private and community RTOs was undertaken over five weeks in July and August 2016. It involved a national mapping of RTO practices specifically associated with delivery of programs to disadvantaged learners—such as learners from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, those who are unemployed, low skill workers, learners in rural and isolated areas of Australia, Indigenous Australians, learners with a disability, refugees, and those with little or no prior education.

The survey aimed to generate a provider-based picture of strategies employed across the sector to support disadvantaged learners in achieving successful outcomes. In terms of the broader study’s overall research plan the national survey addresses two key research questions:

- 1 What VET provider practices are most effective in supporting learner success?
- 2 How successful are the practices, with whom and under what circumstances?

This report deals with the national online survey component of the study which closed on 5 August 2016. It outlines the collection approach, participation rates, strategies for ensuring high data quality and initial and emerging findings.

Scope of the survey

Administration of a survey instrument across all RTOs in every state and territory presents some logistical challenges, first in securing provider buy-in and then in ensuring the quality of data collected. An online survey is not only a cost-effective way of collecting information from providers

nationally but is less onerous on respondents: the survey can be undertaken at a time of the participant's choosing; it can be sequenced and customised, taking less time; and the respondent has more control with the ability to amend and return to the survey at any point before submission (Nulty 2008). These points are outlined in the brief technical note on the online survey methodology provided in Appendix A.

All TAFEs, community and private RTOs registered to deliver training in 2016 were contacted by email and invited to participate in the online survey. To optimise participation promotion of the online survey was also undertaken by NCVER using platforms such as Twitter, their newsletter and website. Industry peak bodies and the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) also supported and publicised the project. This publicity, independent of CIRES researchers' direct approaches to providers, extended the scope of the prospective survey sample and contributed to very positive participation rates (see subsequent sections).

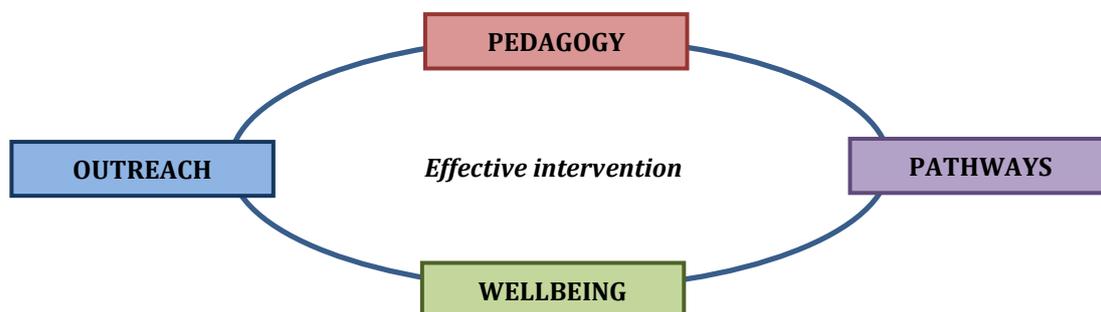
The survey aimed to elicit data that could allow the identification of practices, policies, provision and initiatives that contribute to patterns of engagement and productive outcomes for target groups of learners.

Instrument design

The short practice-focused questionnaire was constructed and intensively workshopped prior to implementation. This included feedback on the instrument provided by the NCVER and the project's steering committee. The instrument was trialled before wider implementation.

A thematic approach was used in the questionnaire based on the good practice interventions framework that identified a four-pronged approach to supporting learners in undertaking education or training (Davies, Lamb & Doecke, 2011). This approach is outlined in Figure 1. The questionnaire was structured to collect information on the RTO's learner profile, moving then to the identification of strategies that serve to promote program access, facilitate learner engagement and wellbeing, support participation, course progress and completion and finally the pathways and transitions post-course completion.

Figure 1 Good Practice Intervention Framework



Source: Davies, Lamb & Doecke (2011)

Containing both closed-form and open-ended responses, the survey format provided participants with opportunities to describe their practice in their own words.

Conduct and implementation of the online survey

Researchers drew on information provided by www.training.gov.au to generate the email contact list for RTOs. This publically available website is a national register of training in Australia and is funded by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments. Use of the database provided by training.gov.au meant that the survey was limited to RTOs, rather than all training providers that submit data to NCVER. Furthermore, the survey was restricted to TAFEs, skills institutes or polytechnics, universities, community based adult education providers and privately operated RTOs, as the focus of this study centres on providers with experience in training post-school VET learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The projected sample and the achieved sample are outlined in Table 1. The survey exceeded projected response rates for private RTOs (10.3 per cent compared to 24.8 per cent). It did not meet the projected response rate for community RTOs (57.0 per cent compared to 47.1 per cent), nor for TAFEs and dual sector RTOs (85.9 per cent compared to 54.7 per cent).

In total 994 individual RTOs participated in the national online survey, with 1009 unique respondents. There were 46 responses from the 35 public RTOs (TAFEs, skills institute /polytechnic/university) and 826 responses from the 822 private RTOs (Education/training business or centre: privately operated registered training organisation).

Table 1 Projected sample against the achieved sample, N of providers and response rate %

	Base	Projected sample		Achieved sample	
	N of RTOs	N of RTOs	Response Rate %	N of RTOs	Response rate %
Community Based Adult Education Provider	291	166	57.0	137	47.1
Education/training Business Or Centre: Privately Operated Registered Training Organisation	3349	345	10.3	822	24.8
Technical And Further Education Institute, Skills Institute Or Polytechnic, Universities	64	55	85.9	35	54.7
Total	3704	616		994	

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Preliminary survey findings

Engaging with disadvantaged learners

The survey of provider practice was designed to provide the project with current information on how RTOs engage with disadvantaged learners and what strategies are successful in widening community access to VET, supporting participation and promoting learner engagement and success. Initial analysis highlights the importance of registered training organisations in catering for adult learners from certain backgrounds. Table 2 shows that over two-thirds of RTO respondents nominated learners from a culturally and linguistically diverse background and those that are currently unemployed within their learner profile. The strong presence of these disadvantaged learners within RTOs is indicative of the crucial role the VET sector plays for education and training within Australia. We can learn much from the approach taken by RTOs with these learners. Table 2 also shows the level of agreement to the statement that their RTO has ‘particular focus or success’ with the various identified target populations if those specific learner groups were within their learner population. Of the 525 RTOs who indicated that their learner populations included Indigenous students, 63% indicated that they had a particular ‘focus or success’ with Indigenous learners. Of the 500 RTOs who indicated that their learner populations included low-skilled workers, 97.7% indicated that they had a particular ‘focus or success’ with low-skilled workers.

Table 2 Presence of target populations within RTO learner profile (N, %)

Learner population	N=	% total responses	RTO has focus or success with this group if in enrolment profile (%)
Indigenous	525	52.0	63.0
Disability (including mental illness)	463	45.9	79.0
Little or no prior education (e.g. early school leavers)	576	57.1	82.2
Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)	695	68.9	88.6
Unemployed	664	65.8	82.9
Not in the labour force	595	59.0	85.7
Refugees	202	20.0	83.7
Rural or isolated	444	44.0	97.9
Low skill workers	500	49.6	97.7

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Notes: Multiple responses per RTO allowed.

It is important to understand the extent to which different types of providers within the VET sector engage with different types of learners. Table 3 shows the responses from different types of providers on whether or not they generally enrol particular types of learners and whether or not they have a focus and success with members of particular disadvantaged populations.

TAFEs tend to enrol learners from a wide range of backgrounds and a high proportion of TAFEs engage with most of the groups of disadvantaged learners. For example, over 90 per cent of TAFE Institutes reported having indigenous learners and learners with disabilities among their enrolments. All who do reported having a focus or success with these students.

Table 3 Presence and focus/ success of equity groups within RTO learner profile, by provider type (%)

	Community Based Adult Education Provider		Business or Centre Private RTO		TAFE Institute, Skills Institute or Polytechnic or University	
	Presence %	Focus / success %	Presence %	Focus / success %	Presence %	Focus / success %
Target group						
Indigenous learners	80.0	81.7	57.6	75.7	90.7	100
Learners with a disability (including mental illness)	85.8	92.9	48.3	75.6	90.2	100
Learners with little or no prior education (e.g. early school leavers)	90.0	94.6	61.5	86.5	90.7	91.4
Learners from a culturally or linguistically diverse background	84.2	90.1	77.5	80.5	95.3	94.3
Learners who are unemployed	93.2	92.5	71.9	83.6	93.0	90.3
Learners who are not in the labour force	88.8	94.0	65.1	80.8	90.7	86.2
Refugees	47.8	91.4	22.0	77.4	73.0	86.4
Rural or isolated learners	60.8	87.0	53.6	85.2	86.8	96.3
Low skill workers	79.8	86.6	56.6	84.6	86.0	92.6
Total	(N=137)		(N=826)		(N=46)	

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Notes: Multiple responses per RTO allowed.

Table 4 Number of target groups within enrolments, by provider type (%)

	Community Based Adult Education Provider %	Business or Centre: Private RTO %	TAFE/Skills Institute/ Polytechnic/ University %	Total %
Number of target groups				
None	8.0	14.8	6.5	13.5
One	3.6	6.9	0.0	6.1
Two	4.4	7.7	4.3	7.1
Three	2.9	9.1	0.0	7.8
Four	5.1	13.6	2.2	11.9
Five	10.9	9.7	6.5	9.7
Six	8.0	11.3	4.3	10.5
Seven	23.4	12.3	8.7	13.7
Eight	28.5	10.2	21.7	13.2
Nine	5.1	4.5	45.7	6.4

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Notes: Multiple responses per RTO allowed.

The majority of community based adult education providers similarly have numbers of disadvantaged learners among their enrolments. Notably, 93 per cent report engaging with unemployed learners and a similar proportion report having a focus on or success with these learners.

Private RTOs are least likely to enrol learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, though over two-thirds report enrolling learners from a culturally or linguistically diverse background or learners who are unemployed and most who do claim to have success with them.

Many of the RTOs reported that they enrolled learners from more than one of the target equity groups of disadvantaged learners. To look at this we created a summative index to examine the association between type of RTO and the provision of services to different groups of learners. The index ranges from 0 (no learners from the equity groups within the RTO learner profile) to 9 (learners from all of the equity groups are within the learner profile). The index has a mean of 4.6 and a standard deviation of 2.9.

Table 4 shows that public RTOs (TAFEs, skills institutes or polytechnic and universities) are most likely to engage with all of the types of disadvantaged learners. 45.7% of public RTOs indicated that they were enrolling learners from all nine of the target groups and a further 21.7 per cent were enrolling learners from 8 of the groups. This is compared to a rate across all RTOs of 6.4% which enrol learners from all nine equity groups and 13.2% which enrol learners from at least 8 of the groups.

Just 4.5% of private RTOs and 5.1% of community based adult education providers enrol learners from all nine of the equity groups. Although 13.5% of all RTOs indicated that they did not educate learners in any of the equity groups, only 6.5% of public RTOs indicated that learners in these equity groups were not included in their learner profiles.

Identifying at-risk learners and their needs

How do RTOs find out about the learners they have and their needs? If RTOs are to work effectively with different types of learners then they need to know about who they are and what their backgrounds are.

Table 5 lists the main types of strategies used by providers to find out about learner background and learner needs. In looking at all responses regardless of provider type, the most common strategies to identify the backgrounds and needs for all students at the point of enrolment are self-completed enrolment forms (88.9%) and separate student surveys (87.0%).

Two-thirds of RTOs indicated that they used upfront screening or assessment for proficiency in numeracy and literacy for all students to identify students who were at risk. About half of all providers report using interviews at the point of entry to learn more about their learners and the learning and support needs they may have.

Table 5 Strategies used by RTOs to find out about their students' backgrounds and needs (%)

	Used for all learners	Used for groups of learners	Used on a case-by-case basis	Not used	Total	N=
Self-complete enrolment forms	88.9	1.8	5.7	3.6	100	949
Student surveys	87.0	5.5	2.9	4.6	100	935
Ongoing in-program monitoring	75.2	5.2	12.6	7	100	940
Informal classroom observations by course teachers or instructors	70.0	8.3	13.4	8.3	100	940
Upfront screening or assessment for proficiency in numeracy and literacy	67.0	6.2	16.9	9.9	100	940
Individual course coordinators notes or files	62.5	7.5	19.7	10.3	100	930
Interview on entry	53.5	11.2	22.6	12.7	100	934
Other	29.3	5.4	4.1	61.2	100	147
Referrals for external agencies	16.4	13.5	37.9	32.2	100	913

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Notes: Multiple responses per RTO allowed.

Effective practice

When RTOs enrol numbers of disadvantaged learners, then they may need to employ a range of strategies to effectively deal with their needs. The strategies may be used across courses and organised around courses, and/or they may target the different types of learners themselves.

The strategies for effective practices targeted through courses are listed in Table 6. In looking at all responses, regardless of provider type, the most common strategies to support student engagement and wellbeing for all courses were: having specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups of learners (29.8%); and having specific organisational units or centres to provide support for particular groups (15.4%). The most common strategies for supporting student participation, progress and completion were allocating additional student contact hours (50.4%); and having flexible learning options (46.1%). The most common strategies for supporting student pathways and articulation for further training and employment is building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area (44.1%).

Table 6 Effective practices used across courses (%)

	Used for all courses	Used for some courses
	%	%
Strategies to support engagement and wellbeing		
Specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups	29.8	17.9
Specific units to provide support for particular groups	15.4	25.8
Use of community members in programs	12.9	32.9
Joined-up service delivery with external agencies	9.6	27.6
Co-location of education and training and other community services	9.5	17.1
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Allocating additional student contact hours	50.4	37.9
Flexible learning options	46.1	33.6
Tailoring programs for students with low skills	36.0	36.3
Adapting specific courses	30.6	43.9
Delivering programs in community settings	24.2	37.9
Delivering programs in partnership with other RTOs	10.9	42.1
Strategies to support pathways to further training and employment		
Building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area	44.1	35.6
Customising articulation arrangements to further study or training	20.8	30.6

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Strategies which were focused more on learners rather than courses are listed in Table 7. The most common practices to support engagement and wellbeing were strategies for managing the needs of students with a disability (39.3%), case management (30.9%), and counselling (30.6%). The most common strategies for supporting participation, progress and completion were clearly acknowledging learners' existing knowledge (84.0%) and providing flexible assessment formats (40.1%). The most common strategy for supporting student pathways and articulation to further training and employment was providing course and career guidance (58.2%).

Table 7 Effective practices used to support learners (%)

	Used for all learners	Used for some learners
	%	%
Strategies to support engagement and wellbeing		
Strategies for managing needs of students with a disability	39.3	36.5
Case management	30.9	36.6
Counselling	30.6	34.9
Referrals to external agencies	25.8	42.2
Mentoring programs	24.3	36.1
Support services	18.6	25.8
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Clearly acknowledging students existing knowledge	84.0	12.4
Providing flexible assessment formats	40.1	40.4
Providing opportunities for work experience	35.2	37.9
Providing note takers for students with disabilities	15.0	30.3
Strategies to support pathways to further training and employment		
Providing course and career guidance	58.2	26.4
Tracking destinations of students after training	26.3	38.4

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Strategies for Indigenous students

In this section, we examine the associations between enrolling Indigenous learners and employing effective strategies or practices to successfully meet their needs. Strategies employed by RTOs where Indigenous students are part of their student profile are listed in Table 8. Of the different strategies used at a course level to support student engagement and wellbeing, having specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups was the commonly used strategy. One-third of RTOs with Indigenous students indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses. Just over 19% of RTOs with Indigenous students indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses.

Providers which report that they have success with Indigenous students describe their specific staffing strategy and how this is of particular benefit to their Indigenous student cohort:

'Aboriginal Coordinator using community outreach and engagement to help local Aboriginal population overcome their distrust of government run agencies'.

'One of the key benefits for our students is the Study Coach for Life model across the course so that students can build rapport with their primary mentor and support member, as well as easier visibility on students when they wane in their engagement with the course or need additional support. In addition to this, we also have LL&N resources and support staff to assist students who require more scaffolding at the beginning of their studies'.

'High portion of Aboriginal trainers and assessors. High level of cultural safety and content of courses specific to vocational needs of Aboriginal people'.

One provider experiences success with their non-accredited courses as they are designed and delivered by Indigenous people.

Table 8 Strategies used by RTOs where Indigenous students form part of the student profile (%)

	All	Some
	%	%
Courses		
Student engagement and wellbeing		
Specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups	33.3	19.2
Participation, progress and completion		
Flexible learning options	44.9	37.2
Student pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area	48.6	37.3
Learners		
Student engagement and wellbeing		
Counselling	29.6	38.1
Participation, progress and completion		
Clearly acknowledging students existing knowledge	84.1	13.4
Student pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Providing course and career guidance	56.6	29.5

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Of the various strategies focussed on supporting students through engagement and wellbeing, the most commonly used was counselling services. Of RTOs with Indigenous students, 29.6% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their students. Almost 39% of RTOs with Indigenous students indicated that they used this strategy for some of their students.

Of the six strategies used to support student participation, progress and completion at the course level, the most common strategy was having flexible learning options. Of the RTOs with Indigenous students, 44.9% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses and just over 37% of the RTOs with Indigenous students indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses. Of the four strategies used to support student participation, progress and completion at the student level, the most common strategy was clearly acknowledging students' existing knowledge. Of the RTOs with Indigenous students, 84.1% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their students and 13.4% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their students.

The most common strategy used to support student pathways and articulation to further training and employment at the course level was building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area. Of the RTOs with Indigenous students, 48.6% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses. Just over 37% of the RTOs with Indigenous students indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses. Some RTOs with focus and/or success with Indigenous students describe the pathways into employment opportunities they had implemented effectively including partnerships with construction, school cleaning contracts, fisheries, mining, warehousing and the aged care sector. At the student level, the most common strategy used to support student pathways and articulation to further training and employment was providing course and career advice. Of the RTOs with Indigenous students, 56.6% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their students, whilst 29.5% of the RTOs with Indigenous students indicated that they used this strategy for some of their students.

Providers who had identified that they had particular success and/or a focus on Indigenous students were asked to provide examples of practices or strategies they felt work particularly well with this student cohort. Many strategies were centred on the need to make the learning accessible for the students, so that they feel capable and confident to meet the demands made on them by the training.

‘We train in remote Qld Indigenous communities and deliver face-to-face and break down learning into manageable tasks’.

‘Face-to-face and culturally aware delivery modes’.

Providers also comment that a respect for cultural difference sits at the core of effective delivery with Indigenous students, described by one provider as the creation of a ‘culturally equitable environment’. Cultural recognition was typically described as an embedded component to the course delivery, rather than supplementary or sitting outside the formal structure of the course.

‘We provide Indigenous cultural support programs to match our delivery strategies’.

‘Indigenous tailored programs which focuses on Indigenous culture, hospitality, IT, LLN skills, foundation skills and job searching techniques. The courses have to be a mix of theory and practical, we feed the students’ lunch for social connection, repeat trainers who have built a rapport with the students (very important) and an Indigenous Liaison Officer on site. Confidence building is very important and we have had a good success rate of students finding employment’.

Other strategies identified as particularly successful with Indigenous students are:

- All our courses are very ‘hands-on’ where there is a high level of student participation and alternate methods of assessment.
- Providing individualised one-on-one support.
- Course specifically focusses on Indigenous students and Indigenous matters.
- Indigenous family carers - face-to-face training, 1 day per week + extra tuition time and study groups.
- Indigenous students completing qualifications and being promoted at work.
- One-on-one mentoring; facilitated study nights; one-on-one tutoring sessions.
- Partners with local Indigenous organisations to deliver skills sets and qualifications in nominated locations.

Strategies for students with disabilities

In this section, we examine the associations between having students with disabilities in the student population and strategies for effective practice at the course level and the learner level. The most common strategies employed by RTOs with students with disabilities are provided in Table 9. The most common strategy used to support student engagement and wellbeing at the course level was having specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups. Of the RTOs with students with disabilities 36.1% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses. Just over 22% of RTOs with students with disabilities indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses.

Providers who indicated that they had particular success and/or focus on students with a disability provided their own examples of effective practice. Many report how staff are intrinsic to their success, with ‘dedicated programs and services staffed by expert professionals’ and ‘trainers who are

also social workers and able to best support learners with mental illness'. One large provider describes how 'AccessAbility Advisers' are 'present on every campus to negotiate and provide reasonable adjustments to students registered with AccessAbility Services, including note takers, participation assistants, interpreters'.

Table 9 Strategies used by RTOs where students with disabilities form part of the student profile: %

	All	Some
	%	%
Courses		
Strategies to support student engagement and wellbeing		
Specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups	36.1	22.3
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Allocating additional student contact hours	50.6	41.6
Strategies to support student pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area	45.3	41.0
Learners		
Strategies to support student engagement and wellbeing		
Strategies for managing needs of students with a disability	50.7	41.4
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Clearly acknowledging students existing knowledge	85.0	13.0
Strategies to support student pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Providing course and career guidance	61.5	29.1

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

In terms of supporting students, the most common strategy used to promote engagement and wellbeing was having specific strategies for managing the needs of students with a disability. Of RTOs with students with disabilities, 50.7% indicated that they used this approach for all of their students and 41.4% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their students.

Providers with a particular focus and/or success concerning their delivery for students with a disability implement a very thorough process for identifying strategies to support learning in an ongoing way as the following examples show:

'Additional learning resources have been provided to meet the individual student needs, this may be larger screens, audio books, big books (learning resources printed in 20 font), additional one-on-one support by learning coaches, extended time to complete course'.

'A robust reasonable adjustment process and individual learning plan process is in place for all students. If a student identifies either at point of enrolment or post-enrolment that they have a disability or learning need, both the Student Support Team and Learning Team are trained and equipped to work collaboratively in supporting each student's needs... One of the key benefits to our students is that the course is flexible and there are no set assessment deadlines - we work 1:1 with each student to put these goals in place throughout their study.'

(The RTO)... 'offers a range of disability services to ensure all individuals have an optimal study experience... Services include advice and support, assistive technology, note-takers, volunteer readers, advocacy, peer support networks, alternative exam arrangements and accessible parking.'

The most common strategy used to support student participation, progress and completion at the course level was allocating additional student contact hours. Of the RTOs with students with disabilities, 50.6% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses and almost 42% of the RTOs with students with disabilities indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses. One provider reporting having success with students with a disability described providing learners with 'additional learning time as required including pre-course'.

For learners, the most common strategy used to support participation, progress and completion was clearly acknowledging learners' existing knowledge. Of the RTOs with students with disabilities, 85% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their learners and 13% indicated that they used this strategy for at least some of their learners. One provider who had a focus and/or success concerning learners with a disability saw a strength in their 'focus on practical application plus utilising the local environment that they (the students) are familiar with', another regularly adapts 'training and assessment tools to include the student's range of abilities'.

The most common strategy used to support student pathways and articulation to further training and employment across courses was building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area. Of the RTOs with students with disabilities, 45.3% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses and 41% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses.

In terms of learners, the most common strategy used to support student pathways and articulation to further training and employment was providing course and career advice. Of the RTOs with students with disabilities, 61.5% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their students and just over 29% of the RTOs with students with disabilities indicated that they used this strategy for some of their students.

Providers identified a number of effective strategies to work specifically with students suffering from poor mental health to ensure that their condition is acknowledged and that they are supported in an ongoing way to continue and eventually be able to complete their training:

'Our trainers and assessors are very skilled at providing the support to learners with a mental illness to succeed at their training. This can range from regularly checking in with them to ensuring that they are eating and looking after themselves. Our trainers are willing to take students to medical appointments etc. It is a long valued part of our culture.'

'Many of the students in our youth program have issues with anxiety and/or depression. A significant number have issues with substance abuse. Several have a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome. We have a specific separate program for young people with chronic fatigue syndrome and social anxiety. We aim to provide a safe, stable and predictable environment for our students. They are provided with a flexible program where they can effectively learn at their own pace.'

Other strategies identified as particularly effective at supporting students with disabilities are:

- Good literacy results with 1:1 tutors.
- A pre-accredited course before completing the VET qualification. The pre-accredited course gave the students an insight into the industry sector as well as developing job search documentation and skills to ensure the student is ready to apply for employment once they have completed the VET qualification. Students complete practical placement of at least 120 hours and in some cases are offered casual employment from this that has led to permanent employment.
- Strong induction, mentoring and on-the-job training and support.

- Mentoring them one-on-one in conjunction with their social worker. Keep them focussed on their course.
- Opportunities to self-identify and assist us with creating a solution.

Strategies for students with little prior education

The associations between having students with little prior education within the student population and strategies at the course and student/learner levels are provided in Table 10. The most common strategy used to support engagement and wellbeing through courses was having specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups. Of the RTOs with students with little prior education, 34.1% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses and just over 21% of the RTOs with students with little prior education indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses.

Specific staffing identified by providers claiming success with this student cohort were case managers, particularly for students in flexible learning. One provider reinforced how skilled trainers who can 'quickly engage the learner and build rapport' were essential to their success with students with little prior education.

The most common strategy used to support student engagement and wellbeing of learners was having support services for students. Of RTOs with students with little prior education, 21.0% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their students and 28.2% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their students.

Additional support delivered by staff employed by the provider was described by many as important for this learner cohort to fully engage with their training. One provider employs additional tutors to provide in-class and ad-hoc support when required by the learner, another maintains a Learning Support Unit consisting of 'non-content specific adult educators assigned to assist students who self-identify LLN issues or students who struggle with assessment'.

Table 10 Strategies used by RTOs where students with little education form part of the student profile (%)

	All %	Some %
Courses		
Strategies to support student engagement and wellbeing		
Specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups	34.1	21.2
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Allocating additional student contact hours	52.4	40.0
Strategies to support student pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area	45.6	40.0
Learners		
Strategies to support student engagement and wellbeing		
Support services	21.0	28.2
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Clearly acknowledging students existing knowledge	85.4	12.5
Strategies to support student pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Providing course and career guidance	57.7	29.6

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

There is a strong sense from providers who work well with this learner cohort that education levels are 'not equal to skill levels' and that it is essential to take a strengths-based approach. Some providers describe how their adopted strategies are very dependent on the varied backgrounds of students with little prior education and they tailor their approach accordingly. Providers with success with this cohort note their different approach to working with adults, who may have not had formal schooling but are now seeking to reskill or obtain a relevant qualification for their current role, compared with young students who have not completed school.

'Early school leavers through a Career Taster Program, Career Counselling Services and also with students that are older that went straight into employment from school and then became redundant/accident - retraining these individuals means providing students with support from the SSO, extra training time with the tutor, sometimes extensions where necessary and making the learning environment relaxed with small class sizes of 10'.

'Groups of agriculture employees who left school early and have little or no former training - we deliver and assess it in a very work placed focus way which improves people skills and knowledge to do the jobs they are doing - also improves production'.

'It is not uncommon for us to have students in their 50s and 60s who left school very early. We employ many reassurance and confidence building strategies in an attempt to help them take a risk with learning again. We deliberately provide an informal, relaxed learning environment. We are very respectful and constantly remind our learners that we are all learners and teachers and that there are things we can learn from them'.

RTOs undertake different strategies for students who are still of school age. These strategies may be construed as having a little more rigidity to them when compared to mature adult learners, with a stronger emphasis on foundation literacy and numeracy development.

'Students who have not completed Year 12, undertake the Diploma Entrance Test (we are using the BKSB platform). This testing process helps us to assess that these students have the

foundational LL&N needs to undertake a Diploma or Advanced Diploma level of qualification. In addition to this, we also have a majority of the Student Support team who have undertaken training in the LL&N unit of competency and all Study Coaches and Trainers/Assessors who hold the TAE40110 at a minimum'.

Providers furnish examples of effective practice in engaging students with little prior education in their programs using 'blended learning, including an online component'. Providers also reiterate the importance that all learners with little or no prior education, are offered different methods of assessment, including more oral assessment and/or practical skills assessment.

The most common strategy used to support student pathways and articulation to further training and employment across courses was building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area (see Table 10). Of the RTOs with students with little prior education, 45.6% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses and 40% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses.

Providers with focus and/or success with those who have little prior education comment that providing training that is face-to-face, theory-driven, practical and 'tied to the job outcome' is a strong motivator for students. Some RTOs emphasise matching students to the 'right job' through 'maintained links to employers for potential job placements', others develop good associations with job agencies to be able to do so.

Other strategies identified as particularly effective at supporting students with little prior education are:

- Adult literacy tutoring.
- Coaching and mentoring.
- Having trainers spend extra time with students and conducting an oral assessment where necessary for students with low language or literacy skills.
- Practical applications, one-on-one, contextualised learning materials, support of other learners.

Strategies for CALD learners

The associations between having CALD learners as enrollees and strategies for effective practice at the course and learner levels are provided in Table 11.

The most common course-level strategy used to support learner engagement and wellbeing was having specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups. One-third of RTOs with CALD learners indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses and 19% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses. For learner-based practices, the strategies most commonly used to support learner engagement and wellbeing (excluding the strategy of managing the needs of learners with disability for the present focus on CALD learners) were referrals to external agencies and case management. In both cases, 70% of RTOs used these strategies.

Table 11 Strategies used by RTOs if CALD learners form part of the learner profile, %

	All %	Some %
Courses		
Strategies to support learner engagement and wellbeing		
Specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups	32.8	19.0
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Allocating additional learner contact hours	52.5	38.6
Strategies to support learner pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Building relationships with employers to help learners gain work in their course industry area	45.0	37.5
Learners		
Strategies to support learner engagement and wellbeing		
Referrals to external agencies	28.7	41.7
Case management	33.8	36.2
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Clearly acknowledging learners' existing knowledge	85.6	12.0
Strategies to support learner pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Providing course and career guidance	59.4	27.7

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

To support learner participation, progress and completion, both course- and learner-level strategies were used by RTOs enrolling CALD learners. The vast majority of these RTOs (98%) declared acknowledging the existing knowledge of learners (for some or all learners), and over 90% of RTOs also explained allocating additional contact hours for learners on a course basis as required (for all or some of their courses). Delivering programs in partnership with other providers was, on the other hand, a far less common strategy (used by 56% of RTOs only for some or all of their courses).

RTOs enrolling CALD learners also use a range of strategies to support learner pathways and articulation to further training and employment. The most commonly used strategy is learner-based: almost 60% of RTOs with CALD learners declare providing course and career guidance to all their learners and a further 28% explain providing such guidance to some of their learners. At the course level, the most common strategy was building relationships with employers: over 82% of RTOs declared engaging in such practice for some or all of their courses.

While Table 11 describes the most common course- and learner-based strategies, RTOs with CALD learners use an extensive range of strategies that the table does not capture. A selection from the free-text responses provided by RTOs includes:

- ESL/EAL classes
- Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) support
- Multilingual staff
- Course delivered in language other than English
- Language and learning support
- Modified training materials
- Minimum English language level pre-requisite and optional English classes

- Additional learning tools and personalised coaching support
- Student Experience Team tracking student progress and offering learning support
- One-to-one tutorials with tutors
- One-to-one support and verbal assessing
- Student support officers who speak multiple languages and do home visits to speak with students in their first language to ensure comprehension
- Interpreting services
- Translation of materials
- Providing language support and flexibility of learning through practical and oral assessments
- Individual coaching or use of visual examples
- Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)
- Skills for Education & Employment (SEE) program
- Participation in multicultural events
- Focus on the everyday English needed for learners' particular requirements
- Conversational English classes - pre-accredited programs
- One to one and small group literacy and numeracy support
- Specialised learning groups
- Using Read and Write for Google Chrome as a tool for reading resources in English.
- Supporting with plain English ('easy ready' assessments) and contextualizing the assessments in order for the student to recognize the workplace links
- Extra volunteer tutors to assist with participants achieving their competencies
- Certificate qualifications, volunteer support provided to students; one-on-one tutoring support; post-training support for work placement via the Work and Learning Centre
- Many specific English language programs (including AMEP and SEE) as well as a variety of funded and Fee for Service classes at a variety of levels.

Strategies for unemployed learners

The associations between having unemployed learners within the learner population and strategies at the course and learner levels are provided in Table 12.

The most common course-based strategies used by RTOs with unemployed learners to support learner engagement and wellbeing were the use of community members in programs and having specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups. Over 55% of RTOs used community members for some or all of their courses, and one-third of RTOs with unemployed learners indicated having specific staff positions for all of their courses (with an additional 20% having such positions available for some of their courses). At the learner level, the most common practices (excluding the strategy of managing the needs of learners with disability for the present focus on unemployed learners) were the use of referrals to external agencies and case management. Over three quarters of RTOs with unemployed learners (76%) relied on referrals to external agencies for

some or all of their learners, and almost as many (74%) implemented case management practices for some or all of their learners. For both types of strategies, a targeted approach (i.e. using such strategies for some rather than all learners) prevailed.

Strategies to support participation, progress and completion were widespread in RTOs enrolling unemployed learners and some strategies were used by almost all training organisations. Among learner-based strategies, clearly acknowledging learners' existing knowledge was a common practice in almost 98% of RTOs (with over 85% of respondents doing so for all their learners). At the course level, allocating additional learner contact hours was the predominant strategy used by over 92% of RTOs. The strategy was most often used for all courses (53%) than for specific courses (40%).

Table 12 Strategies used by RTOs if unemployed learners form part of the learner profile, %

Course-based strategies	All courses	Some courses
Strategies to support learner engagement and wellbeing		
Use of community members in programs	15.7	39.6
Specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups of learners	33.6	20.3
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Allocating additional learner contact hours	52.8	39.5
Strategies to support learner pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Building relationships with employers to help learners gain work in their course industry area	46.0	40.4
Learner-based strategies	All learners	Some learners
Strategies to support learner engagement and wellbeing		
Referrals to external agencies	29.3	46.5
Case management	33.4	40.9
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Clearly acknowledging learners' existing knowledge	85.4	12.2
Strategies to support learner pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Providing course and career guidance	62.5	26.9

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

For RTOs enrolling unemployed learners, the most common strategies used to support learner pathways and articulate current training with further training and employment were learner-based strategies, with the most prominent one being the provision of course and career guidance in over 89% of RTOs. In these cases, the provision of pathway support was predominantly used systematically (for all learners) as opposed to on a case-by-case basis (for some learners). At the course level, building relationships with employers to help learners gain work in their course industry area was a widespread strategy. More than 86% of respondents used it for some or all of their courses, with more RTOs using it across all their courses than for some of their courses only (46% versus 40%).

In addition to the practices described in Table 12, RTOs also provided numerous concrete examples of the strategies they used to support unemployed learners in their training. These included:

- Having a Student Service Officer (SSO) to support learners' needs; referring learners to other relevant services and offering work experience
- Building on employment skills

- Collaborating with Job Networks to assist participants to become job ready
- Focussing on local areas of need
- Providing workplace delivery and a 'helping hand' for learners to build their portfolio
- Offering accredited & pre-accredited programs to enhance employment opportunities
- Availability of pre-accredited Explore Options programs
- Running government funded programs specifically for under/unemployed members of the community
- Providing an informal and inclusive learning environment where all students are respected and working with the student to ensure that they have the resources needed to successfully complete their studies.
- Embedding employment skills in courses
- Using course material that is a simulated work environment
- Program including work placement, resume writing, personal presentation and attributes to gain employment
- Providing personalised coaching and help to write CV, application letter and practice responding to questions for interview
- Providing complex, real work scenario/ case studies for assessment purposes
- Registering as an agent for the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) program
- Pathway planning, resume writing
- Offering pre-accredited skill building courses in employability skills, particularly computer-based skills such as Excel, MYOB and Bookkeeping etc.
- Running pre-employment training with work experience component
- Smart and Skilled and CSO Programs
- Providing assistance with financial options available to unemployed learners while they are studying; offering them a payment plan for their fees, providing budgeting assistance
- Offering pre-accredited work ready program
- Availability of certificate qualifications, career guidance via the Centre for Work and Learning, Trade taster programs and Skills gap programs, tutor support and volunteer support
- Courses with highly supported environments where learner barriers to work are addressed and supported.
- Working closely with JobActive agencies to facilitate referral and access to courses
- Providing pre assessment to help decide on level of support needed to maintain participation and progress and provide a range of relevant training including short industry specific qualifications, full qualifications, pre-vocational training underpinned by group training, work placement, one to one and small group support when needed, and integration of foundations skills training as needed.

Strategies for learners not in the labour force

The associations between training providers having learners not in the labour force within the learner population and strategies at the course and learner levels are provided in Table 13.

Predictably, the strategies used by RTOs enrolling learners not in the labour force are similar to the strategies used by RTOs enrolling unemployed learners since these populations partly overlap. Therefore, it is expected that the most commonly used strategies are also similar in both cases.

Among course-level strategies to support learner engagement and wellbeing, the use of community members in programs and the existence of specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups were most common. As with RTOs enrolling unemployed learners, RTOs with learners not in the labour force (a broader category than unemployment) often used community members in programs (56% of respondents), although most did so in some courses only. On the other hand, specific staff to understand and address the needs of specific learners or learner groups were available across course in more than a third of RTOs (35%), for a total of 55% of RTOs using this strategy in some or all of their courses. Learner-level strategies for promoting learner and engagement and wellbeing were dominated by the recourse to referrals to external agencies for more than three quarters (77%) of RTOs with learners not in the labour force. In this case, targeted referrals (47%) were most frequent than systematic referrals (30%).

Table 13 Strategies used by RTOs if learners not in the labour force form part of the learner profile, %

Course-based strategies	All courses	Some courses
Strategies to support learner engagement and wellbeing		
Use of community members in programs	16.6	39.1
Specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups	35.4	19.9
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Allocating additional learner contact hours	53.8	38.8
Strategies to support learner pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Building relationships with employers to help learners gain work in their course industry area	46.7	39.9
Learner-based strategies	All learners	Some learners
Strategies to support learner engagement and wellbeing		
Referrals to external agencies	30.0	47.1
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Clearly acknowledging learners' existing knowledge	86.0	12.4
Strategies to support learner pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Providing course and career guidance	63.1	25.7

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Strategies to support participation, progress and completion seem typically used by RTOs in a more systematic many than strategies to support engagement and wellbeing or strategy to develop learner pathways. For RTOs enrolling learners not in the labour force, the most commonly used learner-level strategy was to clearly acknowledge learners' existing knowledge, with 86% of RTOs using it with all learners and a further 12% using it with some of their learners. Meanwhile, the most widely used course-level strategy was to allocate additional contact hours for learners: over half of RTOs (54%) did so for all their courses, while 39% did so for some of their courses. In total, more than nine out of 10

RTOs with learners not in the labour force used these strategies to support learner participation, progress and completion.

The most commonly used strategies to support learner pathways and articulation to further training and employment are once again identical to the ones identified from RTOs enrolling unemployed learners. At the course level, building relationships with employers to help learners gain work in their course industry area is the most prominent practice (87% of RTOs). At the learner level, 89% of RTOs with learners not in the labour force declared providing course and career guidance to their learners. Whereas this course-level strategy was used to a comparable extent for all or some courses, this learner-level strategy was more than twice as commonly used for all learners as for some learners (63% versus 26%).

The detailed responses provided by RTOs enrolling learners not in the labour force provide a more concrete illustration of the strategies they implemented for their learners. More specifically, they give us examples of RTO practices specifically designed to support learners not in the labour force. They include:

- Allowing learners to learn at their own pace to ensure they can integrate to the labour force adequately
- Providing individual support as required based on small class size
- Introducing the work experience, Vocational Placement mid-course
- Providing individualised one on one support
- Collaborating with Job networks to assist participants to become job ready
- Offering collaborative programs with job providers and industry
- CV writing
- Offering flexible Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
- Proposing entry Training Programs
- Providing Life Skills Support
- Upskilling through short courses and pre-accredited courses
- Hiring trainers with empathy to cohort
- Tutoring ad hoc as well as having a dedicated day each week and a teacher to give extra support
- Offering welfare support and careers guidance
- Using AMEP or non-accredited Information Technology Programs as a pathway to employability or accredited programs
- Availability of Career Counsellor (Equity and Diversity) to identify a career path and explore opportunities/set themselves up for a great career.
- Tailoring delivery including life skills, career guidance and work experience
- Availability of student welfare adviser and support
- Presenting the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) program and promoting self-employment/starting one's own business
- Having dedicated programs and services staffed by expert professionals

- Helping learners discover the skills they have, what they want to achieve and develop learning activities to bridge the gaps using their intended job focus
- Offering industry specific work prep program
- Being able to quickly engage the learner and build rapport (thanks to) skilled trainers. Focus on their strengths
- Securing employment outcomes

Strategies for refugee students

The associations between having refugee students within the student population and strategies at the course and student level are provided in Table 14. The most common strategy used to support student engagement and wellbeing at the course level was having specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of learners. Of the RTOs with refugee students, 48.5% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses. Just over 19% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses.

The course-level strategy most often used by the RTOs with a focus or success with refugee students was the co-location of education and training and other community services. Just under 15% of RTOs with refugee students indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses. Just over 32% of RTOs with refugee students indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses.

In terms of focusing on learners, the student-level strategy most often used by the RTOs was providing support services. Just over 31% of RTOs with refugee students indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses. Just under 26% of RTOs with refugee students indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses.

The most common strategy used to support student participation, progress and completion at the course level was allocating additional student contact hours. Of the RTOs with refugee students, 53.8% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses. Almost 40% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses.

The course-level strategy most often used by the RTOs with a focus or success with refugee students was delivering programs in partnership with other RTOs. Just under 14% of RTOs with refugee students indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses. Just over 61% of RTOs with refugee students indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses.

At the learner level, the most common strategy used to support learner participation, progress and completion for students was clearly acknowledging students' existing knowledge. Of the RTOs with refugee students, 86.3% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their students. Almost 13% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their students.

Table 14 Strategies used by RTOs to support learners where refugee students form part of the student profile (%)

Course-based strategies	All Courses	Some Courses
Strategies to support student engagement and wellbeing		
Specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of learners	48.5	19.4
Co-location of education and training and other community services	14.8	32.3
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Allocating additional student contact hours	53.8	39.9
Delivering programs in partnership with other RTOs	13.9	61.2
Strategies to support student pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area	45.9	43.5
Learner-based strategies	All learners	Some learners
Strategies to support learner engagement and wellbeing		
Support services	31.2	25.6
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Clearly acknowledging learners existing knowledge	86.3	12.9
Providing flexible assessment formats	43.5	44.9
Strategies to support learner pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Providing course and career guidance	67.1	26.6

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

The student-level strategy most often used by the RTOs with a focus or success with refugee students was providing flexible assessment formats. Forty-three and a half per cent of RTOs with refugee students indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses. Just under 45% of RTOs with refugee students indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses.

The most common strategy used to support student pathways and articulation to further training and employment was providing course and career advice. Of the RTOs with refugee students, 67.1% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their students and of those, 79.8% indicated that they had focus or success with refugee students. Almost 27% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their students and of those, 87.5% indicated that they had focus or success with refugee students. The remaining 6% indicated that they did not use this strategy and of those, 20% indicated that they had focus or success with refugee students.

RTOs which reported having refugees as part of their learner profiles and which reported having success in meeting their needs identified a number of specific strategies they use for this population of learners. The specific strategies included the following:

- Additional language support
- Adult migrant programs
- Community support
- Child care, language support, counsellors, work with specialist agencies
- Core skills development
- culturally specific programs

- dedicated learner support
- Dedicated programs and services staffed by expert professionals.
- EAL classes - prelim to level 4.
- extra help with welfare e.g. contact the migrant resource centre
- Extra volunteer tutors to assist with participants achieving their competencies
- Have many students who are refugees from Sudan, the one on one training, additional literacy support, and mentoring has helped students to achieve their goal including employment and university studies
- Migrant English classes, counsellors at each campus.
- Offer free English classes. Also offer ongoing training at prices less than international fees
- Offered scholarship opportunities and non-accredited training via internal networks such as GTCAS, tutor and volunteer support. Traineeship via our internal CSIS program
- Partnering with LLN specialist provider and mentoring in addition to program timetable to identify and assist with barriers to successfully completing program, longer duration sometimes required
- partners with refugee and migrant support organisations to deliver skills sets and other qualification training
- Provision of Counselling support with learning issues, fees and pastoral care.
- translator provided
- Try to match to support officers who speak their language
- We connect them with the local community, provide learning opportunities and boost their confidence and self-esteem so they feel that they are a valued member of the community
- We engage with refugee resettlement groups
- We have a refugee, asylum seeker scholarship that we try and fill each year to encourage applicants

Strategies for rural/ isolated students

The associations between having rural or isolated students within the student population and strategies for courses and students are provided in Table 15. The most common strategy used to support student engagement and wellbeing at a course level was having specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups. One-third of RTOs with rural or isolated students indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses and of those. Almost 20% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses.

The course-level strategy most often used by the RTOs was co-location of education and training and other community services. Nine and a half per cent of RTOs with rural/ isolated students indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses. Just over 19% of RTOs with rural or isolated students indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses.

When targeting learners, the student-level strategy most often used by the RTOs with a focus or success with rural/ isolated students was counselling. Just under 32% of RTOs with rural or isolated students indicated that they used this strategy for all of their students. Thirty-seven and a half per

cent of RTOs with rural/ isolated students indicated that they used this strategy for some of their students.

The most common strategy used to support student participation, progress and completion at the course level was allocating additional student contact hours. Of the RTOs with rural/ isolated students, 53.1% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses, while just over 40% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses.

Table 15 Strategies used by RTOs to support learners where rural/isolated students form part of the student profile (%)

Course-based strategies	All Courses	Some Courses
Strategies to support student engagement and wellbeing		
Specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups	33.2	19.7
Co-location of education and training and other community services	9.5	19.3
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Allocating additional student contact hours	53.1	40.3
Delivering programs in community settings	27.1	44.1
Strategies to support student pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area	47.4	35.1
Learner-based strategies		
Strategies to support student engagement and wellbeing		
Counselling	31.9	37.5
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Clearly acknowledging students existing knowledge	86.6	10.7
Strategies to support student pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Providing course and career guidance	60.8	26.1

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

The next most frequently cited course-level strategy used by the RTOs was delivering programs in community settings. Just over 27% of RTOs with rural or isolated students indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses and just over 44% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses.

At the student level, an important strategy used to support student participation, progress and completion was clearly acknowledging the existing knowledge of students. Of the relevant RTOs, 86.6% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their students. Almost 11% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their students.

RTOs which reported serving rural or isolated learners as part of their learner profiles and which reported having success in meeting their needs identified a number of specific strategies they use for this population of learners. The specific strategies included the following:

- Access to online studies and support networks without needing to travel
- Access via Student Central
- All of courses are on-line, therefore, students can study anywhere

- As a national blended learning provider we are equipped to support our students in a multitude of ways. Firstly, our hours of operation are 8:00-8:00 Monday - Friday and 09:00 - 5:00 on Saturday and Sunday. Further to this, all learning content is available 24/7 and students gain access to their learning materials as soon as they meet the entry requirements of the course. Face-to-face workshops are held for those courses with work placement requirements in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth on a regular basis. For those students who are rural or isolated and need financial assistance to be able to attend these workshops there is a structured Scholarship and Grants program and committee to review and endorse this process. Furthermore, courses with work placement requirements are resourced with Work Placement Coordinators to assist them in locating and undertaking this within industry. We also hold regular webinars on everything from online orientations, getting started (or newbie webinars), work placement readiness, learning content, and assessment requirements. Similarly, there are a number of pilots underway to test different systems that enable further social engagement which is often a key factor for rural and isolated students.
- Assisted Longreach community through training
- Basic computer courses to engage people
- Blended Learning
- block delivery in some areas
- By providing individualised one on one support
- Clustered face to face delivery, telephone and videoconference support; smaller groups to cater for less available clients, trainer travels to smaller, isolated communities
- Coaching and mentoring
- Dedicated programs and services staffed by expert professionals.
- Deliver the training and assessment to the remote community rather than have the students come to regional centre; ensure the training is practical
- deliver training within the students community
- Delivery on site always
- Distance Education, students travel to us for block practical training
- Distance Learning Support model
- e-learning
- Ensuring visits from trainer/assessors on regular basis and learning is following prescribed patterns
- Flexible learning options (on-line, self-paced)
- Focus groups, advisory committees, validation
- individual programs and coaching in the workplaces
- Majority of courses available through online and/or remote learning allowing students in rural or isolated geographical locations to participate where they may not have been able to attend a classroom-based course
- mentors
- Online delivery

- Online learning platform means that isolation is not an issue. Students can study from home, wherever that is.
- Our online and distance-based program has been very successful in helping rural or isolated learners achieve success. In fact, we're a rural RTO!
- Our RTO and assessors work with them to gather evidence and the admin staff maintain regular contact with them to answer any question and assist where possible.
- Outreach programs through other partners
- residential facilities
- Return to study programs, study supports, good library service, wellbeing officer, regular staff training, qualified teachers
- student welfare adviser and support
- We use a blended delivery model where rural or isolated students can access the learning material online with trainer support during normal business hours. Practical skills are learnt and practiced in the work place. Their trainer visits them a minimum of once per month to assist with skill development and to assess skills.

Strategies for low-skilled workers

Table 16 reports the main strategies used by RTOs who deal with high numbers of skilled workers as part of their learner profiles. A common strategy used to support student engagement and wellbeing at the course level was having specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups. Of the RTOs with low-skilled workers, 34.8% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses while over 20% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses.

The student level strategy most often used by the RTOs with success with low-skilled workers was referrals to external agencies. Thirty-one per cent of RTOs with low-skilled workers indicated that they used this strategy for all of their students while a further 47% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their students.

A strategy used to support student participation, progress and completion at the course level was allocating additional student contact hours. Of the RTOs with low-skilled workers, 49.4% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses. Just over 44% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses. In terms of learners, the most common strategy used to support participation, progress and completion was clearly acknowledging students' existing knowledge. Of the RTOs with low-skilled workers, 84.6% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their students while 13.5 per cent indicated that they used this strategy for some of their students.

The most common strategy used to support student pathways and articulation to further training and employment at the course level was building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area. Of the RTOs with low-skilled workers, 47.2% indicated that they used this strategy for all of their courses and almost 41% indicated that they used this strategy for some of their courses.

Table 16 Strategies used by RTOs to support learners where low-skilled workers form part of the student profile (%)

Course-based strategies	All Courses	Some Courses
Strategies to support student engagement and wellbeing		
Specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups	34.8	20.4
Co-location of education and training and other community services	12.8	22.9
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Allocating additional student contact hours	49.4	44.1
Delivering programs in community settings	28.2	45.1
Strategies to support student pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area	47.2	40.6
Learner-based strategies	All learners	Some learners
Strategies to support student engagement and wellbeing		
Referrals to external agencies	31.0	47.2
Strategies to support participation, progress and completion		
Clearly acknowledging students existing knowledge	84.6	13.5
Providing note takers for students with disabilities	18.7	38.7
Strategies to support student pathways and articulation to further training and employment		
Providing course and career guidance	59.6	28.3

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

RTOs with high numbers of skilled workers as part of their learner profiles and which reported having success in meeting their needs identified a number of specific strategies they use for this population of learners. The specific strategies included the following:

- As a VET provider who focuses on 1:1 flexible support we work with each student to identify their prior knowledge, skills and experience and then build their learning experience across their enrolment with the College.
- Boosting confidence and assisting with learning to ensure skill levels increase to cope with working
- Build competence and self esteem
- By improving their English and Literacy Skills
- By providing individualised one on one support
- career advice, study support and other mechanisms mentioned earlier
- Customised Training
- dedicated learner support
- Dedicated programs and services staffed by expert professionals.
- Employability development
- Ensure the training is practical, use visual training aids to maximise learning, provide language, literacy and numeracy assistance throughout the program
- entry level accredited courses, pre-enrolment courses
- Evening classes

- extensive pathway program
- Focus on their strengths and build on that - strength based approach. Ensure training is relevant and meaningful
- Focussing on building on skills already achieved or developing new skills. In some cases the qualification or unit are requirements of the job. There is a definite need to recognise the skills the student already has - RPL or credit transfer.
- Foundation skills programs in Language, literacy and numeracy
- Hands on workplace training
- Individual coaching, use of visual examples, making training applicable to individual job helps get results
- LLN support and workplace mentors
- matching to right job
- One on one training
- provide additional remedial training where required and additional learner support/ personalised coaching - also encourage mentoring in workplace where possible
- Providing online learning with dedicated distance trainers who use Skype and telephone to maintain weekly contact with student, learning coaches and vocational placement officers and career coaches offer additional assistance to help students target employment options in their local area
- Return to study programs, study supports, good library service, wellbeing officer, regular staff training, qualified teachers
- specialised and individual support coaching/mentoring
- Specialist trainers, foundation skills
- Tailored delivery including life skills, career guidance and work experience. A high completion rate
- Up-skilling and create pathway to short course training
- We run a range of pre accredited skill programs assisting people to develop skills to find work
- Your Tutor / Tutor Space / LLN assessments / support / intervention

Regional analysis

The regional data were merged with the survey data to examine the relationship between participation at the regional level and the strategies for effective practice that RTOs employed. Regions were broken into four levels of performance based on their participation rates—bottom 10%; 11 to 50%; 51 to 90%; top 10%. The level of participation is based on the enrolment rates of students in each of the specific learner groups. The next step was to identify the RTOs from each region and use their survey data to ascertain the strategies they used. For example, RTOs located in the top 10% for Indigenous student enrolments were located in regions with the highest levels of Indigenous student enrolments; RTOs located in the bottom 10% for Indigenous student enrolments were located in regions with the lowest levels of Indigenous student enrolments.

In this section, we present the strategies listed by RTOs in the top bands of disadvantaged learner participation (top 10% of regions). We compare the use of the strategies against RTOs across the bands of performance.

Effective practices for improving participation of indigenous Australians

Table 17 shows the association between the level of participation of Indigenous students at the regional level and strategies for effective practice used by RTOs at the course and student levels. Of the five strategies used to improve student engagement and wellbeing at the course level, having specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups was used by 55% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with Indigenous student enrolments. This strategy was used by 36.5% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with Indigenous student enrolments. Of the six strategies used to improve student participation, progress and completion at the course level, delivering programs in community settings was used by 65.9% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with Indigenous student enrolments. This strategy was used by 53.2% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with Indigenous student enrolments. Of the two strategies used to develop pathways and articulation to further training and employment at the course-level, customising articulation arrangements to further study and training was used by 58.5% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with Indigenous student enrolments. This strategy was used by 36.7% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with Indigenous student enrolments.

Of the six strategies used to improve student engagement and wellbeing at the student-level, providing support services was used by 63.9% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with Indigenous student enrolments. This strategy was used by 30% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with Indigenous student enrolments. Of the four strategies used to improve student participation, progress and completion at the student-level, providing flexible assessment formats was used by 87.7% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with Indigenous student enrolments. This strategy was used by 77.5% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with Indigenous student enrolments. Of the two strategies used to develop pathways and articulation to further training and employment at the student-level, providing course and career guidance was used by 87.3% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with Indigenous student enrolments.

This strategy was used by 76.5% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with Indigenous student enrolments.

Table 17 Practices employed by RTOs, by regional differences in levels of VET participation of indigenous students (%)

	Performance of regions			
	Top 10%	51 to 90%	11 to 50%	Bottom 10%
<i>Used across courses</i>				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups	55.0	49.5	46.9	36.5
Specific units to provide support for particular groups	52.6	43.2	37.6	36.5
Participation, progress and completion				
Delivering programs in community settings	65.9	64.6	60.9	53.2
Tailoring programs for students with low skills	81.6	72.6	69.3	72.2
Pathways to further training and employment				
Customising articulation arrangements to further study or training	58.5	51.1	53.7	36.7
<i>Used for supporting students</i>				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Support services	63.9	42.3	45.4	30.0
Counselling	73.4	66.4	64.1	60.0
Participation, progress and completion				
Providing flexible assessment formats	87.7	81.9	77.8	77.5
Providing note takers for students with disabilities	53.0	46.3	42.4	44.8
Pathways to further training and employment				
Providing course and career guidance	87.3	86.5	84.1	76.5

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Effective practices for improving participation of Australians with disabilities

Table 18 shows the association between level of participation of students with disabilities at the regional level and strategies for courses and for students used by RTOs. Of the five strategies used to improve student engagement and wellbeing at the course-level, having community members in programs was used by 55.1% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with students with disabilities enrolments. This strategy was used by 38.5% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with students with disabilities enrolments. Of the six strategies used to improve student participation, progress and completion at the course-level, tailoring programs for students with low skills was used by 83.1% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with students with disabilities enrolments. This strategy was used by 71% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with students with disabilities enrolments. Of the two strategies used to develop pathways and articulation to further training and employment at the course-level, building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area was used by 84.4% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with students with disabilities enrolments. This strategy was used by 76.1% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with students with disabilities enrolments.

Of the six strategies used to improve student engagement and wellbeing at the student-level, strategies for managing students with a disability was used by 90.2% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with students with disabilities enrolments. This strategy was used by 64.4% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with students with disabilities enrolments. Of the four strategies used to improve student participation, progress and completion at the student-level, providing note takers for students with disabilities was used by 61.9% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with students with disabilities enrolments. This strategy was used by 38% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with students with disabilities enrolments. Of the two strategies used to develop pathways and articulation to further training and employment at the student-level, tracking destinations of students after training was used by 69.7% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with students with disabilities enrolments. This strategy was used by 62.7% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with students with disabilities enrolments.

Table 18 Practices employed by RTOs, by regional differences in levels of VET participation of students with disabilities (%)

	Performance of regions			
	Top 10%	51 to 90%	11 to 50%	Bottom 10%
<i>Used across courses</i>				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Use of community members in programs	55.1	52.0	38.2	38.5
Specific units to provide support for particular groups	55.7	44.9	33.1	42.9
Participation, progress and completion				
Tailoring programs for students with low skills	83.1	74.7	66.9	71.0
Delivering programs in community settings	74.7	68.2	51.9	64.7
Pathways to further training and employment				
Building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area	84.4	83.2	75.4	76.1
<i>Used for supporting students</i>				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Strategies for managing students with disability	90.2	79.1	71.1	64.4
Referrals to external agencies	81.3	71.0	63.0	61.7
Participation, progress and completion				
Providing note takers for students with disabilities	61.9	46.6	40.5	38.0
Providing flexible assessment formats	94.4	78.5	79.5	76.2
Pathways to further training and employment				
Tracking destinations of students after training	69.7	65.6	62.5	62.7

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Effective practices for improving the participation of CALD Australians

Table 19 shows the association between level of participation of CALD students at the regional level and strategies for courses and for students used by RTOs. Of the five strategies used to improve student engagement and wellbeing at the course-level, having community members in programs was used by 54.1% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with CALD student enrolments. This strategy was used by 35.8% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with CALD student enrolments. Of the six strategies used to improve student

participation, progress and completion at the course-level, delivering programs in community settings was used by 68.4% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with CALD student enrolments. This strategy was used by 54.3% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with CALD student enrolments. Of the two strategies used to develop pathways and articulation to further training and employment at the course-level, building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area was used by 89% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with CALD student enrolments. This strategy was used by 73.2% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with CALD student enrolments.

Table 19 Practices employed by RTOs, by regional differences in levels of VET participation of CALD learners (%)

	Performance of regions			
	Top 10%	51 to 90%	11 to 50%	Bottom 10%
Used across courses				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Use of community members in programs	54.1	51.4	40.0	35.8
Specific units to provide support for particular groups	49.3	44.9	36.9	35.4
Participation, progress and completion				
Delivering programs in community settings	68.4	68.5	55.7	54.3
Tailoring programs for students with low skills	81.5	73.5	69.4	68.1
Pathways to further training and employment				
Building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area	89.0	80.9	77.6	73.2
Used for supporting learners				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Referrals to external agencies	75.0	69.4	68.2	52.7
Strategies for managing students with disability	80.0	75.4	78.4	60.0
Participation, progress and completion				
Providing opportunities for work experience	86.0	72.1	73.0	66.7
Providing flexible assessment formats	85.9	78.5	82.4	75.4
Pathways to further training and employment				
Providing course and career guidance	91.4	82.4	86.1	82.0

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Of the six strategies used to improve student engagement and wellbeing at the student-level, referrals to external agencies was used by 75% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with CALD student enrolments. This strategy was used by 52.7% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with CALD student enrolments. Of the four strategies used to improve student participation, progress and completion at the student-level, providing opportunities for work experience was used by 86% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with CALD student enrolments. This strategy was used by 66.7% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with CALD student enrolments. Of the two strategies used to develop pathways and articulation to further training and employment at the student-level, providing course and career guidance was used by 91.4% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with CALD student enrolments. This strategy was used by 82% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with CALD student enrolments.

Effective practices for improving the participation of unemployed Australians

Table 20 shows the association between level of participation of unemployed students at the regional level and strategies for courses and for students used by RTOs. Of the five strategies used to improve student engagement and wellbeing at the course-level, having community members in programs was used by 53.8% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with unemployed student enrolments. This strategy was used by 38.4% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with unemployed student enrolments. Of the six strategies used to improve student participation, progress and completion at the course-level, delivering programs in community settings was used by 72.6% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with unemployed student enrolments. This strategy was used by 52.6% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with unemployed student enrolments. Of the two strategies used to develop pathways and articulation to further training and employment at the course-level, building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area was used by 87.1% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with unemployed student enrolments. This strategy was used by 74.4% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with unemployed student enrolments.

Of the six strategies used to improve student engagement and wellbeing at the student-level, having strategies for managing students with disabilities was used by 87.3% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with unemployed student enrolments. This strategy was used by 59% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with unemployed student enrolments. Of the four strategies used to improve student participation, progress and completion at the student-level, providing note takers for students with disabilities was used by 49.2% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with unemployed student enrolments. This strategy was used by 32.1% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with unemployed student enrolments. Of the two strategies used to develop pathways and articulation to further training and employment at the student-level, providing course and career guidance was used by 87.7% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with unemployed student enrolments. This strategy was used by 73.4% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with unemployed student enrolments.

Table 20 Practices employed by RTOs, by regional differences in levels of VET participation of unemployed learners (%)

	Performance of regions			
	Top 10%	51 to 90%	11 to 50%	Bottom 10%
<i>Used across courses</i>				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Use of community members in programs	53.8	50.2	39.4	38.4
Specific units to provide support for particular groups	52.6	43.8	36.1	32.9
Participation, progress and completion				
Delivering programs in community settings	72.6	66.0	56.7	52.6
Tailoring programs for students with low skills	83.7	73.3	68.5	67.1
Pathways to further training and employment				
Building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area	87.1	79.4	78.5	74.4
<i>Used for supporting students</i>				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Strategies for managing students with disability	87.3	80.5	71.0	59.0
Mentoring	63.5	59.1	63.2	43.4
Participation, progress and completion				
Providing note takers for students with disabilities	49.2	48.9	42.7	32.1
Providing flexible assessment formats	88.7	81.0	78.9	73.4
Pathways to further training and employment				
Providing course and career guidance	87.7	84.9	85.9	73.4

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Effective practices for improving the participation of Australians with low educational attainment

Table 21 shows the association between level of participation of low attainment students at the regional level and strategies for courses and for students used by RTOs. Of the five strategies used to improve student engagement and wellbeing at the course-level, having community members in programs was used by 50% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with low attainment student enrolments. This strategy was used by 31.9% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with low attainment student enrolments. Of the six strategies used to improve student participation, progress and completion at the course-level, delivering programs in community settings was used by 73.1% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with low attainment student enrolments. This strategy was used by 57.3% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with low attainment student enrolments. Of the two strategies used to develop pathways and articulation to further training and employment at the course-level, building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area was used by 87.4% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with low attainment student enrolments. This strategy was used by 68.8% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with low attainment student enrolments.

Table 21 Practices employed by RTOs, by regional differences in levels of VET participation of learners with low prior educational attainment (%)

	Performance of regions			
	Top 10%	51 to 90%	11 to 50%	Bottom 10%
Used across courses				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Use of community member programs	50.0	52.1	41.7	31.9
Co-location of education and training and other community services	30.9	29.3	24.8	17.6
Participation, progress and completion				
Delivering programs in community settings	73.1	67.5	54.3	57.3
Tailoring programs for students with low skills	75.9	78.0	67.6	61.3
Pathways to further training and employment				
Building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area	87.4	82.9	76.5	68.8
Used for supporting students				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Support services	56.6	48.6	40.2	27.5
Referrals to external agencies	72.0	70.8	66.5	58.1
Participation, progress and completion				
Providing opportunities for work experience	80.2	73.2	73.7	60.3
Providing note takers for students with disabilities	38.8	55.9	39.4	34.6
Pathways to further training and employment				
Providing course and career guidance	92.0	86.3	83.5	72.1

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Of the six strategies used to improve student engagement and wellbeing at the student-level, providing support services was used by 56.6% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with low attainment student enrolments. This strategy was used by 27.5% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with low attainment student enrolments. Of the four strategies used to improve student participation, progress and completion at the student-level, providing opportunities for work experience was used by 80.2% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with low attainment student enrolments. This strategy was used by 60.3% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with low attainment student enrolments. Of the two strategies used to develop pathways and articulation to further training and employment at the student-level, providing course and career guidance was used by 92% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the top 10% of those with low attainment student enrolments. This strategy was used by 72.1% of the RTOs that were located in regions within the bottom 10% of those with low attainment student enrolments.

Effective practices and award completions

We also examined the associations between award completions at the regional level and the strategies or practices employed by RTOs. Regions were broken into four levels of performance based on their award completion rates—bottom 10%; 11 to 50%; 51 to 90%; top 10%. The level of completion is based on the award completion rates of students of each of the specific learner groups. The next step was to identify the RTOs from each region and use their survey data to ascertain the strategies they used. For example, RTOs located in the top 10% for Indigenous student award completions were

located in regions with the highest levels of Indigenous student completions while RTOs located in the bottom 10% for Indigenous students were located in regions with the lowest levels of Indigenous student completions.

The results are presented in five separate tables based on learner group:

- 1 Indigenous learners—Table 22
- 2 Learners with disabilities—Table 23
- 3 CALD learners—Table 24
- 4 Unemployed learners—Table 25
- 5 Learners with low prior educational attainment—Table 26.

The results in general show that differences in RTO practices across regions are nowhere near as marked for award completions as they are for participation. There are no clear differences in RTO practices linked to regional performance profiles. RTOs in regions with lower award completion rates adopt practices that are generally similar to RTOs in regions with higher award completion rates for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. The lack of clear differences in practices may be because award completion rates are much lower on average than participation rates and there is less clear separation of regions. While RTOs in some regions have great success in promoting participation of disadvantaged learners, it is harder to translate this into completion rates, at least as expressed in differences in practices for the different groups of learners.

Just under 86% of the RTOs located in the regions within the top 10% of Indigenous award completions used flexible learning options whereas 74.4% of the RTOs located in the regions within the bottom 10% of Indigenous award completions used this strategy (see Table 22).

Just under 92% of the RTOs located in the regions within the top 10% of Indigenous award completions allocated additional student contact hours whereas 89% of the RTOs located in the regions within the bottom 10% of Indigenous award completions used this strategy. Just over 84% of the RTOs located in the regions within the top 10% of Indigenous award completions provided flexible assessment formats whereas 81.8% of the RTOs located in the regions within the bottom 10% of Indigenous award completions used this strategy.

Table 22 Practices employed by RTOs, by regional differences in levels of award completions of indigenous learners (%)

	Performance of regions			
	Top 10%	51 to 90%	11 to 50%	Bottom 10%
Used across courses				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Use of community member programs	44.6	43.8	46.5	52.0
Specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups	42.1	47.2	50.0	47.3
Specific units to provide support for particular groups	37.5	40.6	40.1	53.5
Joined-up service delivery with external agencies	35.1	37.4	35.5	45.3
Co-location of education and training and other community services	27.1	25.3	26.8	31.6
Participation, progress and completion				
Allocating additional student contact hours	91.8	88.4	86.9	89.0
Flexible learning options	85.9	81.5	77.6	74.4
Adapting specific courses	78.6	73.6	73.4	78.8
Tailoring programs for students with low skills	72.2	70.0	72.5	80.5
Delivering programs in community settings	58.8	60.3	62.6	71.6
Delivering programs in partnership with other RTOs	46.3	55.2	54.0	46.8
Pathways to further training and employment				
Building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area	81.9	77.0	79.3	90.2
Customising articulation arrangements to further study or training	43.6	50.3	53.6	55.7
Used for supporting students				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Strategies for managing students with disability	84.6	71.8	76.6	78.8
Referrals to external agencies	71.2	66.0	67.5	74.6
Case management	65.5	67.7	69.6	59.7
Mentoring	63.9	60.4	60.1	58.3
Counselling	60.7	66.5	65.6	66.2
Support services	35.7	44.5	44.9	50.8
Participation, progress and completion				
Clearly acknowledging students existing knowledge	95.9	96.2	97.0	95.5
Providing flexible assessment formats	84.1	79.1	80.7	81.8
Providing opportunities for work experience	76.9	70.2	74.0	78.5
Providing note takers for students with disabilities	50.9	38.7	49.0	52.5
Pathways to further training and employment				
Providing course and career guidance	83.3	84.2	85.3	85.1
Tracking destinations of students after training	63.5	66.3	61.9	71.0

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

About 83% of the RTOs located in high performing regions (top 10%) for learners with disabilities used flexible learning options whereas 74.1% of the RTOs located in the lower performing regions (bottom 10%) used this strategy.

Table 23 Practices employed by RTOs, by regional differences in levels of award completion of learners with disabilities (%)

	Performance of regions			
	Top 10%	51 to 90%	11 to 50%	Bottom 10%
Used across courses				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Use of community member programs	42.9	46.6	43.4	56.9
Specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups	42.3	45.3	49.4	57.4
Specific units to provide support for particular groups	37.3	41.1	39.4	56.3
Joined-up service delivery with external agencies	36.8	39.1	33.2	48.4
Co-location of education and training and other community services	31.4	23.5	27.3	33.3
Participation, progress and completion				
Allocating additional student contact hours	87.2	89.0	87.4	90.0
Flexible learning options	82.9	84.6	75.6	74.1
Adapting specific courses	75.6	75.3	71.6	82.3
Tailoring programs for students with low skills	71.1	71.6	71.2	80.5
Delivering programs in community settings	62.3	60.1	60.7	76.6
Delivering programs in partnership with other RTOs	50.6	54.3	52.9	50.6
Pathways to further training and employment				
Building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area	82.5	79.6	76.5	91.3
Customising articulation arrangements to further study or training	50.7	49.7	51.7	58.9
Used for supporting students				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Strategies for managing students with disability	74.2	74.1	74.0	91.5
Referrals to external agencies	65.6	59.6	57.4	71.2
Case management	61.0	65.5	69.5	73.8
Mentoring	58.3	68.3	65.9	86.0
Counselling	55.9	63.0	68.2	74.6
Support services	42.1	38.7	47.3	59.3
Participation, progress and completion				
Clearly acknowledging students existing knowledge	97.3	94.6	97.2	100
Providing flexible assessment formats	82.4	81.2	77.6	87.7
Providing opportunities for work experience	75.4	71.0	72.5	82.8
Providing note takers for students with disabilities	53.4	44.6	40.4	62.5
Pathways to further training and employment				
Providing course and career guidance	81.8	83.4	85.0	91.2
Tracking destinations of students after training	68.3	68.7	58.2	71.9

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Table 24 Practices employed by RTOs, by regional differences in levels of award completion of CALD learners (%)

	Performance of regions			
	Top 10%	51 to 90%	11 to 50%	Bottom 10%
Used across courses				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Use of community member programs	44.4	44.8	48.4	60.0
Specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups	40.6	35.4	42.9	59.2
Specific units to provide support for particular groups	37.7	42.2	48.2	58.3
Joined-up service delivery with external agencies	29.2	35.8	38.7	44.4
Co-location of education and training and other community services	28.4	23.0	28.1	34.7
Participation, progress and completion				
Allocating additional student contact hours	88.6	88.6	86.7	92.9
Flexible learning options	85.2	83.3	73.8	84.1
Adapting specific courses	74.4	71.7	75.4	81.9
Tailoring programs for students with low skills	67.1	68.7	73.2	86.7
Delivering programs in community settings	53.4	58.1	64.0	79.0
Delivering programs in partnership with other RTOs	52.1	52.5	53.9	52.4
Pathways to further training and employment				
Building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area	73.3	77.3	81.0	89.5
Customising articulation arrangements to further study or training	32.9	50.8	54.1	59.8
Used for supporting students				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Strategies for managing students with disability	71.4	74.6	74.9	86.8
Referrals to external agencies	61.0	62.2	56.0	69.8
Case management	59.0	66.4	69.0	73.2
Mentoring	57.4	66.2	69.4	80.0
Counselling	53.3	63.2	69.3	71
Support services	37.3	40.9	46.0	59.0
Participation, progress and completion				
Clearly acknowledging students existing knowledge	97.1	94.6	97.8	97.3
Providing flexible assessment formats	76.9	80.4	79.9	86.3
Providing opportunities for work experience	71.0	70.9	73.8	81.4
Providing note takers for students with disabilities	50.0	41.7	44.7	57.4
Pathways to further training and employment				
Providing course and career guidance	75.4	84.4	84.6	94.3
Tracking destinations of students after training	60.3	68.0	60.6	72.5

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Table 25 Practices employed by RTOs, by regional differences in levels of award completion of unemployed learners (%)

	Performance of regions			
	Top 10%	51 to 90%	11 to 50%	Bottom 10%
Used across courses				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Use of community member programs	43.2	42.6	46.7	57.3
Specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups	38.9	37.2	34.3	47.3
Specific units to provide support for particular groups	36.0	47.9	49.2	53.2
Joined-up service delivery with external agencies	31.9	41.1	39.9	56.6
Co-location of education and training and other community services	26.4	26.3	25.9	32.0
Participation, progress and completion				
Allocating additional student contact hours	91.1	87.4	87.8	90.6
Flexible learning options	85.7	81.9	77.2	75.3
Adapting specific courses	75.6	73.2	72.8	84.7
Tailoring programs for students with low skills	73.3	69.7	71.3	84.3
Delivering programs in community settings	60.3	57.8	63.0	77.4
Delivering programs in partnership with other RTOs	46.8	53.8	51.3	61.9
Pathways to further training and employment				
Building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area	79.3	78.0	79.1	89.3
Customising articulation arrangements to further study or training	42.9	50.5	52.6	59.3
Used for supporting students				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Strategies for managing students with disability	71.9	71.1	80.8	78.8
Referrals to external agencies	61.5	59.0	62.7	56.3
Case management	59.4	65.7	72.2	64.7
Mentoring	57.1	66.0	69.7	80.0
Counselling	51.6	62.8	70.5	70.8
Support services	27.9	41.1	50	53.1
Participation, progress and completion				
Clearly acknowledging students existing knowledge	96.1	94.6	98.1	97.3
Providing flexible assessment formats	82.6	78.3	80.2	88.0
Providing opportunities for work experience	74.2	68.9	74.3	84.3
Providing note takers for students with disabilities	50.0	42.2	43.3	59.4
Pathways to further training and employment				
Providing course and career guidance	80.6	80.5	89.6	86.5
Tracking destinations of students after training	69.6	64.3	62.4	69.9

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Just under 87% of the RTOs located in the high performing regions for learners with low prior educational attainment used flexible learning options whereas 75.3% of the RTOs located in the regions within the bottom 10% used this strategy (see Table 26).

Table 26 Practices employed by RTOs, by regional differences in levels of award completion of learners with low prior educational attainment (%)

	Performance of regions			
	Top 10%	51 to 90%	11 to 50%	Bottom 10%
Used across courses				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Use of community member programs	41.7	45.8	50.6	50.0
Specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of particular groups	40.8	44.6	47.3	49.3
Specific units to provide support for particular groups	38.6	38.3	41.5	55.4
Joined-up service delivery with external agencies	36.1	36.5	36.9	42.5
Co-location of education and training and other community services	27.5	24.1	27.8	31.9
Participation, progress and completion				
Allocating additional student contact hours	91.5	86.3	88.4	91.7
Flexible learning options	86.9	81.3	77.7	75.3
Adapting specific courses	76.8	71.8	74.8	81.0
Tailoring programs for students with low skills	69.7	72.1	73.1	71.3
Delivering programs in community settings	62.8	61.5	59.9	73.8
Delivering programs in partnership with other RTOs	51.3	52.3	52.2	60.2
Pathways to further training and employment				
Building relationships with employers to help students gain work in their course industry area	81.7	81.4	76.4	85.4
Customising articulation arrangements to further study or training	44.2	49.8	52.6	60.3
Used for supporting students				
Engagement and wellbeing				
Strategies for managing students with disability	80.0	72.9	75.3	84.4
Referrals to external agencies	65.5	65.7	67.8	74.6
Case management	63.8	66.8	68.2	76.3
Mentoring	63.8	59.3	59.6	65.1
Counselling	54.7	66.8	65.6	69.4
Support services	30.6	44.0	44.8	56.9
Participation, progress and completion				
Clearly acknowledging students existing knowledge	95.7	97.1	95.4	98.6
Providing flexible assessment formats	83.3	79.0	79.4	88.2
Providing opportunities for work experience	76.3	72.9	70.6	82.8
Providing note takers for students with disabilities	55.8	43.8	42.7	54.1
Pathways to further training and employment				
Providing course and career guidance	83.1	86.6	83.0	85.5
Tracking destinations of students after training	68.9	67.5	62.0	62.1

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Conclusion: refining the model of effective practice

The survey of VET providers was undertaken to identify the practices being used by providers across Australia to facilitate participation and completion in VET of adult Australians from disadvantaged backgrounds. The survey was designed around a practice interventions framework containing a four-pronged approach to supporting learners in undertaking education or training (Davies, Lamb & Doecke, 2011). The framework groups strategies to support learner participation and completion into four categories: outreach, wellbeing, pedagogy and pathways.

Outreach strategies aim at creating a connection with the individual to identify their needs and inform them of available options; *wellbeing* strategies aim at overcoming the personal obstacles disengaged learners may have to engage in learning; *pedagogy* strategies aim at adapting the delivery of training to the needs and dispositions of the learner; and *pathways* strategies aim at helping disengaged individuals link education and training to goals and pathways beyond the training itself (Davies, Lamb and Doecke 2011). The four types of effective interventions—outreach, pedagogy, wellbeing and pathways—are seen as mutually important in the process of supporting prospective disadvantaged learners through an education and training pathway.

The model was initially developed as an instrument for addressing four types of challenges disengaged learners often experience: (1) accessing education and training (e.g. poor knowledge of study options), (2) application to study or remaining engaged (e.g. effects of poverty, weak skills), (3) aspirations (e.g. limited career plans), and (4) achievement and skills (e.g. poor prior experiences of learning or early school leaving). One of the strengths of the model is that it recognises that engaging disadvantaged learners is not sufficient to provide them with improved outcomes. Supporting them throughout their VET training is also important, and the model offers four types of areas of practice linked to doing this.

The model has proven effective for categorising the variety of interventions and strategies used to promote enhanced opportunities and outcomes for disadvantaged learners. For this reason, the survey of VET providers gave equal consideration to the four components of the model in order to maximise the range of strategies and practices it could capture. The list of items included in the questionnaire was based on the strategies previously identified as forming effective intervention. At the same time, the inclusion of text fields in the survey allowed for the emergence of new types of strategies.

The primary advantage of the model is its flexibility: it does not dictate the appropriate strategies but simply provides a framework for organising the diversity of strategies. It makes the emergence of new strategies possible and thus allows for a combination of deductive and inductive reasoning in the identification of successful strategies. It also leaves open the possibility of reorganising the framework (e.g. adding a new category or merging two categories that were previously separated), if relevant.

The free text responses in the provider survey, seeking descriptions or examples of effective practice for different learners, highlight the utility of the framework. Providers listed a range of practices they use to support learners and they were largely consistent with the framework. A summary of some key examples under each of the framework categories—outreach, wellbeing, pedagogy and pathways—are provided below:

Outreach practices

- Aboriginal Coordinator using community outreach and engagement to help local Aboriginal population overcome their distrust of government run agencies.
- Flexible RPL
- We make arrangements for courses to be delivered where there is an interest, which may be a remote location
- Strong marketing and admissions focus
- Ongoing partnerships to reach community
- Outreach programs through other partners
- Partnering with other Agencies to reach the relevant groups
- Referrals from local communities
- We frequently travel to deliver training onsite in rural locations at actual job sites
- We have conducted community engagement projects to assist Indigenous parents and caregivers.
- Courses organised in rural and remote locations

Well-being practices

- Aboriginal support officer
- Assistance with costs is specifically given
- Individualised one on one support
- Coaching and mentoring/Case management
- Disability Officers working with staff and students. Includes staff professional development and training.
- Extra volunteer tutors to assist with participants achieving their competencies
- For all groups: social engagement, work readiness programs, work experience, work with one on one volunteer employment mentors
- Indigenous support officers offer tailored assistance to indigenous students to improve retention and completion
- Providing transport
- Provide a range of wrap around services that remove barriers like access to programs that provide financial assistance for travel, accommodation and meals while away from home for study.
- Provide assistance with financial options while they are studying; offer them a payment plan for their fees, provide budgeting assistance
- Provision of Counselling support with learning issues, fees and pastoral care.
- Specialised and individual support coaching/mentoring
- Student Experience Team tracking student progress and offering learning support
- Student welfare advisor and support

- We feed the students lunch for social connection, use repeat trainers who have built a rapport with the students (very important) and an Indigenous Liaison Officer on site.

Pedagogy practices

- A range of strategies apply: one to one and small group literacy and numeracy support, specialised learning groups catering to students with limited English
- A robust reasonable adjustment process and individual learning plan process is in place for all students. If a student identifies either at point of enrolment or post enrolment that they have a disability or learning need, both the Student Support team and Learning team are trained and equipped to work collaboratively in supporting each student's needs. Our reasonable adjustment practices have included examples of course extensions, longer periods for exams, printing of learning materials in larger format, additional 1:1 face-to-face support. One of the key benefits to our students is that the course is flexible and there are no set assessment deadlines - we work 1:1 with each student to put these goals in place throughout their study.
- Access to online studies and support networks without needing to travel
- Adapted training and assessment tools to include the student's range of abilities
- Again through one on one assistance. We also buddy people to complete coursework and have provided online webinars to support the coursework.
- Blended delivery methodology
- Clustered face to face delivery, telephone and videoconference support; smaller groups to cater for less available clients, trainer travels to smaller, isolated communities
- Course delivered in language other than English
- Ensure the training is practical, use visual training aids to maximise learning, provide language, literacy and numeracy assistance throughout the program
- Face to face learning in small groups, continue to rephrase until the words connect. Extended timelines to submit material
- Flexible and practical approach to learning and assessment. On the job assessments, observations.
- Individualised learning and assessment programs
- Majority of courses available through online and/or remote learning allowing students in rural or isolated geographical locations to participate where they may not have been able to attend a classroom-based course
- Modified training materials
- Online learning and work based delivery
- Our success rate comes from the fact we deliver face to face classroom training supplemented with on the job training and assessment
- Providing online learning with dedicated distance trainers who use Skype and telephone to maintain weekly contact with student
- Small number in standard classes to deal with students one on one
- To engage these student we put all our learning resources online, meaning our students can learn through audio books and educational step by step DVDs and also one on one, face to face.

- Matching trainers and learners and ensuring trainers have appropriate training and background
- Using mix of classroom, online and workplace

Pathways practices

- Continuous careers advice and planning
- Careers Counselling / career and job related workshops
- Certificate qualifications, career guidance via our Centre for work and learning, Trade taster programs and Skills gap programs, tutor support and volunteer support
- Collaborating with Job networks to assist participants to become job ready
- Employment pathway training through strong partnerships with employers
- Employment skills embedded in courses
- Extensive pathway program
- Industry Placement Program to encourage students to seek employment. Lessons to teach resume writing. Developed relationships with employers to offer internships. Dedicated Student Salon so the students get real training and experience in a live environment.
- Pathway Planning, resume writing
- Ready for work programs incorporating work experience
- We have run pathway to work programs. We are running jobseeker programs for students from non-English speaking backgrounds - language, culture, processes and expectations of the Australian workforce.

Yet, the free text responses also highlighted a category of strategies and practices not readily covered by the framework. Many providers reported modifying or providing courses or programs specific to the needs of learners and these were important to provider success with particular groups of learners. This fifth category, based on curriculum and focused on implementing specially designed programs or courses, was raised by providers as being important to address learner needs and encourage them to participate as well as complete.

Examples of this additional category of strategies are provided below:

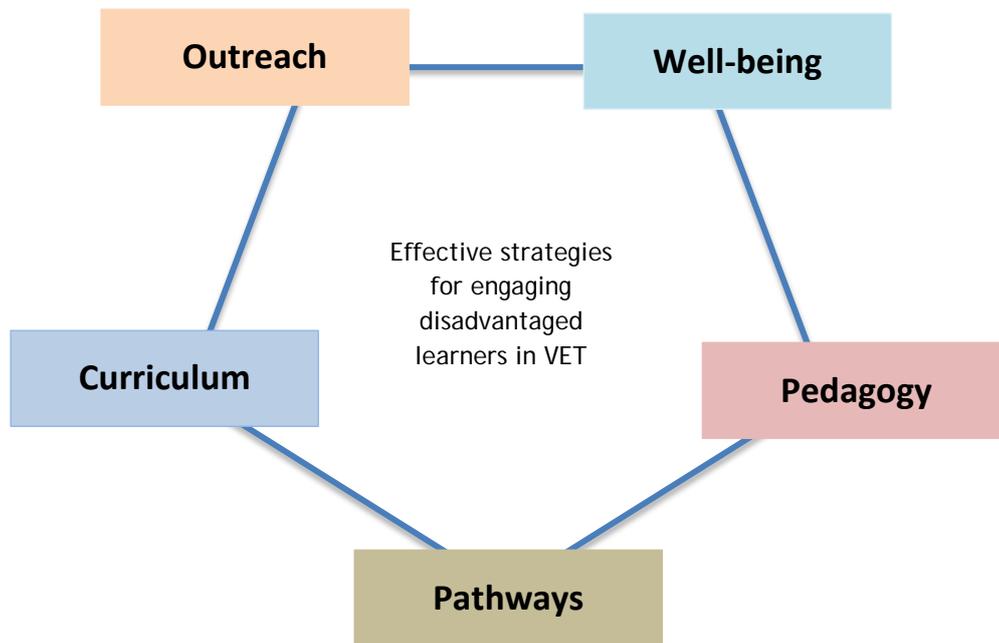
Curriculum: Programs or courses

- Indigenous tailored programs which focuses on Indigenous culture, hospitality, IT, LLN skills, foundation skills and job searching techniques. The courses have to be a mix of theory and practical,
- For learners with minimal or no language skills we have designed courses focused on language development in Auslan and English
- Program includes work placement, resume writing, personal presentation and attributes to gain employment
- Tailored courses to get learners engaged
- Provide basic entry level skills training and job search support
- Provide EAL classes to students with poor English

- Providing English Language courses, to bring students up to the required level of proficiency prior to moving onto certificate programs
- Provision of lower level courses to assist students to progress to apprenticeships.
- Offer short courses up-front
- Special classes in foundation skills integrated into life skills programs such as cooking / computer usage
- Start-up training programs
- Tailor programs to remove barriers to participation including delivery within the students community
- Transition to work youth program, non-accredited programs targeted to the hospitality industry partnered with employers, tutor support and volunteer support including youth mentoring
- We deliver Core Skills for Employment and Training (CSET) and also Foundation Skills qualifications as pathways to further education or employment
- We have run pre-vocation and access programs for people who haven't been employed.
- We offer pre-accredited skill building courses in employability skills particularly computer based skills such as Excel, MYOB and Bookkeeping etc.
- We provide a basic literacy and numeracy course for most students prior to other study
- Adult migrant programs to prepare learners
- Basic computer courses to engage people
- Entry level accredited courses, pre-enrolment courses
- One of the key benefits of being a blended learning provider who offers a start anytime model and 1:1 support means that we can work with each student based on their previous experience, knowledge and skills. In conjunction with delivering training packages which are designed to equip students for their chosen study/employment area, we also offer Career Services including assistance with CV and cover letter design, LinkedIn profiles, interview readiness, etc.
- Learning coaches and vocational placement officers and career coaches offer additional assistance to help students target employment options in their local area

The feedback from providers about effective practices for disadvantaged learners suggest that curriculum design (programs and courses) is an important category for VET providers to consider in better engaging disadvantaged populations in VET. Figure 5 presents a modified framework taking account of the new category.

Figure 2 Good practice framework for VET provision



The framework presents the main categories of effective practice needed for improving the participation and completion in VET of disadvantaged populations.

References

Davies, M, Lamb, S and Doecke, E, (2011) *Strategic Review of Effective Re Engagement Models for Disengaged Learners*, DEECD

Appendix A: Method for conducting the online survey

An online survey of all providers registered on the National Register on Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia (www.training.gov.au) was conducted in 2016. The survey of TAFEs and skills institutes, polytechnics, private and community RTOs was undertaken over five weeks in July and August 2016. It involved a national mapping of RTO practices specifically associated with delivery of programs to disadvantaged learners—such as learners from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, those who are unemployed, low skill workers, learners in rural and isolated areas of Australia, Indigenous Australians, learners with a disability, refugees, and those with little or no prior education.

The survey aimed to generate a provider-based picture of strategies employed across the sector to support disadvantaged learners in achieving successful outcomes.

All TAFEs, community and private RTOs registered to deliver training in 2016 were contacted by email and invited to participate in the online survey. To optimise participation promotion of the online survey was undertaken by NCVET using platforms such as Twitter, their newsletter and website. Industry peak bodies and the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) also supported and publicised the project. This publicity, independent of CIRES researchers' direct approaches to providers, extended the scope of the prospective survey sample and contributed to good participation rates (see below).

National RTO contacts database

In order to make reliable contact with the relevant personnel, the researchers utilised training provider information made available from the National Register on Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia (www.training.gov.au). This publically available website is a national register of training in Australia and is funded by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments. An electronic file of all RTOs delivering training in 2016 included the following fields: provider name, trading name, RTO code/TOID, associated regulatory body, provider type, RTO address, RTO/CEO telephone number and RTO/CEO email addresses. The supplied email addresses enabled email contact with a total of 3704 RTOs to invite participation in the study, and to subsequently keep track of provider participation and generate reminders as required. The total number of RTOs contacted by provider type is detailed in Table 1A.

Table 1A Number of RTOs contacted to participate in the online survey, by provider type

Provider type	N
Community Based Adult Education Provider	291
Education/training Business Or Centre: Privately Operated Registered Training Organisation	3349
Technical And Further Education Institute, Skills Institute Or Polytechnic	48
University - Government and Non-Government	16
Total RTOs contacted by email	3704

Source: www.training.gov.au data

Use of the database provided by training.gov.au meant that the survey was limited to RTOs, rather than all training providers that submit data to NCVER. Furthermore, the survey was restricted to TAFEs, skills institutes or polytechnics, universities, community based adult education providers and privately operated registered training organisations, as the focus of this study centres on RTOs with experience in training post-school VET students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Online survey tool and platform

Qualtrics was utilised as the online survey development tool for the project. Qualtrics is a development tool that facilitates the delivery of an online survey with multi-platform access, ensuring functionality across computers, tablets and phones. The survey was open to all those supplied with the specific survey link and could be viewed across the range of internet browsers (Chrome, Safari, Firefox, Explorer).

The Qualtrics platform ensured that responses could be monitored to ascertain completion and in-progress responses at all times. Participants had the option to leave the survey at any point during the survey and return to their saved responses at a later point. To ensure that providers were afforded every opportunity to complete such responses all training providers with an in-progress response were emailed reminders over the course of the survey, as detailed in subsequent sections. Along with completed responses all in-progress responses were closed at 5pm on the 5th August after 5 weeks in the field.

Contact approach and follow up processes

In the first instance a primary approach email was sent to the director of each identified RTO. This informed the head of the RTO about the project and provided contacts for further information. It invited the CEO/Director, or a nominated staff member of their choosing (e.g. equity officer) to participate in a short online survey via an embedded link within the text of the email. In line with Victoria University ethics requirements, participants were assured of their anonymity and it was emphasised that no training providers would be directly named in any reporting and that results from the survey would only be reported in aggregate terms.

The personalised primary approach email to CEOs utilised MailChimp, an email service provider designed to assist bulk electronic communications. To optimise delivery the initial email and all reminder emails were sent in batches of 200 to ensure that mailing systems would not incorrectly identify the emails as spam or junk and block delivery. To further guard against firewall the email was constructed in a plain-text format and words or phrases targeted by spam filters were also avoided.

The timing of the initial approach email and reminders are outlined below:

1st July 2016	Initial approach email sent
7th July 2016	First reminder email
21st July 2016	Second reminder
2nd August 2016	Final reminder sent
5th August 2016, 5pm	Survey Close

Survey support and follow up

A number of strategies were employed to optimise participation and ensure all RTOs had ample opportunity to access the survey:

- 1 Alternate email contacts were pursued for emails deemed undeliverable, with web searches conducted to find alternate email contacts.
- 2 'Out of office' automated responses were also monitored for alternate email contacts, with follow up contact letters forwarded to the named person as appropriate
- 3 In weeks in which the survey was in the field CIRES project officers assisted with RTOs' queries, concerns or technical difficulties in filling out the survey online. Approximately 40 phone calls were received and many emails exchanged to assist in the survey's implementation.
- 4 In instances where training providers communicated that the survey did not fit their circumstances, (e.g. they were a RTO specialising in upper-level management/leadership courses or they did not feel that they had much experience training equity groups) they were encouraged to take part in the online survey nevertheless and skip through questions that were not applicable.
- 5 In the limited contexts where an RTO had no current students (through very recent accreditation or being in the process of being wound up) they were advised to not complete the online survey.

Few technical difficulties were encountered or reported by participants. The expected completion time to undertake the survey was 15 minutes, and in practice the average completion time was 26 minutes. In future, a slightly higher estimation of time required would be provided.

Three reminders were sent out to providers over the course of the survey period, advising again about the study and urging participation. On each occasion all RTOs with an identified survey completion were removed from the follow up mailing list prior to each reminder email.

Data quality

Upon closure of the online survey link on 5 August, a file containing all complete and incomplete responses was downloaded from Qualtrics in SPSS format.

Cleaning and refinement of the file involved undertaking unit-level checks. Empty cases were removed as well as dummy data. To ensure that each response included in the file represented a valid RTO, names and email addresses provided by the respondent were manually matched to a valid RTO number. Where a valid RTO number could not be found, the case was flagged as invalid and excluded from any analysis.

Any duplicate entries from the same RTO or same individual were flagged and in each case the most complete or recent response was retained.

Achieved response

Prior to the survey entering the field, it was estimated using classical parameters that to ensure findings be representative nationally within 95 per cent confidence (that is, within a 5 per cent margin of error) a 85.9 per cent response rate would be required for TAFE Institutes and dual sector RTOs, a 57 per cent response rate would be required for community RTOs and an 10.3 per cent response rate required for private RTOs.

The projected sample and the achieved sample are outlined in Table 2A. The survey exceeded projected response rates for private RTOs (10.3 per cent compared to 24.5 per cent). It did not meet the projected response rate for community RTOs (57.0 per cent compared to 47.1 per cent), nor for TAFEs and dual sector RTOs (85.9 per cent compared to 54.7 per cent). Response rates alone are not the only consideration in determining accuracy of survey results and representativeness of providers is

also important, and is explored further below. TAFEs will be targeted in the report featuring case studies, where they will be first approached and profiled within the identified regions of top VET performance for equity groups. With a total of 1003 RTOs completing the survey, the number of responses from RTOs surpassed the projected aggregate total of 616.

Table 2A Projected sample against the achieved sample, N of RTOs and response rate (%)

	Base	Projected sample		Achieved sample	
	N RTOs	N RTOs	Response Rate %	N RTOs	Response rate %
Community Based Adult Education Provider	291	166	57.0	137	47.1
Education/training Business Or Centre: Privately Operated Registered Training Organisation	3349	345	10.3	822	24.5
Technical And Further Education Institute, Skills Institute Or Polytechnic, Universities	64	55	85.9	35	54.7
Other*				9	
Total	3704	616		1003	

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Notes: The 'other' category represents all providers which were excluded from the initial RTO contact but participated in the provider survey regardless.

Table 3A Count of RTO and participant response by provider type

	RTO (N)	Respondents (N)
Community Based Adult Education Provider	137	142
Education/training Business Or Centre: Privately Operated Registered Training Organisation	822	843
Technical And Further Education Institute, Skills Institute Or Polytechnic	27	41
University - Government	7	10
University - Non-Government Catholic	1	1
Other		
<i>Enterprise - Government</i>		1
<i>Enterprise - Non-Government</i>		1
<i>Industry Association</i>		4
<i>Other – Not Elsewhere Classified</i>		1
<i>Professional Association</i>		1
<i>School-Independent</i>		1
Total	1003	1046

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Notes: All providers including those out of scope included.

Australia-wide, 1003 RTOs participated in the online survey with over 1046 unique respondents. Multiple responses were typically found within larger and often multi-site training organisations (see Table 3A). In considering the achieved sample by provider type, it is evident that some organisations took part in the project despite being excluded from the initial contact by CIRES (e.g. Industry Associations (n=4) and one independent school). Their participation is a result of the wider promotion of the project and their data will be included for analysis where appropriate.

The achieved data set can be said to have a national perspective as it contains registered training providers from all states and territories. The state with the highest response was Queensland (291 RTO responses), there was strong participation within New South Wales (257 RTO responses) and Victoria (261 RTO responses) (see Table 4A).

Table 4A RTO administrative base by all jurisdictions and provider type, N and %

	Community Based Adult Education Provider		Education/training Business Or Centre: Privately Operated Registered Training Organisation		Technical And Further Education Institute, Skills Institute Or Polytechnic, Universities		Total N	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
New South Wales	39	27.5	208	24.7	10	19.2	257	24.8
Victoria	68	47.9	180	21.4	13	25.0	261	25.2
Queensland	14	9.9	266	31.6	11	21.2	291	28.1
South Australia	6	4.2	57	6.8	0	0.0	63	6.1
Western Australia	6	4.2	93	11.0	8	15.4	107	10.3
Tasmania	3	2.1	13	1.5	4	7.7	20	1.9
Northern Territory	1	0.7	13	1.5	2	3.8	16	1.5
Australian Capital Territory	5	3.5	13	1.5	4	7.7	22	2.1
Australia	142	100.0	843	100.0	52	100.0	1037	100.0

Source: 2016 Australian RTO census administered by CIRES

Notes: Providers out of scope excluded from calculation, multiple responses per RTO included.