

Managed by the Flexible Learning Advisory Group on behalf of all States and Territories in conjunction with ANTA

# **Evaluation of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework 2000 – 2001**

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## FOREWORD

### BACKGROUND

In August 1999, the Australian National Training Authority Chief Executive Officers (ANTA CEOs) endorsed the *Australian Flexible Learning Framework for the National Vocational Education and Training System 2000 – 2004 (AFL Framework)*. The AFL Framework has been developed by the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG) and represents a strategic plan for the five-year National Project allocation for flexible learning. It is designed to support both accelerated take-up of flexible learning modes and to position Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) as a world leader in applying new technologies to vocational education products and services.

The AFL Framework is supported by an annual implementation plan, and the plan for 2002, *Strategy 2002*, was endorsed by the ANTA CEOs in September 2001. It identifies specific initiatives and allocates resources within each of the five Goals identified in the Framework.

### ROLE OF THE FLEXIBLE LEARNING ADVISORY GROUP

In broad terms, FLAG is a strategically-focused group of senior VET personnel advising ANTA CEOs, the ANTA Board, the Department of Education, Science and Technology (DEST), and the Australian Information and Communication Technology Education Committee (AICTEC - formerly known as the EdNA Reference Committee), on national issues relating to the directions and priorities for flexible learning in VET, with particular reference to online technologies<sup>1</sup>.

### THE EVALUATION PROJECT

This report is an evaluation of the first two years of the Framework – *Strategy 2000* and *Strategy 2001*. It includes an evaluation architecture for the five years of the Framework and three case studies, as well as evaluation of the outcomes of the five Goals of the Framework and progress towards fulfilling the Framework's Mission and Vision. It presents recommendations for the future directions of the Framework.

### THE EVALUATION TEAM

The evaluation has been conducted for FLAG by KPMG Consulting Australia in partnership with LifeLong Learning Associates. The team comprised:

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<sup>1</sup> The New Economy Index, Progressive Policy Institute, URL: [www.ppionline.org](http://www.ppionline.org)

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## ABSTRACT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This project has evaluated the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (the *Framework*) in Years 1 – 2 of its five-year life. The evaluation processes have comprised:

- ✍ Revision of the original Measures of Success for the Framework against which it will be ultimately be evaluated.
- ✍ Design of a robust architecture for evaluating the efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness of the Framework over the five years of 2000 – 2004 and into the longer term.
- ✍ A formative evaluation of *Strategy 2000* and its immediate outcomes and processes.
- ✍ A summative evaluation of the first two years of the Framework with recommendations for future directions in Years 4-5 and beyond (presented in this report).

The policy document establishing the Australian Flexible Learning Framework sets a very ambitious challenge – no less than transforming the meaning and practice of ‘learning’ in VET in order to assist Australia to make the transition from the old mechanised economy to a new knowledge society. The goal is systemic change in the nature, practice and management of vocational education and training, accompanied by a shift from supply-driven offerings to demand-driven responses to industry and student needs.

In only two years, the *Framework* has taken big strides towards that goal, guided by a growing number of highly committed people who have developed a strong collaborative culture to support their work. A great deal has been learned about what works, what does not, and why; and about barriers inside and outside the system which need to be addressed. The problems outlined above should not obscure the facts that the *Framework* is proving an effective and efficient way of moving collaboratively towards this national goal of systemic change, and that its management strategy is both effective and imaginative.

## THE KEY FINDINGS

Broadly speaking, significant returns are being achieved on the investment made by the ANTA CEOs in the *Framework*, most particularly through three outstanding achievements of the *Framework* program:

1. The growth in knowledge, skills and confidence of VET practitioners in using flexible learning approaches in their teaching. The emphasis on professional development marks the Framework out as a distinctive, leading model for change across the system.
2. The increase in the number and variety of resources on which they can call in implementing flexible learning; in particular, the development of a body of nationally available, crown copyright online material to support teaching and learning.
3. The development of networks and communities of practice across the country. The collaborative culture on which the *Framework*'s philosophy and its management are based is one of the outstanding achievements of the *Framework* and potentially one of its strongest legacies to the VET sector.

There are, however, three broad areas in which the *Framework* has failed to fulfill its promise or has encountered barriers which inhibit FLAG's capacity to implement some of the Goals:

1. The lack of close engagement of industry stakeholders with Framework activities, products and processes. The evaluation has identified a need to achieve a better balance in the *Framework* between a supply-driven model of e-learning and a demand-driven approach which includes industry more clearly within its scope.
2. Three *Framework* Goals have been unable to realise their potential. Their aims are couched in terms of achieving change in policy and practice, but at best FLAG can advocate for such change on the basis of *Framework* findings. These are Goal 2

(Technical Infrastructure), Goal 4 (VET Policy) and Goal 5 (Legal and Regulatory Environment).

3. Thirdly, returns on the investment are inhibited by a lack of systematic capability to leverage the *Framework* through communication, promotion and advocacy. One imperative is to communicate the opportunities, outcomes and outputs of the *Framework* and its projects to VET staff and to VET stakeholders with a view to engaging their participation and adoption of *Framework* resources. The other is to advocate for flexible learning as integral to mainstream delivery of training, and as fundamental to enabling the VET sector to become more client-focused.

The Framework has been managed effectively and the collaborative approach has been especially appropriate to the task. FLAG's collective will to maintain the collaborative concept has been a powerful success factor in helping FLAG to overcome inevitable jurisdictional tensions and manage a multi-faceted program effectively. However, workloads have become unsustainable and there is now an urgent need to implement a less complex, more efficient management strategy which capitalises on the strong trust relationships which have developed within the Group.

## MAJOR CHALLENGES GOING FORWARD

At mid-point in the *Framework*, the time is right to build confidently on what has been learned, and shift the *Framework's* focus from building to sustainability, while still preserving the cutting edge explorations. Sustainability means consolidating the successes and learnings across the VET system, and using those to keep ahead of the game in a fast-moving technological and economic environment.

This suggests the overall strategic focus for the remainder of the *Framework* should incorporate:

- Further consolidation and refinement of the professional development program and strengthening of the connections between it and the online content, resources and networks supporting VET staff.
- An emphasis, across all *Framework* projects, on integrating flexible learning approaches, especially technology-based approaches, into the mainstream of VET delivery and business practices.
- An accompanying emphasis on moving beyond the 'early adopters' who have ably championed flexible learning through the *Framework* to date, to the mainstream of VET staff, through strategies which differentiate among client groups.
- Development of closer relationships with industry stakeholders in the *Framework*.
- A tightly focused, strategy-driven research program which enables FLAG to stay 'ahead of the game' and strengthens its advocacy role.
- A systematic program to leverage the *Framework* on State and Territory initiatives through a highly visible, coordinated set of communications, promotions and advocacy activities upwards, outwards and downwards in the VET sector, and outside to industry stakeholders and legislative and regulatory bodies.

It is necessary to recalibrate the management strategy to support this strategic emphasis on sustainability and renewal, as well as reduce the unacceptably high workloads. Refinements are also proposed to the project design and management processes to assist further quality assurance.

Funding levels for the remainder of the *Framework* will be contingent on the global allocation for the *Framework* to be agreed by Ministers. The evaluation draws some conclusions around the global funding threshold for the *Framework*, below which the *Framework* is likely to lose its coherence and momentum. It offers suggestions in relation to the relative proportions that might be allocated in 2003 and 2004 to each Goal area.

Finally, the evaluation suggests it would be prudent to position the activities and operation of the *Framework* in 2003 and 2004 against a clear understanding of the *Framework's* future in 2005 and beyond. A decision by the Ministers in Council by the end of 2002 would enable forward planning for 2003 and 2004 and beyond to proceed with the appropriate transition strategies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Framework Goals

- 1.0 That in order to strengthen the *Framework's* potential to achieve its objectives, the present Goals be realigned for Years 4 – 5 by:
- ✍ Retaining and refining Goal 1 relating to professional development.
  - ✍ Revising Goal 3 relating to resources and content development and modifying its priorities for 2003 – 2004.
  - ✍ Creating two new Goals to address needs for tightly focused research, and leveraging the *Framework* through an extended communications and advocacy program.
  - ✍ Dropping Goals 2, 4, and 5 in their present form, and taking up aspects of their focus under the new goals for research and leveraging the *Framework*.

### Goal 1 Creative Capable VET People

- 2.0 That Goal 1 for Years 4 – 5 of the *Framework* be the building of a critical mass of VET staff able to use flexible learning approaches – especially those incorporating online technologies – to accelerate Australia's transition to a knowledge society.

#### Priorities and strategies for 2003 – 2004 should include:

- 2.1 That 2002 levels of funding for professional development projects under Goal 1 be maintained in 2003 and 2004 to continue to strengthen the capabilities of VET staff to engage in flexible learning.
- 2.2 That in 2003 – 2004 the *LearnScope* program take a finer-grained approach to differentiating the priority groups for professional development in relation to flexible learning with a view to progressing beyond the 'early adopters' of innovations. In particular, the program should have close regard to:
- ✍ The outcomes of ANTA's client focus project and the profiles identified for the various segments of TAFE staff.
  - ✍ The identification in the current evaluation of particular groups including middle and senior managers, contract and sessional staff, and staff of ACE, enterprise RTOs and private providers.
- 2.3 That, within the ambit of *LearnScope* and *Flexible Learning Leaders*, a number of projects be supported which explore and report on ways in which workload and performance management can support and promote flexible learning. The findings of these projects should be published in the form of case studies and widely disseminated.

### Goal 2 Resources to Support VET People

- 3.0 That Goal 2 for 2003 – 2004 of the *Framework* be the provision of accessible, usable resources to support teaching, learning and professional development related to flexible learning in the VET sector.

#### Goal 2 priorities and strategies for 2003 – 2004 should include:

- 3.1 That new development of *Toolboxes* be suspended for 12 months to allow time to incorporate the lessons learned from previous rounds, and to ensure the ongoing quality, relevance to industry needs, and uptake of future rounds.

- 3.2 That all websites under the former Goals 1 and 3, and their associated products, be evaluated to assess their relationships and to recommend a rationalisation in 2003 which will maximise their accessibility and effectiveness; this evaluation to be associated with current work being undertaken on the [flexiblelearning.net.au](http://flexiblelearning.net.au) website, and also to take into account initiatives such as the VET portal.
- 3.3 That FLAG consider the remaining former Goal 3 projects, decide whether or not they should continue, and if so, determine in what form this should happen given the strategic priorities for 2003 and 2004.
- 3.4 That a project be commissioned to examine how resources produced by *Framework* projects can be maintained and updated in order to assure a reasonable lifespan beyond the funding period of the project.

### **Goal 3 Research to Inform the Framework**

- 4.0 That Goal 3 for 2003 – 2004 of the *Framework* be the commissioning of targeted research to inform the operations and future development of the *Framework*.

#### **Goal 3 priorities and strategies for 2003 – 2004 should include:**

- 4.1 That the research program comprise a small number of tightly focused, strategy-driven projects planned for implementation over 2003 – 2004.
- 4.2 That priorities for research include:
  - ✎ Telecommunications and technology infrastructure – e.g. bandwidth issues, pricing, new technologies and implications for delivery.
  - ✎ Aspects of VET policy which inhibit integration of flexible learning into mainstream VET practice – e.g. researching ways in which job design and performance management could support and promote flexible learning.
  - ✎ Industry needs for technology-enabled learning – e.g. through a needs assessment conducted in conjunction with relevant ITABs.
  - ✎ Legal and regulatory barriers to the effective take-up of flexible learning by the VET sector – e.g. in relation to privacy, and copyright and intellectual property.
- 4.3 That membership of the Research Steering Committee include stakeholder interests and expertise in research methods.
- 4.4 That each project be commissioned on the basis of:
  - ✎ Research questions developed through a rigorous design process prior to tender.
  - ✎ Demonstration by the research team of why the preferred methodologies are proposed, and that it has the expertise to conduct and write up the project to the desired quality.
  - ✎ Project oversight by the Research Goal Steering Committee within limited but realistic timelines.

### **Goal 4 Leveraging Flexible Learning through Communication and Advocacy**

- 5.0 That Goal 4 for 2003 – 2004 of the *Framework* be to leverage the *Framework* through communication and advocacy throughout the VET sector and outside to key stakeholders by:
  - ✎ Disseminating its outcomes and products throughout the VET sector and outside to key stakeholders such as industry.
  - ✎ Developing closer linkages at all levels of the VET sector within the *Framework* and beyond to industry stakeholders.

- ✍ Advocating for organisational, policy and regulatory changes needed to enable flexible learning approaches to be fully integrated into training delivery and business practices.
- 5.1 That priorities under this Goal in 2003 be to develop systematic strategies for:
- ✍ FLAG's advocacy roles within the VET system, beyond it to other national educational forums, and to industry.
  - ✍ Creating communications and promotions strategies for each Goal and its various outcomes and outputs since 2000, designed to reach the different client groups within and outside the *Framework*.
  - ✍ Providing guidance to every *Framework* project team on designing a communications and promotions plan as a required pre-requisite to winning the project and a required item for reporting against progress.
  - ✍ A coordinated approach to information management within the *Framework*.
  - ✍ Supporting existing and new communities of practice – e.g. reaching into industry through a e-learning community of practice network among national ITABs
- 5.2 That the Goal Steering Committee include stakeholder interests and experts in communications and advocacy.
- 5.3 That the dissemination and promotion of the Preferred Standards be managed through this Goal area.

## Managing the Framework

- 6.0 That the *Framework* management strategy and support structure be revised in the second half of 2002, as follows:

### FLAG and the Working Group:

- 6.1 That FLAG as a group continue to focus on *Framework* strategy and strengthen its emphasis on communications and advocacy within and outside the VET sector.
- 6.2 That the Working Group continue to operate as the operations planning and management centre for the *Framework*.

### Steering Committees and project oversight:

- 6.3 That the number of Steering Committees be reduced to four, one for each Goal.
- 6.4 That the membership of the four Goal Steering Committees:
- ✍ Reduce the number of FLAG members on each Steering Committee.
  - ✍ Include industry stakeholders in order to enhance the communications, advocacy and leverage goals of the *Framework*.
  - ✍ Include specialist expertise in the area of the Goal.
- 6.5 That the Goal Steering Committee's role be to:
- ✍ Oversee the development of project designs.
  - ✍ Review progress of the projects and address emerging issues and problems.
  - ✍ Review project products and reports and recommend on them to FLAG.
  - ✍ Advise FLAG and other Steering Committees on cross-*Framework* issues arising from the projects.
- 6.6 That each Goal Steering Committee be chaired by a FLAG member who assumes direct management responsibility for the cluster of projects, supported locally by a Secretariat staff member funded from the *Framework* management budget

- 6.7 That the formal roles of 'project sponsor' and 'managing agent' disappear. FLAG members might choose to become mentors to one or more projects in which they have particular interests and expertise.

**The Secretariat:**

- 6.8 That, to support the above, a networked Secretariat be created, which remains separate from ANTA and which comprises:
- ✍ The small central Secretariat group which supports the Chairs of FLAG and the Working Group, coordinates *Framework* activities including the work of the out-posted program managers and support staff, and manages the flexiblelearning.net.au website and the Phase 2 evaluation project.
  - ✍ Four out-posted Goal program managers which are full-time positions funded from the *Framework* management budget. An out-posting arrangement, locating the four managers with the Goal Steering Committee Chair, will preserve the sense of an overall coordinating and unifying intelligence. FLAG can both secure their responsiveness to the role of the Chair, and reinforce the aim of information sharing and cross-*Framework* synergy. The managers' role is to:
    - ✍ Coordinate the activities of the cluster of projects and develop networks and linkages among them.
    - ✍ Support the work of the Steering Committee Chair.
    - ✍ Liaise with the other Goal program managers on operational management, cross-*Framework* linkages and information management.
  - ✍ Secretariat support to all State and Territory FLAG members to support them in their advocacy and leveraging activities. The support staff would be located with the State and Territory FLAG members. The level of resourcing will depend on members' requirements; it will be funded from the *Framework* management budget.

**Project management and quality assurance:**

- 6.9 That no project should go to tender until a detailed project design brief has been completed against which bids are assessed. This brief should include:
- ✍ Objectives and expected outcomes.
  - ✍ Scope and boundaries of the project.
  - ✍ Assessment of the audience(s) for the project, the formats they prefer for accessing and using project outputs, and appropriate dissemination strategies.
  - ✍ Assessment of methodologies appropriate to the desired outcomes.
  - ✍ Implementation strategy, including expectations about inclusion of critical self-reflection processes.
  - ✍ The skills and expertise required in the project team for successful completion of quality outputs.
- 6.10 That to improve overall quality assurance and assist synergy across projects within a Goal area, FLAG employ an expert or panel to review the project design briefs for that Goal area prior to tenders being called.

**Funding the Framework**

- 7.0 That budget planning span *Strategy 2003* and 2004 with progressive refinements made to budget plans during 2003.
- 7.1 That budget planning for 2003 and 2004 take into account:
- ✍ Preservation of the centrality of professional development by allocating 35-40% of total funds to Goal 1.

- ✍ A relative decline in funds for Goal 2 in 2003 to accommodate the pause in new content development followed by renewal in 2004.
- ✍ A substantial investment to set up Goal 4 in 2003, followed by a relative decline in 2004 as program implementation continues.
- ✍ Funding for Goal 3 to be set by priorities at the time.
- ✍ Repair of the chronic under-funding of *Framework* program management by allocation of 5-10% of the budget for this purpose.
- ✍ Project funding to take into account the costs of developing sound project design prior to tender, the inclusion of a communications and promotions strategy in the project, and the inclusion in the project of the negotiation of a mechanism and funding arrangements for maintenance and updating of products, where this is relevant.

## **Beyond the Framework – 2005 and on**

- 8.0 That FLAG recommend through ANTA CEOs that the Ministers in Council make a commitment in principle in 2002 to continue the national collaboration in flexible learning beyond 2004.
- 8.1 That FLAG put in place a timetable and transition strategy to accommodate this decision.

## **Evaluation architecture**

### **Framework evaluation overall:**

- 9.0 That FLAG strengthen its *Framework* monitoring processes by:
- ✍ Continuing its regular reviews of the *Framework's* objectives, strategies and outcomes, in conjunction with assessments of emerging needs.
  - ✍ Building into each Goal area and individual projects strategies for critical self-reflection.
- 10.0 That Phase 2 of the *Framework* evaluation be conducted as a summative evaluation from late 2004, evaluating the *Framework* and its outcomes against the Measures of Success through a suite of quantitative and qualitative evaluation tools as below.

### **Qualitative evaluation strategies**

- 11.0 That FLAG implement the following suite of qualitative evaluation strategies in Phase 2 of the evaluation:
- 11.1 Analysis of project outputs and *Framework* management reports from Years 3-5, and consultations with the *Sharing Knowledge* project team on their experience and findings.
- 11.2 Consultations:
- ✍ Repeat the round table consultations with senior STA, Commonwealth and ANTA managers.
  - ✍ Repeat the consultations with representatives of TDA, ACPET and ACE.
  - ✍ Repeat the consultations with representatives of industry peak bodies and ITABs.
  - ✍ Consultations with Project Managers from Years 1 – 5.
- 11.3 Case studies:
- ✍ Revisit the case studies of collaboration and *Framework* management (FLAG), leveraging the *Framework* (the Hunter Institute) and e-learning in industry (TDT Australia).
  - ✍ If resources permit, add a case study to illuminate the impact of refreshing the *Framework* to emphasise the communications and advocacy roles.

- 11.4 External watching brief tightly focused on comparable major public policy initiatives in other countries and in other areas of Australian education.

**Quantitative performance data and evaluation strategies**

- 12.0 That FLAG implement the following actions to create a suite of quantitative performance data for the Phase 2 evaluation:
- 12.1 Actions in relation to AVETMISS Release 6.0:
- ✍ Recommend immediately to the NTSC that revisions be made to the delivery type identifier for Release 6.0 of AVETMISS to identify the what, how, when and where of delivery as per NCVER's technical response.
  - ✍ Recommend immediately to the NTSC that the schedule for Release 6.0 ensure that it is in the field in September 2004.
  - ✍ Maintain close liaison through the remainder of 2002 with NCVER and the NTSC about revisions to the delivery type identifier and timetable for AVETMISS Release 6.0.
- 12.2 Survey of students:
- ✍ Recommend to the NTSC that the Student Outcomes Survey be revised for administration in 2003, to modify the present three questions about training delivery in line with NCVER's option 1.
  - ✍ If this modification cannot proceed in time for the 2003 administration, FLAG should commission NCVER to design, administer and report on a national online survey in 2004 of student satisfaction with online learning and related aspects of flexible learning. This survey would be administered nationally to 1000 respondents, for an approximate cost of \$21,000.
- 12.3 Employer surveys:
- ✍ Recommend to the NTSC that the Survey of Employer Views be revised to improve the accuracy of information on delivery and outcomes and incorporate questions on take-up and outcomes of flexible/e-learning.
  - ✍ Collaborate with NCVER and ANTA during 2003 to develop specific recommendations to the NTSC for incorporation in the 2004 Survey of Employer Views with a view to data being analysed in the final evaluation of the *Framework*.
  - ✍ Review the outcomes of the 2002 ABS Training Expenditure and Practices Survey with a view to assessing its potential to provide performance data relevant to the *Framework*, and influencing later administrations of the survey as appropriate.
- 12.4 Commission NCVER to design, administer and report on a national online survey in 2004 of VET staff views about the outcomes and outputs of the *Framework* (2000 – 2004). This survey would be administered nationally to 1000 respondents, for an approximate cost of \$21,000.
- 12.5 Consult with NCVER on leveraging the *Framework* to add value to NCVER's DIY survey methodology by designing specific questionnaire 'shells' about take-up and outcomes of online learning for use by TAFE providers.
- 12.6 That the State online networks investigation be referred to the proposed new Communications program in 2003-2004 with a view to raising the awareness of, and encouraging development of networks among, RTO managers and technical specialists in relation to:
- ✍ The potential for RTOs to enhance their planning and decision making processes and business management by integrating their online network data with their mainstream management information systems.
  - ✍ Options and solutions for RTOs in re-engineering their management information systems to accommodate flexible and e-learning.

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# **Evaluation of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework 2000 – 2001**

## **Part 1 Findings and Conclusions**

# 1 PART 1: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

## 1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

### 1.1.1 The Australian Flexible Learning Framework

In August 1999, the Australian National Training Authority Chief Executive Officers (ANTA CEOs) endorsed the *Australian Flexible Learning Framework for the National Vocation Education and Training System 2000 – 2004* (the *Framework*). The *Framework* has been developed by the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG) and represents a strategic plan for the five-year National Project allocation for flexible learning. It is designed to support accelerated take-up of flexible learning modes and to position Australian vocational education and training (VET) as a world leader in applying new technologies to vocational education products and services.

The *Framework* is supported by an annual implementation plan, the first of which – *Strategy 2000* – was endorsed by ANTA CEOs in September 1999. It identified specific initiatives and an allocation of resources within each of the five Goal areas identified in the *Framework*. The budget in 2000 was \$20.46 million which supported 26 projects and overall program management. The budget for the *Strategy 2001* implementation plan was \$17.02 million, supporting 19 projects and four *Framework* facilitation programs. A further \$16.93 million has been allocated to support *Strategy 2002* projects and program facilitation.

#### What is the Australian Flexible Learning Framework?

The *Framework's* mission is 'to help our industries and citizens make a rapid and successful transition to the information economy by adding value to Australia's VET system of flexible learning'. Its vision is that, by 2004, Australia will be recognised as the global leader in applying new technologies to vocational education and training products and services'.

The initiatives within the *Framework* are guided by seven principles: shared benefit to all States and Territories; strategic use of new learning technologies; accelerated take-up of flexible learning methodologies; strategic partnerships between VET agencies and other public sector agencies and the private sector; leveraged investment of national funds; maximising employee involvement in *Framework* projects; and projects driven by client demand.

The *Framework* has five Goals:

*Goal 1 - Creative, capable people:* To build a critical mass of VET staff who are able to use flexible learning approaches to accelerate Australia's transition to the information economy.

*Goal 2 - Supportive technological infrastructure:* To achieve a national VET system which facilitates affordable access by all communities, learners and employers to online services; is underpinned by advanced information and communication technologies; and achieves connectivity and associated inter-operability in the application of technology to delivery training services and, where required, to its business processes.

*Goal 3 – World-class online content development, applications and services:* To assist the Australian VET system to maintain and expand its share of the training market within Australia and internationally.

*Goal 4 – Enabling policies:* To ensure that all nationally agreed policies and protocols for VET are designed to facilitate the uptake and usage of flexible learning by the VET industry.

*Goal 5 – Problem-solving regulation:* In partnership with other education and training sectors, to advocate that the legal and regulatory *Framework* in Australia provides adequate protection for VET learners; removes legal and regulatory barriers to the effective use of information technology in VET; and fosters open world trade in Australian VET products and services.

The *Framework* was developed in 1999 by the (then) Education Network Australia (EdNA) Vocational Education and Training Advisory Group, now the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG). This is a strategically focused group of senior VET personnel advising ANTA CEOs, the ANTA Board, Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and the Australian Information and Communications Technology in Education Committee (AICTEC – formerly the EdNA Reference Committee) on national issues related to the directions and priorities for flexible learning in VET, with particular reference to online technologies.

The group comprises representatives from each State and Territory, ANTA, DEST, and the adult and community education (ACE) sector. It is chaired by an ANTA CEO. It is responsible for guiding the implementation, evaluation and ongoing planning and review of the *Framework*. Policy development and operational oversight are managed by the FLAG Working Group chaired by a member of FLAG.

The *Framework* is funded through an unprecedented collaboration among the Commonwealth, ANTA, the States and Territories in which infrastructure funds are pooled with a view to maximising the value and benefit to all of investing in new technologies. These funds are drawn partly from that part of the national Infrastructure Review Fund not directed to major buildings and equipment, and matched by the States and Territories as 'give-back' from their proportion of the national pool of infrastructure funding.

For a more detailed outline of the background to the *Framework* see the Evaluation of *Strategy 2000* ([www.flexiblelearning.net.au/evaluation/The\\_resources/htm](http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/evaluation/The_resources/htm)).

### 1.1.2 Evaluating the Australian Flexible Learning Framework

The *Framework* is now in Year 3. In this project (Phase 1 of the evaluation) the evaluation team was charged to evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of the *Framework* in the first two of its five-year life. We have undertaken the following tasks:

Evaluation architecture:

- ✍ Revision of the original Measures of Success for the *Framework* against which it will be ultimately be evaluated (completed December 2001; see Part 3)
- ✍ Design of a robust architecture for evaluating the efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness of the *Framework* over the five years of 2000 – 2004 and into the longer term (summarised below in Part 1 and presented in detail in Part 3).

Evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of the *Framework* in 2000 – 2001:

- ✍ A formative evaluation of *Strategy 2000* and its immediate outcomes and processes, completed in July 2001; see [www.flexiblelearning.net.au/evaluation](http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/evaluation)
- ✍ A summative evaluation of the first two years of the *Framework* with recommendations for future directions in Years 4-5 and beyond (presented in this report).

In July 2001 FLAG agreed that the *Framework's* overall success will ultimately be determined by the extent to which, and ways in which it has:

1. Contributed to Australia's ability to make a rapid and successful transition to a knowledge society
2. Enabled recognition of Australia as a global leader in applying new technologies to vocational education and training programs, products and services
3. Achieved returns on the investment in the *Framework* made by the ANTA CEOs as a concerted national strategy.

In this evaluation mid-way through the *Framework*, we have analysed the success factors, challenges and potential of each Goal, the cross-*Framework* programs, the management strategy and collaborative culture which imbues the *Framework* and its actors in order to

evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of the *Framework* as the initiative progresses towards those three overarching goals.

### 1.1.3 Structure of this report

We acknowledge the challenges to the reader in digesting the huge volume of material being generated through the *Framework*. For ease of reading, therefore, this report is organised into four Parts, the first of which brings forward all the recommendations from the later Parts.

Part 1 integrates the findings from the qualitative and quantitative investigations and analyses we have conducted over the last 18 months. It summarises the major successes of the *Framework* and areas of failure or challenge. It sets out major conclusions from the evaluation and implications for future directions, and makes recommendations for action for the remainder of the *Framework*. It concludes with a summary of the evaluation architecture and associated recommendations.

Part 2 contains analyses of the critical success factors and challenges in implementing the *Framework* Goals and cross-*Framework* programs, and managing the *Framework*.

Part 3 comprises reports on the Measures of Success for the *Framework*, the quantitative and qualitative evaluation tools employed in the evaluation, and an investigation of the potential of State and RTO online networks to provide relevant performance data. It proposes an evaluation architecture for Phase 2 of the evaluation.

Part 4 comprises the evaluation data, including the three case studies, online survey results, and an annotated bibliography.

It is a reflection of the cooperative learning culture which FLAG has sought to model for the VET community through the *Framework* that the evaluation is itself part of the *Framework's* evolution and part of a continuing 'learning exchange' for those driving the program.

We wish to record our appreciation of the assistance given to us by FLAG members, the Secretariat, project managers and staff of the case study organisations. We appreciate, too, the frank and thoughtful comments given by the many people consulted in this evaluation.

*Note:* Consultations with senior staff of the State Training Authorities, Commonwealth and ANTA were an important component of the evaluation. To maintain individuals' anonymity, they are referred to simply as 'agency' or STA consultations throughout the report.

## 1.2 PUTTING THE FRAMEWORK INTO PRACTICE: 2000 – 2001

What have been the major successes of the *Framework* in its first two years? What has failed or not achieved its promise? What has been learned from success and failure? Where are the major present and emerging barriers to achievement of the *Framework's* underlying goal of systemic change?

This section summarises and synthesises findings from all the data. It should be read in conjunction with the detailed reports in Part 2, especially the findings on each Goal and the management strategy.

### 1.2.1 Achieving the Goals of the Framework

#### The major success stories – what has been learned?

The three outstanding achievements of the *Framework* program thus far are the growth in knowledge, skills and confidence of VET practitioners in using flexible learning approaches in their teaching; the increase in the number and variety of resources on which they can call in implementing flexible learning; and the development of networks and communities of practice based on a collaborative culture.

#### Knowledge, skills and confidence of staff about flexible learning

The professional development activities in Goal 1 are acknowledged by all sources as a major success. They have reached a significant number of practitioners across the country and greatly improved teachers' knowledge and skills in aspects of flexible learning:

*You can't put dollars on the ROI but the highest returns are on the PD. You start with motivated people and they learn a lot of things they didn't anticipate as well as what they set out to learn about – like building new networks within and beyond the State, and developing their management skills (FLAG member).*

Survey respondents overwhelmingly believe (87-89%) the top outcomes from *Strategy 2000* and *Strategy 2001* are improvements in teachers' knowledge and skills about online learning. They believe more staff are doing professional development about online learning and there is more variety in the professional development available. One result is a growing sense of confidence in changing long-practised teaching methods to accommodate more client-focused approaches and incorporate online technologies. As a senior RTO manager put it:

*One advantage of LearnScope is that with some money to help develop your skills, it makes staff reflect on their skills and can help them sharpen their teaching practice more widely than just within the project.*

*Framework* expenditure on professional development is a serious investment in people. An influential American industry group argues that major change involving technology requires investment of at least 30% of the technology budget in professional development (CEO Forum 1998<sup>2</sup>). At the time it was unusual to find more than 5% allocated to professional development. The *Framework* commenced with an investment of 33% in Goal 1 (plus, arguably, much of Goal 3 indirectly); by 2002 the proportion had increased to almost 40% for professional development under Goal 1. This level of investment is clearly being leveraged by RTOs around the country; the Hunter Institute case study is but one example of how this is being managed.

The success to date provides a strong base for addressing in 2003 – 2004 the major challenge of moving beyond the committed 'early adopters' and a project base for flexible learning into the mainstream of VET staff and VET operations.

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<sup>2</sup> CEO Forum. 1998. CEO Forum Year 2 Report. *School Technology and Readiness: Professional Development: a Link to Better Learning*. <http://www.ceoforum.org>

Thus far, participants in Goal 1 projects have mostly been practitioners, mostly full-time, and largely from the publicly-funded TAFE system. The demand for professional development opportunities through Goal 1 projects is far from drying up but it appears that saturation point may be close in terms of the enthusiasts who are easy to attract.

The challenge now is to reach the bulk of VET staff who vary from an 'I'm interested but haven't the time' attitude through to those who are resistant to and fearful of change. Among these, the evaluation has singled out managers and administrators; the very large number of part-time and casual staff for whom professional development is always problematic; and practitioners outside the publicly-funded TAFE system – i.e. in enterprise-based RTOs, private providers and ACE. This will require a more fine-grained approach to professional development opportunities for different client groups.

### **Resources to support flexible learning**

The second major achievement of the *Framework* in Years 1 – 2 has been the creation of a variety of resources to support teaching and learning, including a body of nationally available crown copyright material – the *Toolboxes*. The lack of such a body of material has been recognised in the flexible learning (and before that the distance learning) arena for at least twenty years, and efforts to remedy it had met with little success.

The *Framework* has succeeded in developing means by which the nucleus of materials produced in 2000 and 2001 can continue to be added to. A notable comment from interviews was that *colleges involved in actually developing Toolbox material have engaged in flexible learning over a wide spectrum and at a faster rate than other places.*

There is a general view across our consultations that *Toolboxes* have improved considerably since the early rounds. The quality of the content is in many cases excellent, and usability has improved. There has certainly been significant learning in relation to processes of tendering for product development, stakeholder involvement and partnerships, development methodologies, instructional design, and project management.

Nevertheless, the less than positive views about the products of the early rounds still colour the views of many in the VET sector, and take-up has been slow. Reservations are still expressed. Some are concerned about the lack of awareness of the products now available (and the associated 'not invented here' factor). Others criticise a variable involvement of industry in tailoring products to industry needs. A further difficulty for a number of informants is that *Toolboxes* do not necessarily align with Training Packages.

Others identified one of the reasons for slow take-up is the technical difficulties of installing the products. For example:

*They are technically hard to install. A lot of training is needed to get people to the point of actually using them. If the Toolbox champions can't solve the technical and training problems it'll die (interview respondent).*

A more complex debate is emerging around the question of whether 'large' products such as *Toolboxes* are as useful as smaller reusable learning objects. This debate is engaging educators in a number of countries and is unlikely to be soon resolved. At present, a number of FLAG members, in particular, believe the *Toolbox* program needs to be re-thought. As one put it:

*The things practitioners want aren't necessarily what we've developed through the Framework. Toolboxes are supposed to be accessible but aren't. We need to break the packages up and re-purpose them to make them usable for our colleges – i.e. take them down to a unit of competence at a time.*

It is clear that it will be vital to continue to add to the bank of national content in coming years, but it is equally important first to digest and act upon the lessons that have been learned, and take them into account in future developments.

A second challenge for 2003 – 2004 will be to build closer connections between the professional development sponsored under Goal 1 and the bank of resources and opportunities for interaction developed especially through Goal 3. Changing views about the way in which pre-prepared content should be packaged and managed have been accompanied by a shift in views about the way content is constructed. There is an increasing trend towards collaborative knowledge building and the development of learning communities.

Another challenge will be to rationalise the collection of websites and their associated products developed under Goal 1 as well as Goal 3 to support VET staff in implementing flexible learning approaches; and to do so in such a way that not only is access easier but the resources themselves reinforce the networks and communities of practice surrounding them.

### **Networks and communities of practice**

The collaborative culture on which the *Framework's* philosophy and its management are based is one of the outstanding achievements of the *Framework* and potentially one of its strongest legacies to the VET sector.

The *Framework* was devised on the premise that *intelligent competition + creative collaboration = competitive advantage*. Collaboration has been fundamental to the *Framework's* objectives and modes of implementation from the beginning. Commitment to collaboration imbues FLAG's internal dynamics and has generated the multiplicity of networks and communities of practice which are being created through *Framework* projects.

Such a comprehensive approach to collaboration is unusual in Australian public life where federal-State prerogatives have historically been closely guarded. Furthermore, collaboration – certainly on the scale implemented through the *Framework* – has been unusual in a sector where the ethos and expectations are that RTOs will be competitive locally and, ultimately, globally. Most agency consultations were positive about the potential benefits, though realistic about the competitive tensions. For example:

*The issue of collaboration is absolutely vital. As others start to realise our products and delivery strategies enable us to go beyond traditional State boundaries, we'll run into competition. Competition has been used to drive efficiency and a greater customer focus. It's forced people to be more innovative. We now need to balance that better with collaboration to pay for better results. The budgeting processes are totally supply-driven and don't relate to the kind of provision we want. We don't have the means of paying for the effort required. It's essential to get shared understanding by all parties and a collaborative plan in anticipation of market needs.*

The collaborative approach has encouraged the development of networks or communities of practice, at least across the TAFE system (though rarely, as yet, between TAFE and industry). The two online surveys of project participants, and the popularity of the *Net\*Working* conferences, indicate that people have grasped at the opportunity to expand their personal professional networks beyond their immediate organisation and State.

There are still some notable gaps, in particular the lack of engagement of industry, private RTOs and ACE. The TDT Australia case study (Part 4) suggests that similar communities of practice, fostered through the *Framework*, would be welcomed as an important means for national ITABs to support the development of e-learning in their industries. TDT Australia, for example, has initiated the 'National ITAB Workplace Communication Network' which meets four times a year, with a view to receiving and disseminating information in a more strategic way.

In addition, our 2001 and 2002 online surveys point to the importance of engaging middle managers and administrators who oversee the systems and processes which can keep flexible learning out of the mainstream of VET business. One respondent notes:

*Middle management is often insecure about sharing whereas practitioners are more comfortable about it. They will readily team up but directors and managers are more competitive (senior RTO manager).*

More subtly, the *Framework's* collaborative approach is influencing and supporting communities of practice within RTOs. The Hunter Institute case study demonstrates how an RTO can leverage involvement in *Framework* activities to create its own communities of practice by using cross-functional teams to bring educational, technical and administrative perspectives to bear on implementing flexible learning. As one respondent there noted: *It's not till you get everything together that it really starts to work.*

## 1.2.2 The failures – What has been learned?

There are three broad areas in which the *Framework* has failed to fulfill its promise or has encountered barriers which inhibit FLAG's capacity to implement some of the Goals.

### The Framework and industry stakeholders

In August 2001 FLAG affirmed that industry was a primary stakeholder in the *Framework*. However, direct connections with industry in 2000 – 2001 were tenuous, confined to a small number of *LearnScope* projects awarded to enterprise RTOs.

Our consultations with representatives of industry peak bodies and ITABs revealed, at best, a general knowledge of the *Framework*. This is illustrated by the comments of respondents from the Transport and Distribution Training Australia ITAB and two enterprise RTOs in the E-Learning in Industry case study (see Part 4). All are aware to some degree of the two higher profile projects, being *Toolboxes* and *LearnScope*, but their understanding of the contribution of these projects to an overarching program with the breadth of goals and project activity of the *Framework* is very limited.

Several attribute the reason to the ITABs and enterprise RTOs being left out of the 'information loop' and comment that their potential capacity to act as change agents and build links between a program such as the *Framework* and action on the ground has been underestimated.

A clear view emerged in the evaluation that the suite of *Framework* activities is focused more towards a supply-driven approach than a demand-driven one. At one level, this was understood and accepted by industry representatives. RTOs are self-evidently vital to delivery and assessment and they need to have both the resources and professional development to make use of emerging technologies and to flexibly respond to industry needs. The Hunter Institute case study, coupled with comments from a number of those in the agency consultations, indicate very strong awareness of institute staff of the need for, and value of flexible learning as a means of meeting industry needs.

However, the absence of direct industry input into the priority setting of projects for the *Framework* was widely criticised in the industry consultations, as was the absence of projects that directly fund industry initiatives in flexible delivery. The number of enterprise RTOs awarded projects through *LearnScope*, for example, is low. There are few signs of the kind of industry-provider engagement which are evident in the 'Learndirect' online learning initiative which links the UK University for Industry with a large number of organisations, especially small and medium sized enterprises.<sup>3</sup>

The apparent absence of meaningful industry input was most evident in industry comments about the *Toolbox* projects. Most of those consulted were aware of both the specific projects for their industries and that the program as a whole had increased in quality over the years. They believe the best products emerge where teachers/trainers with deep and immediate industry experience were an integral part of the *Toolbox* project team.

However, most commented that their involvement in individual *Toolbox* projects had been notional with little, if any, ongoing involvement in the resource development. Several (from varied industry areas) commented that their advice about the relevance, need for, and quality

<sup>3</sup> University for Industry. *Strategic Plan*. [www.ufilttd.co.uk/strategic%20plan/plan/sec1.htm](http://www.ufilttd.co.uk/strategic%20plan/plan/sec1.htm). Gibson, D. and Limb, A. October 2001. Workforce development in SMEs: a joint report by the Association of Colleges and the University for Industry on increasing the take-up of learning by small firms. [www.ufilttd.co.uk/press/presentations/default.asp](http://www.ufilttd.co.uk/press/presentations/default.asp).

of project bids had been ignored. Projects had been approved whose marketability was at best limited. They saw little evidence that approval criteria included demonstrable relevance to industry needs. As one said: *All this funding has gone into answers but it's not targeted at real problems.*

Those consulted suggested a need to achieve a better balance in the *Framework* between a supply-driven model of e-learning and a demand-driven approach which includes industry more clearly within its scope. Our proposals below for the *Framework's* future directions suggest several ways of achieving this in 2003 – 2004, including drawing industry more closely into the *Framework's* activities through its Goal Steering Committees; undertaking a needs assessment, in conjunction with relevant ITABs, of industry needs for technology-enabled learning; and developing communications and advocacy strategies directed at different industry client groups.

### **The Framework and changing national policy**

Three of the *Framework* Goals have been unable to realise their potential; their aims are couched in terms of achieving change in policy and practice, but at best FLAG can advocate for such change on the basis of *Framework* findings. These are Goal 2 (Technical Infrastructure), Goal 4 (VET Policy) and Goal 5 (Legal and Regulatory Environment).

The dilemma is best summed up by a quote from the project brief for the *Strategy 2002* project *Access to Bandwidth*:

*The Technological Infrastructure Goal has suffered from the difficulty of finding a common issue that is not unduly affected by jurisdictions having separate policy, purchasing and supply regimes for online technologies.*

One agency manager summarised it thus:

*If FLAG as a body is capable of stimulating policy and regulatory change then it's legitimate to have these Goals (2, 4 and 5). Some belongs in the federal arena – like telecommunications regulation or copyright. If FLAG can influence these and it's the only body which can reasonably represent the sector, then the Goals should continue. If not, then things should go to a different level to have VET lobby for changes. And it needs to come from all education sectors, not just VET.*

In Goal 2, for example, the *Technology Infrastructure Investment Fund* project was always going to struggle. A coordinated national approach to the public investment in ICT infrastructure ran straight into long running individual State/Territory procurement processes that are not only different from State to State but are often whole-of-government in their scope.

Similarly, the *Preferred Standards* project to support national cooperation in the application of technology to VET, despite relating to non-mandatory standards, had to come to terms with the variety of State/Territory based arrangements and to whole-of-government considerations. Indeed, the evaluation team notes that a review and report is foreshadowed on the implications of developing whole-of-government standards and standards covering all education and training sectors.

These outcomes are in marked contrast to the way Canada – with a similarly strong historical separation of powers between federal and provincial jurisdictions – has approached investment in CANARIE, the national CA\*net 3 network infrastructure, and an associated range of large scale collaborative programs.<sup>4</sup> This investment is based on partnerships of the federal and provincial governments, telecommunications industries, colleges and universities,

<sup>4</sup> See for example: Harrison, E. April 2000. *Connecting Canadians: CANARIE Inc.: Canada's Advanced Internet Development Organisation*. <http://connect.gc.ca/en/ar/1002-e.htm>; Office of Learning Technologies, Learning Technologies for the Workplace program 2002-2003, and New Practices in Learning Technologies program 2002-2003 – <http://olt-bta.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca>; and \$100 million investment over 5 years in collaborative research programs under *Initiative on the New Economy* ([www.sshrc.ca/english/programinfo/grantsguide/ine\\_about.html](http://www.sshrc.ca/english/programinfo/grantsguide/ine_about.html))

and its purpose is to advance both economic and social prosperity. The way this partnership has been nurtured over the last decade merits close examination by FLAG.

There are two major barriers to effective outcomes in Goal 4 – firstly the focus (or lack of focus) on particular policy domains, and secondly the more basic question of what outcomes are actually feasible. The policy projects which have been undertaken have avoided the more difficult and controversial, but pervasive, problems facing take-up and effective integration of flexible and online learning – e.g. the domains of workforce planning and industrial relations, and funding policies. These are ‘live’ issues in every jurisdiction.

The approach under Goal 5, although slow to take off in 2000 – 2001, illustrates how FLAG might successfully address national policy and regulatory issues which are beyond its own capacity to change. The first project was an excellent survey of the major legal and regulatory arrangements impinging on VET’s capacity to integrate flexible and especially online learning approaches. The next step is to devise effective ways of communicating the results to those within the VET system who need to know in order to improve their own policy making and management (e.g. STA and RTO managers). This is just beginning to happen. The second is to develop strategies for advocating change in regulatory regimes – creating the intellectual bullets which may be fired by FLAG members or others in the VET system.

The Goal 2 *Access to Bandwidth* project for 2002 is perhaps an intuitive version of this approach. As one FLAG member put it:

*The project is taking a different tack – it’s about providing information leading to a strong business case and a consistent message using consistent language so that CEOs and Ministers are talking in the one voice to government central agencies, telco’s etc.*

Our proposals for the *Framework’s* future directions take this approach further, with a limited number of tightly focused research activities and a systematic approach to communications and advocacy.

### **Communications and advocacy**

This aspect of the *Framework* has been perhaps the least successful to date, but the direction determined now will be critical to the ultimate success of the *Framework*. One imperative is to communicate the opportunities, outcomes and outputs of the *Framework* and its projects to VET staff and to VET stakeholders with a view to engaging their participation and adoption of *Framework* resources. The other is to advocate for flexible learning as integral to mainstream delivery of training, and as fundamental to enabling the VET sector to become more client-focused.

The evaluation has identified four aspects to leveraging the *Framework* through communications and advocacy: information management within the *Framework*; communication and promotion of *Framework* outcomes and products to VET staff and RTOs; communication and advocacy to industry for the *Framework* and its potential to meet client needs; and communication and advocacy to senior VET staff and policy makers beyond VET.

Thus far, most attention has been paid to the first of these, and such communications and promotions as have occurred within the VET sector have been addressed to the flexible learning ‘champions’ who already have a stake in the *Framework*. The Hunter Institute case study suggests that this can be an effective conduit into RTOs, but other responses to the evaluation show that it is insufficient.

The fact that lack of understanding of flexible learning and its import is so widespread in the VET system indicates the efforts of the enthusiasts over a decade or more have met with only limited success. The communications approach through the *Framework* has yet to address this.

*The Framework isn’t well publicised. It should be continually in your face. The website is OK but it’s not enough and it’s mainly going to be used by the champions. The*

*dissemination side of things needs to be more exciting and imaginative* (Senior RTO manager).

For VET staff the issue is not so much whether they know about the *Framework* as a policy initiative per se, but rather whether they know about flexible learning and its implications for how, where and when training is delivered. The primary issue, however, is whether information about the *Framework* is reaching VET staff and, if so, whether it is in formats and at times which grab their concerted attention. The proposed future directions for the *Framework* take up this issue of more concerted efforts to reach differentiated audiences.

Advocacy is a crucial aspect of FLAG's role – i.e. advising CEOs and senior managers about the implications of flexible learning and *Framework* outcomes for training delivery in their jurisdiction, and passing to relevant managers the ammunition for use in forums dealing with national policy and regulatory matters.

The evaluation has found that senior managers of the STAs, Commonwealth and ANTA vary in their knowledge of the *Framework* as an initiative and its component parts. *LearnScope*, *Leaders* and the *Toolbox* programs are well known; beyond that, awareness of *Framework* activities tails off dramatically. Familiarity with the *Framework* is directly proportional to the closeness of FLAG members to their senior managers.

Renewing and extending this advocacy and communications role upwards and outwards is a vital requirement for the remainder of the *Framework*. Later in this report we propose ways of achieving this through recalibration of FLAG's role, modifications to the management strategy, and realignment of the *Framework* Goals for Years 4 – 5.

### 1.2.3 Managing the Framework 2000 – 2001

The FLAG case study (see Part 4) demonstrates that the collective will to maintain the collaborative concept has been a powerful success factor in helping FLAG to overcome inevitable jurisdictional tensions and manage a multi-faceted program effectively.

The purpose of the management arrangements has been not just to manage the collection of projects, but to foster collaboration at the grassroots level and, in working across all projects, keep the common aims to the fore. As a straight exercise in efficiency the management structure is too complicated to be a great success, but it was a necessary trade-off in the first two years as a means of developing effective communities of learning and effective outcomes for the *Framework*.

The management strategy has succeeded in enabling FLAG to manage a complex program of activities and build some of the integrators among program elements. The strategy is now causing burdens which threaten the effective management going forward, and needs some adjustments for Years 4 – 5.

FLAG members have been demonstrably effective in influencing the ANTA CEOs to commit and maintain funds and support for the *Framework*. They have been equally successful in exercising leadership down through the public VET sector. They have had more varied success in bringing the *Framework* as a whole, and its component parts, to the attention of senior colleagues in their jurisdiction. Their role of strategic oversight seems now to be focused more on making the *Framework* happen than on the vital communications and advocacy roles beyond the *Framework*.

The exigencies and sheer workload of overseeing the annual program have diminished the time available for the communications and advocacy roles, and restricted FLAG's time for thinking strategically about coming developments and positioning the *Framework* in the light of those developments. FLAG members say they are tired. Their commitment is undimmed but, mid-way through the five-year program, they need refreshment and re-invigoration.

The FLAG case study paints a stark picture of the workload problem for FLAG members and the Secretariat. The volume of paper and project products is growing exponentially. Timetables for initiation, implementation, reporting and sign-off are not being adhered to so that projects linger on into successive funding periods. The quality of decision making is being compromised as FLAG members become highly selective about what they read and how closely they get involved in projects. This in turn affects their capacity to stay on the strategic edge. One FLAG member says bluntly:

*FLAG members have no time. They don't read the material coming in from their own projects, let alone from others. There's no spare capacity in the system. The workloads are huge and the Framework is on top of normal load for most.*

The workloads are not personally sustainable and they endanger the effectiveness of FLAG and the Secretariat as managers of the *Framework*. The problem needs to be addressed immediately and cannot wait till *Strategy 2003*.

If FLAG's role is not recalibrated, there is a real possibility that the *Framework* will not effectively influence systemic change. Its initiatives will be adopted and utilised by the already converted but not by the bulk of the VET sector or industry. Its capacity to influence policy inside and outside VET will be progressively constrained. The evaluation has identified four particular aspects for attention:

- ✍ The number of Steering Committees on which each FLAG member sits and the size of those committees.
- ✍ The amount of hands-on work which FLAG members do in advising project teams on processes, smoothing pathways, helping with jurisdictional issues, solving organisational problems, and commenting on drafts.
- ✍ The workload which is increased when, as has happened even with ultimately successful projects, the project objectives, scope and methods have not been fully worked out in advance, and/or the project team lacks experience in compiling complex reports.
- ✍ The communications role which sits on top of the other functions – passing on to relevant bodies in the jurisdiction information about *Framework* activities, products and outcomes, engaging interest and take-up.

The evaluation has also identified a number of ways in which project management may be further improved in the remainder of the *Framework*. There are several problems common to many projects which affect the quality of outcomes, the workload problem, and the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the *Framework*:

- ✍ Insufficient attention to project design – defining the objectives, scope, methods, audience and outputs for the project before the tender was called
- ✍ Lack of experience in the project team in drawing together masses of data, developing an effective report structure, and writing well.
- ✍ The project team did not at the beginning ask the intended audience *how* they wish to be communicated with, so that the project outputs were not geared well to the audience.
- ✍ Critical self-reflection processes were not built into the project design.

## 1.2.4 Conclusions

The policy document establishing the Australian Flexible Learning Framework sets a very ambitious challenge – no less than transforming the meaning and practice of 'learning' in VET in order to assist Australia make the transition from the old mechanised economy to the new knowledge society. The goal is systemic change in the nature, practice and management of vocational education and training, accompanied by a shift from supply-driven offerings to demand-driven responses to industry and student needs.

In only two years, the *Framework* has taken big strides towards that goal, guided by a growing number of highly committed people who have developed a strong collaborative

culture to support their work. A great deal has been learned about what works, what does not, and why; and about blockages inside and outside the system which need to be addressed. The problems outlined above should not obscure the facts that the *Framework* is proving, overall, an effective and efficient way of moving collaboratively towards this national goal of systemic change, and that its management strategy is both effective and imaginative.

At mid-point in the *Framework*, the time is right to build confidently on what has been learned, and shift the *Framework's* focus from building to sustainability, while still preserving the cutting edge explorations. Sustainability means consolidating the successes and learnings across the VET system, and using those to keep ahead of the game in a fast-moving technological and economic environment.

This suggests the overall strategic focus for the remainder of the *Framework* should incorporate:

- ✍ Further consolidation and refinement of the professional development program and strengthening of the connections between it and the online content, resources and networks supporting VET staff.
- ✍ An emphasis, across all *Framework* projects, on integrating flexible learning approaches, especially technology-based approaches, into the mainstream of VET delivery and business practices.
- ✍ An accompanying emphasis on moving beyond the 'early adopters' who have ably championed flexible learning through the *Framework* to date, to the mainstream of VET staff, through strategies which differentiate among client groups.
- ✍ Development of closer relationships with industry stakeholders in the *Framework*.
- ✍ A tightly focused, strategy-driven research program which enables FLAG to stay 'ahead of the game' and strengthens its advocacy role.
- ✍ A systematic program to leverage the *Framework* on State and Territory initiatives through a highly visible, coordinated set of communications, promotions and advocacy activities upwards, outwards and downwards in the VET sector, and outside to industry stakeholders and legislative and regulatory bodies.

## 1.3 FUTURE OF THE FRAMEWORK: 2003 – 2004

What needs to happen in 2003 – 2004 to maximise the returns on the investment in funding and policy support by the ANTA CEOs? And to maximise the outcomes for VET staff, RTOs and industry stakeholders? What is required to build on the achievements of the first two years and overcome the barriers encountered?

The first two years of the *Framework* were recognised to be a 'knowledge-building' period. This year – 2002 – is the turning point. The final two years must be about helping stakeholders utilise that knowledge and the resources developed while still continuing to 'push the envelope'.

### 1.3.1 Framework Goals

To achieve this, we propose a realignment of the *Framework* Goals and associated management strategy which is designed to:

- ✂ Maintain the original intention to address, in an integrated fashion, the key characteristics of flexible learning.
- ✂ Reinforce the *Framework's* strengths in improving professional knowledge and skills and capacity to deliver training flexibly, especially through online learning, and in developing products to support training delivery and professional development.
- ✂ Investigate, in a focused way, the key barriers and emerging issues affecting the VET system's capacity to adopt flexible learning and integrate it into the mainstream of VET training and business practice.
- ✂ Focus strongly on leveraging the *Framework* by promoting its outcomes and products and advocating for changes in systems, policies and the regulatory environment.

This would be implemented under four Goals as outlined in this section.

#### Recommendations

No.	Recommendations – Framework Goals	Reference*
1.0	That in order to strengthen the <i>Framework's</i> potential to achieve its objectives, the present Goals be realigned for Years 4 – 5 by:	
	✂ Retaining and refining Goal 1 relating to professional development.	2.1
	✂ Revising Goal 3 relating to resources and content development and modifying its priorities for 2003 – 2004.	2.3
	✂ Creating two new Goals to address needs for tightly focused research, and leveraging the <i>Framework</i> through an extended communications and advocacy program.	2.6; 2.7
	✂ Dropping Goals 2, 4, and 5 in their present form, and taking up aspects of their focus under the new goals for research and leveraging the <i>Framework</i> .	2.2; 2.4; 2.5; 2.6; 2.7

\* Cross-reference to the relevant section(s) in the report.

### 1.3.2 Goal 1 Creative, capable VET people

This goal aims to build a critical mass of VET staff able to use flexible learning approaches – especially those incorporating online technologies – to accelerate Australia’s transition to a knowledge society.

The strategic thrust for 2003 – 2004 should be the extension of professional development opportunities and support to VET staff beyond the ‘early adopters’ and champions of flexible learning .

This means retention and – as feasible – expansion of the *LearnScope* and *Flexible Learning Leaders* projects, and continuation of the *Net\*Working* conferences, and the *Virtual Learning Community*. The latter two are also prime vehicles for dissemination and promotion of *Framework* outcomes and products (see new Goal 4).

#### Recommendations

No.	Recommendations – Goal 1	Reference*
2.0	That Goal 1 for Years 4 – 5 of the <i>Framework</i> be the building of a critical mass of VET staff able to use flexible learning approaches – especially those incorporating online technologies – to accelerate Australia’s transition to a knowledge society.	
2.1	<b>Priorities and strategies for Goal 1 in 2003 – 2004:</b> That 2002 levels of funding for professional development projects under Goal 1 be maintained in 2003 and 2004 to continue to strengthen the capabilities of VET staff to engage in flexible learning.	2.1; 4.3
2.2	That in 2003 – 2004 the <i>LearnScope</i> program take a finer-grained approach to differentiating the priority groups for professional development in relation to flexible learning with a view to progressing beyond the ‘early adopters’ of innovations. In particular, the program should have close regard to: <del>///</del> The outcomes of ANTA’s client focus project and the profiles identified for the various segments of TAFE staff. <del>///</del> The identification in the current evaluation of particular groups including middle and senior managers, contract and sessional staff, and staff of ACE, enterprise RTOs and private providers.	
2.3	That, within the ambit of <i>LearnScope</i> and <i>Flexible Learning Leaders</i> , a number of projects be supported which explore and report on ways in which workload and performance management can support and promote flexible learning. The findings of these projects should be published in the form of case studies and widely disseminated.	

\* Cross-reference to the relevant section(s) in the report.

### 1.3.3 Goal 2 Resources to support VET people

This goal aims to provide accessible, usable resources to support teaching, learning and professional development related to flexible learning in the VET sector

This reshaping of the former Goal 3 recognises the lessons learned from building a body of national, copyright-free online content over the last four years. One is that the process of creating these products is essentially a professional development activity, and a closer bridge needs to be built between the activities under this goal and those in Goal 1. Another is that time is needed to refine and maximise the potential accessibility and take-up of the products developed.

It is well recognised that products developed with project funding often become out of date because no funds or processes are available for their maintenance. This is a problem which needs to be rectified to obtain proper return on investment from the *Framework*.

The strategic thrusts for 2003 – 2004 should be:

- ✍ Examination and incorporation into the online products and services of lessons learned over the last four years about usability and access (from both educational and technical points of view), to ensure ongoing quality and relevance to industry needs.
- ✍ Consolidation and enhancement of the online and other resources developed under the former Goals 1 and 3 to support teaching and learning and its management.

### Recommendations

No.	Recommendations – Goal 2	Reference*
3.0	That Goal 2 for 2003 – 2004 of the <i>Framework</i> be the provision of accessible, usable resources to support teaching, learning and professional development related to flexible learning in the VET sector	
	<b>Priorities and strategies for 2003 – 2004:</b>	
3.1	That new development of <i>Toolboxes</i> be suspended for 12 months to allow time to incorporate the lessons learned from previous rounds, and to ensure the ongoing quality, relevance to industry needs, and uptake of future rounds.	2.3
3.2	That all websites under the former Goals 1 and 3, and their associated products, be evaluated to assess their relationships and to recommend a rationalisation in 2003 which will maximise their accessibility and effectiveness; this evaluation to be associated with current work being undertaken on the <a href="http://flexiblelearning.net.au">flexiblelearning.net.au</a> website, and also to take into account initiatives such as the VET portal.	2.1; 2.3
3.3	That FLAG consider the remaining former Goal 3 projects, decide whether or not they should continue, and if so, determine in what form this should happen given the strategic priorities for 2003 and 2004.	2.3
3.4	That a project be commissioned to examine how resources produced by <i>Framework</i> projects can be maintained and updated in order to assure a reasonable lifespan beyond the funding period of the project.	2.3

\* Cross-reference to the relevant section(s) in the report.

### 1.3.4 Goal 3 Research to inform the Framework

Targetted research is commissioned under this Goal to inform the operations and future development of the *Framework*.

This Goal addresses two requirements. First, as the ‘guiding intelligence’ for the VET sector in relation to flexible learning, FLAG needs to keep scanning the horizons for major new trends, technologies etc which will affect how flexible learning is implemented and taken up in coming years. Secondly, FLAG needs robust evidence to use in advocating changes to policies, laws and regulations inside and outside VET which affect the take-up and outcomes of flexible learning as an integral part of training reform.

This Goal area brings together and/or replaces a number of previous projects, especially from former Goals 2, 4, and 5 and the original research program. Those identified as high priorities through the evaluation include research into:

- ✂ Telecommunications and technology infrastructure – e.g. bandwidth issues, pricing, new technologies and implications for delivery.
- ✂ Aspects of VET policy which inhibit integration of flexible learning into mainstream VET practice. One example emerging from the evaluation is researching ways in which job design and performance management could support and promote flexible learning.
- ✂ Industry needs for technology-enabled learning – e.g. through a needs assessment conducted in conjunction with relevant ITABs.
- ✂ Legal and regulatory barriers to the effective take-up of flexible learning by the VET sector – e.g. in relation to privacy, and copyright and intellectual property.

## Recommendations

No.	Recommendations – Goal 3	Reference*
4.0	That Goal 3 for 2003 – 2004 of the <i>Framework</i> be the commissioning of targetted research to inform the operations and future development of the <i>Framework</i> .	2.6
4.1	<p><b>Priorities and strategies for 2003 – 2004:</b></p> <p>That the research program comprise a small number of tightly focused, strategy-driven projects planned for implementation over 2003 – 2004.</p> <p>4.2 That priorities for research include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✂ Telecommunications and technology infrastructure – e.g. bandwidth issues, pricing, new technologies and implications for delivery.</li> <li>✂ Aspects of VET policy which inhibit integration of flexible learning into mainstream VET practice – e.g. researching ways in which job design and performance management could support and promote flexible learning.</li> <li>✂ Industry needs for technology-enabled learning – e.g. through a needs assessment conducted in conjunction with relevant ITABs.</li> <li>✂ Legal and regulatory barriers to the effective take-up of flexible learning by the VET sector – e.g. in relation to privacy, and copyright and intellectual property.</li> </ul>	2.6
4.2		2.2
4.3		2.1; 2.4
4.4		1.2
4.3	That membership of the Research Steering Committee include stakeholder interests and expertise in research methods.	2.5
4.4	That each project be commissioned on the basis of:	2.6; 2.8
	✂ Research questions developed through a rigorous design process prior to tender	
	✂ Demonstration by the research team of why the preferred methodologies are proposed, and that it has the expertise to conduct and write up the project to the desired quality.	
	✂ Project oversight by the Research Goal Steering Committee within limited but realistic timelines.	

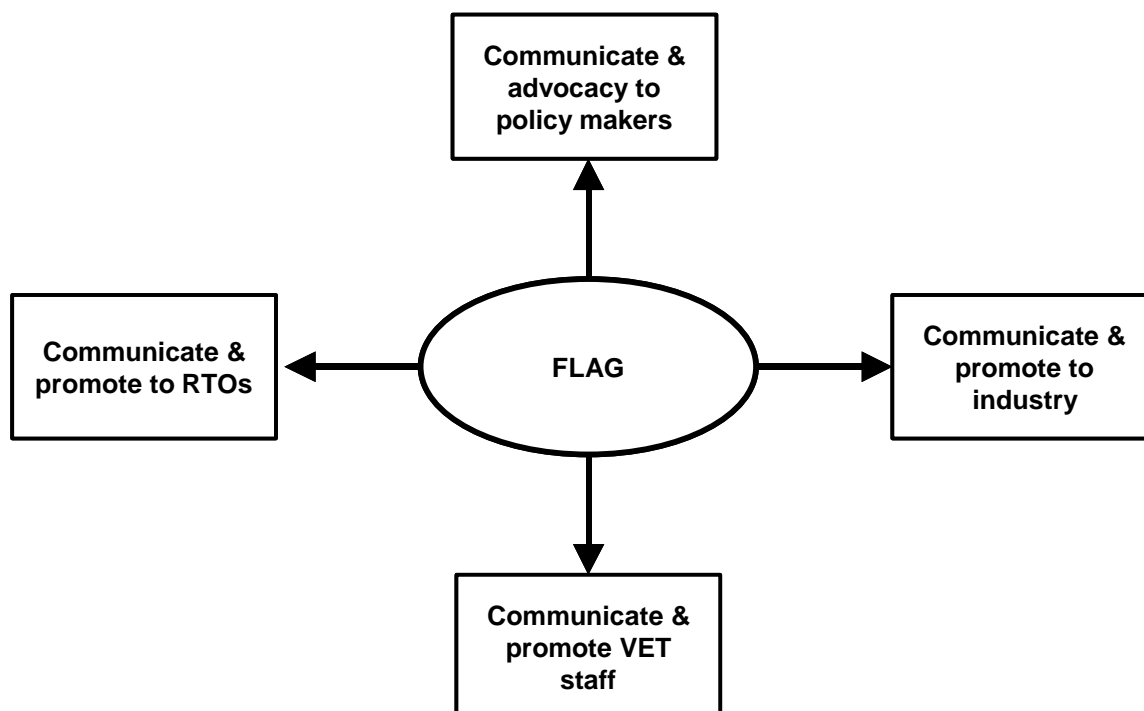
\* Cross-reference to the relevant section(s) in the report.

### 1.3.5 Goal 4 Leveraging flexible learning through communication and advocacy

Initiatives under this Goal aim to get the best outcomes from the *Framework* by:

- Disseminating its outcomes and products throughout the VET sector and outside to key stakeholders such as industry
- Developing closer linkages at all levels of the VET sector within the *Framework* and beyond to industry stakeholders
- Advocating for organisational, policy and regulatory changes needed to enable flexible learning approaches to be fully integrated into training delivery and business practices.

This can be represented thus:



This represents perhaps the most significant shift in the *Framework's* focus and priorities and is the logical next step to ensure the *Framework* achieves maximum return for the tangible and intangible investments made in it. It involves leverage to maximise the impact of *Framework* activities on State-based programs, projects and services; and in turn, the *Framework* activities themselves being informed by State-based practices. It is, in short, about making best use of everything produced by and learned through the *Framework*.

In the second half of the five-year program, this area is where the real impacts will be achieved and it is where additional resources should be applied to leverage the *Framework* and communicate and promote its outcomes and outputs.

## Recommendations

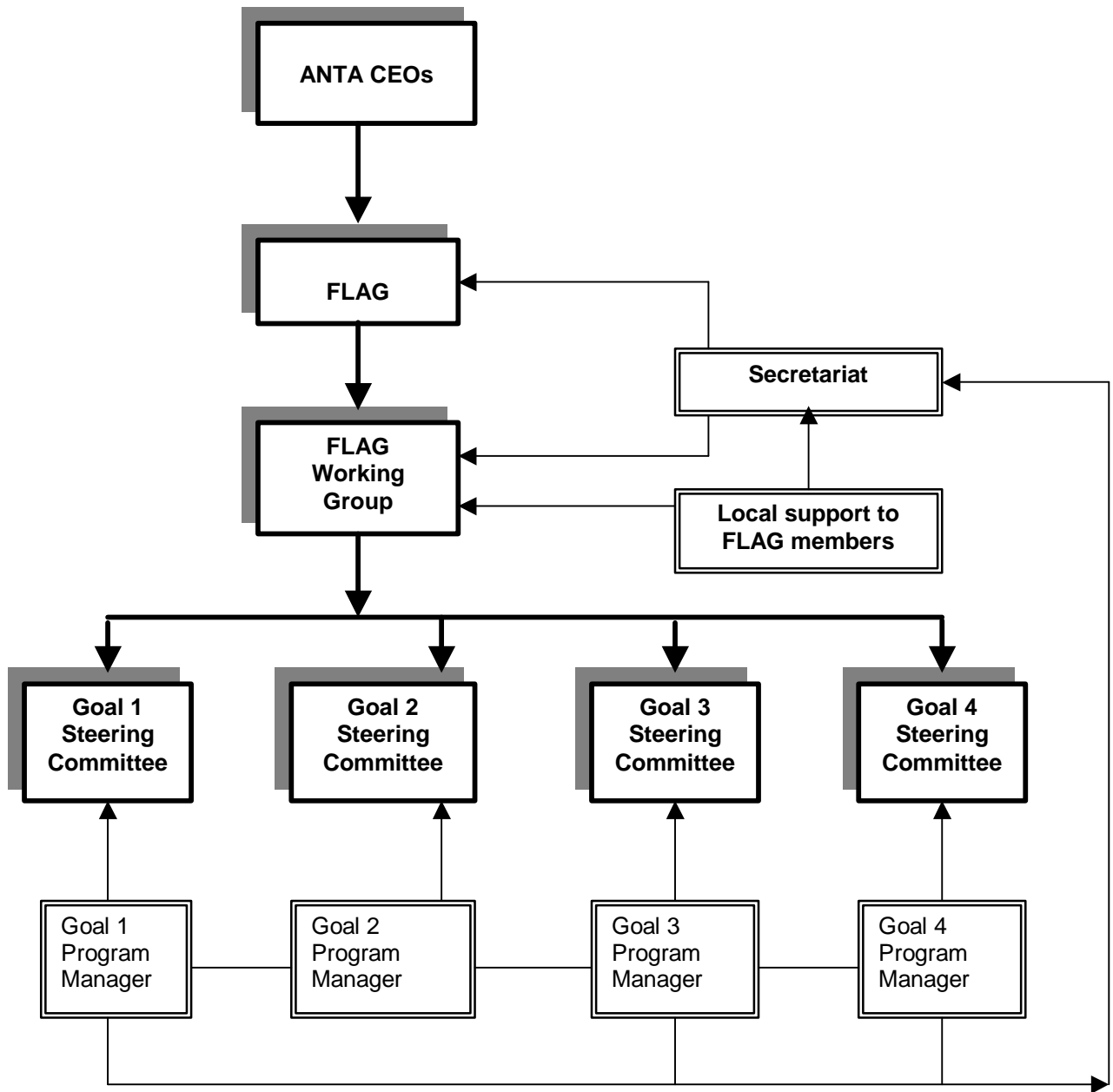
No.	Recommendations – Goal 4	Reference*
5.0	<p>That Goal 4 for 2003 – 2004 of the <i>Framework</i> be to leverage the <i>Framework</i> through communication and advocacy throughout the VET sector and outside to key stakeholders by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✂ Disseminating its outcomes and products throughout the VET sector and outside to key stakeholders such as industry</li> <li>✂ Developing closer linkages at all levels of the VET sector within the <i>Framework</i> and beyond to industry stakeholders</li> <li>✂ Advocating for organisational, policy and regulatory changes needed to enable flexible learning approaches to be fully integrated into training delivery and business practices.</li> </ul>	2.7
5.1	<p>That priorities under this Goal in 2003 be to develop systematic strategies for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✂ FLAG's advocacy roles within the VET system and beyond it to other national educational forums and industry.</li> <li>✂ Creating communications and promotions strategies for each Goal and its various outcomes and outputs since 2000, designed to reach the different client groups within and outside the <i>Framework</i>.</li> <li>✂ Providing guidance to every <i>Framework</i> project team on designing a communications and promotions plan as a required pre-requisite to winning the project and a required item for reporting against progress.</li> <li>✂ A coordinated approach to information management within the <i>Framework</i></li> <li>✂ Supporting existing and new communities of practice – e.g. reaching into industry through an e-learning community of practice network among national ITABs</li> </ul>	2.7; 2.8 2.7 2.8; 4.2 2.3; 2.8 1.2; 2.1; 4.4
5.2	That the Goal Steering Committee include stakeholder interests and experts in communications and advocacy	2.7; 2.8
5.3	That the dissemination and promotion of the Preferred Standards be managed through this Goal area.	2.2

\* Cross-reference to the relevant section(s) in the report.

### 1.3.6 Managing the Framework 2003 – 2004

It is proposed to modify the management strategy which has been in place since 2000 to align *Framework* management to the four Goal areas, maximise the strengths already developed through the collaborative approach to management, and address the major barriers to effective management which the Phase 1 evaluation has uncovered.

In addition, the proposed changes to the management strategy are designed to support the strategic focuses on sustainability and renewal, and leveraging the *Framework* through communication and advocacy.



Recommendations

No.	Recommendations – Framework Management	Reference*
6.0	That the <i>Framework</i> management strategy and support structure be revised in the second half of 2002.	2.8; 4.2
6.1	<p>That the new management structure comprise:</p> <p><b>FLAG and the Working Group:</b> That FLAG as a group continue to focus on <i>Framework</i> strategy and strengthen its emphasis on communications and advocacy within and outside the VET sector.</p> <p>6.2 That the Working Group continue to operate as the operations planning and management centre for the <i>Framework</i>.</p> <p><b>Steering Committees and project oversight:</b> 6.3 That the number of Steering Committees be reduced to four, one for each Goal.....</p> <p>6.4 That the membership of the four Goal Steering Committees:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ Reduce the number of FLAG members on each Steering Committee.</li> <li>☞ Include industry stakeholders in order to enhance the communications, advocacy and leverage goals of the <i>Framework</i>.</li> <li>☞ Include specialist expertise in the area of the Goal.</li> </ul> </p> <p>6.5 That the Goal Steering Committee's role be to:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ Oversee the development of project designs.</li> <li>☞ Review progress of the projects and address emerging issues and problems.</li> <li>☞ Review project products and reports and recommend on them to FLAG.</li> <li>☞ Advise FLAG and other Steering Committees on cross-<i>Framework</i> issues arising from the projects.</li> </ul> </p> <p>6.6 That each Goal Steering Committee be chaired by a FLAG member who assumes direct management responsibility for the cluster of projects, supported locally by a Secretariat staff member funded from the <i>Framework</i> management budget</p> <p>6.7 That the formal roles of 'project sponsor' and 'managing agent' disappear. FLAG members might choose to become mentors to one or more projects in which they have particular interests and expertise.</p> <p><b>The Secretariat:</b> 6.8 That, to support the above, a networked Secretariat be created, which remains separate from ANTA and which comprises:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ The small central Secretariat group which supports the Chairs of FLAG and the Working Group, coordinates <i>Framework</i> activities including the work of the outposted program managers and support staff, and manages the flexiblelearning.net.au website and the Phase 2 evaluation project.</li> </ul> </p>	2.8; 4.2

No.	Recommendations – Framework Management	Reference*
	<p><del>///</del> Four outposted Goal program managers which are full-time positions funded from the <i>Framework</i> management budget. An outposting arrangement, locating the four managers with the Goal Steering Committee Chair, will preserve the sense of an overall coordinating and unifying intelligence. FLAG can both secure their responsiveness to the role of the Chair, and reinforce the aim of information sharing and cross-<i>Framework</i> synergy. The managers' role is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><del>///</del> Coordinate the activities of the cluster of projects and develop networks and linkages among them.</li> <li><del>///</del> Support the work of the Steering Committee Chair.</li> <li><del>///</del> Liaise with the other Goal program managers on operational management, cross-<i>Framework</i> linkages and information management.</li> </ul> <p><del>///</del> Secretariat support to all State and Territory FLAG members to support them in their advocacy and leveraging activities. The support staff would be located with the State and Territory FLAG members. The level of resourcing will depend on members' requirements; it will be funded from the <i>Framework</i> management budget.</p>	
6.9	<p><b>Project management and quality assurance:</b> That no project should go to tender until a detailed project design brief has been completed against which bids are assessed. This brief should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><del>///</del> Objectives and expected outcomes.</li> <li><del>///</del> Scope and boundaries of the project.</li> <li><del>///</del> Assessment of the audience(s) for the project, the formats they prefer for accessing and using project outputs, and appropriate dissemination strategies.</li> <li><del>///</del> Assessment of methodologies appropriate to the desired outcomes.</li> <li><del>///</del> Implementation strategy, including expectations about inclusion of critical self-reflection processes.</li> <li><del>///</del> The skills and expertise required in the project team for successful completion of quality outputs.</li> </ul>	2.8; 4.2
6.10	<p>That to improve overall quality assurance and assist synergy across projects within a Goal area, FLAG employ an expert or panel to review the project design briefs for that Goal area prior to tenders being called.</p>	2.8

\* Cross-reference to the relevant section(s) in the report.

## 1.4 FUNDING THE FRAMEWORK 2003 – 2004

In this section we do not make recommendations in relation to the quantum of funding for the individual proposed new Goals for 2003 and 2004 because, by definition, the funding levels will be contingent on the global allocation for the *Framework* to be agreed by Ministers. However, we do:

- ✍ Draw some conclusions around the global funding threshold for the *Framework*, below which the *Framework* is likely to lose its coherence and momentum.
- ✍ Offer some suggestions in relation to the relative proportions that might be allocated in 2003 and 2004 to each Goal area.

It is our judgement that funding for the *Framework* of less than \$12 million per annum in 2003 and 2004 will jeopardise its ability to drive sustainable change in flexible learning, particular in professional development. This assumes maintenance of the commitment to an approach which integrates the various aspects of flexible learning and retains professional development as a central feature of the *Framework*.

We propose that planning of relative allocations for both 2003 and 2004 be undertaken now, recognising that actual budgets will not be known immediately. This acknowledges changing priorities over the two years between Goals 2 and 4 in particular.

The commitment to professional development in the *Framework* is not only one of its most successful features but also a distinctive 'stamp' which provides a model to other education providers here and internationally. We propose that the centrality of professional development should be preserved by assigning a similar level of investment as occurred in Years 1 – 3. This suggests allocation of 35-40% of the total budget to Goal 1 in 2003 and 2004.

There should be a relative decline in the budget for Goal 2 of Resources to Support VET People in 2003, given the proposed pause in new content development for that year, coupled with rationalisation of websites and setting of more stringent priorities for developing resources to support flexible learning. This should be balanced against the need for a substantial initial investment in 2003 to set up the new Goal 4 of Leveraging through Communications and Advocacy. This would diminish in 2004, corresponding with renewed investment in Goal 2.

The proportion of funds for Goal 3, the Research Program, should be driven by priority requirements at the time, rather than by a simple allocation of funds into which the number of research projects fit.

Program management has been acutely under-funded in Years 1 – 3. Our judgement is necessarily imprecise but experience would indicate that funding for program management should be 5 – 10% of total funds.

Funding for all projects should take into account two new dimensions: the cost of developing good project design prior to going to tender; and the creation of a communications and promotions strategy as an integral part of the project.

The focus for each Goal will determine priorities to the limits of the budget available. It is not proposed that the present suite of projects will simply be reshuffled and automatically retained. Rather, the annual program will be based on a rigorous assessment of priorities and the potential for rationalisation.

## Recommendations

No.	Recommendations – Funding the Framework
7.0	That budget planning span <i>Strategy 2003</i> and 2004 with progressive refinements made to budget plans during 2003.
7.1	<p>That budget planning for 2003 and 2004 take into account:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="331 443 1273 510"><del>///</del> Preservation of the centrality of professional development by allocating 35-40% of total funds to Goal 1.</li> <li data-bbox="331 533 1273 600"><del>///</del> A relative decline in funds for Goal 2 in 2003 to accommodate the pause in new content development followed by renewal in 2004.</li> <li data-bbox="331 622 1273 689"><del>///</del> A substantial investment to set up Goal 4 in 2003, followed by a relative decline in 2004 as program implementation continues.</li> <li data-bbox="331 712 1002 745"><del>///</del> Funding for Goal 3 to be set by priorities at the time.</li> <li data-bbox="331 768 1289 835"><del>///</del> Repair of the chronic under-funding of <i>Framework</i> program management by allocation of 5-10% of the budget for this purpose.</li> <li data-bbox="331 857 1289 1014"><del>///</del> Project funding to take into account the costs of developing sound project design prior to tender, the inclusion of a communications and promotions strategy in the project, and the inclusion in the project of the negotiation of a mechanism and funding arrangements for maintenance and updating of products, where this is relevant.</li> </ul>

## 1.5 BEYOND THE FRAMEWORK: 2005 AND ON

It would be prudent to position the activities and operation of the *Framework* in 2003 and 2004 against a clear understanding of the *Framework's* future in 2005 and beyond.

A decision in 2002 not to continue with the *Framework*, or to discontinue lines of funding under a future version of the *Framework*, would enable the affected projects to be planned for 2003 and 2004 with the need for appropriate transition strategies.

Our view that an early indication of the *Framework's* future is desirable does not, however, imply that a firm commitment by Ministers to levels and areas of funding needs to be secured at the end of 2002 for the years beyond the current *Framework*.

Rather, if Ministers wish to signal their on-going support for the activities of the *Framework* it would seem appropriate to gain agreement in principle in 2002 to continue the national collaboration in flexible learning beyond 2004 to:

- ✍ Enable investment in people, resources and tools to support VET staff, and research to resolve problems and to alert the system to latest developments
- ✍ Maximise the benefits of the States' and Territories' investments in flexible, client focused training
- ✍ Strengthen the VET sector's ability to provide global leadership in the application of appropriate teaching and learning processes and technologies to meet client's training needs.

One of the strengths of the current *Framework* has been its lifespan. A five year timeframe has enabled experimentation, reorientation and consolidation designed to maximise the returns on the investment, including integration of the initiatives into VET culture and practice. To derive similar benefits and returns, a second framework should have a similar lifespan.

An approach and outcome in these terms would signal to people in the VET sector, whose aspirations and professionalism have been raised and enhanced by the *Framework*, that the leaders of the system continue to be committed to flexible learning. It would also show that change through flexible learning remains high on the national agenda for training and is recognised as an integral aspect of on-going training reform. Conversely, a decision not to proceed would send a negative message to VET staff and stakeholders in the VET system.

### Recommendations

No.	Recommendations – 2005 and beyond
8.0	That FLAG recommend through ANTA CEOs that the Ministers in Council make a commitment in principle in 2002 to continue the national collaboration in flexible learning beyond 2004, and that a future framework should have a five year timespan.
8.1	That FLAG put in place a timetable and transition strategy to accommodate this decision.

## 1.6 EVALUATION ARCHITECTURE

The *Framework* is a dynamic policy initiative which has already built on experience and will continue to do so. In Phase 1 of the evaluation we have designed a suite of qualitative and quantitative tools which can be replicated and extended in Phase 2 of the evaluation so that trend data can be readily obtained and analysed over the five years of the *Framework* while still accommodating further evolution of *Framework* activities and outcomes.

Equally importantly, the evaluation architecture aims to facilitate longer term assessment of the *Framework's* outcomes for clients through the formal performance data collection regimes of the VET sector. As one senior RTO manager we consulted said:

*The ultimate measure of success – but it will show up a long way down the road – is that we have upped our level of post-school skills qualifications according to the OECD measures – i.e. against international benchmarks.*

The first step in building a robust architecture was to revise the original Measures of Success for the *Framework*. This, together with the full details of the evaluation architecture, is set out in Part 3.

### 1.6.1 Measures of success

The revised Measures of Success agreed by FLAG in December 2001:

- ~~///~~ Define a set of 10 characteristics of flexible learning within which the *Framework* should sit, under broad headings of driving forces, learning choices and enablers.
- ~~///~~ Establish three overarching Goals and five areas of achievement by which the *Framework* will be assessed at the end of 2004.
- ~~///~~ Identify forms of evidence through which each area of achievement might be assessed, recognising these would include direct and indirect performance data, and that their activation would be influenced by contemporary resource and policy implications.

In approving the revised measures, FLAG recognised that they would need further refinement before activation for the final evaluation, partly because of the *Framework's* evolutionary nature and partly because – despite efforts to achieve a robust and rigorous set of measures – they remain problematic. We share three broad reservations expressed by many FLAG members during the consultations:

Firstly, the debate continues about whether the *Framework* is concerned with the full dimensions of 'flexible learning' as defined by the 10 characteristics, or with online or e-learning as a sub-set of flexible learning. The answer is not straightforward despite FLAG's re-focusing of the *Framework* on 'e-learning'. The evidence from all our data shows that stakeholders in the *Framework* interpret flexible learning and online learning in a multiplicity of ways. Moreover, as we report below, one of the most interesting trends in the *Framework* is a maturing of understanding about the value of hybrid delivery methods and the inter-connections of content, interaction and communities of learning. Two representative views from the consultations:

*The Framework is about much more than online. Important though online learning is, it's not a panacea of access to training for people in Australia. The Framework won't be successful just because people go online. That's simply another tool (STA manager).*

*The success of the Framework won't be in how many students are online. It's about satisfaction with learning and access to it and that's about being really responsive to the customers (senior RTO manager).*

Secondly, as our investigations of the national and State data collection regimes and the 'State online networks' indicate (see Part 3), it is and will continue to be difficult to obtain robust quantitative performance data about take-up and satisfaction with flexible learning in

general and online learning in particular. The recommendations below are designed to correct some of the inadequacies and anomalies in data presently collected, and ensure that at least a first set of appropriate baseline data can be collected and analysed in the Phase 2 evaluation.

Thirdly, it has been accepted from the outset that direct causal relationships between *Framework* activities and flexible learning outcomes are very difficult to prove, let alone quantify. The variables are many and complex – other national, State and Territory policies and investments, external influences, etc. The qualitative data we have gathered in Phase 1 has directly addressed the issues of how and to what effect States and Territories are using the *Framework* to leverage their investments in flexible learning. Strategies to maximise these opportunities comprise a key part of our recommendations for future directions.

The revised Measures of Success have broadly guided our thinking and questioning in this evaluation but the report is not constructed directly against each measure. This is partly because of the continuing issues outlined above. It is also partly because the areas of achievement in the Measures of Success are constructed to assess the overarching outcomes of the *Framework* as a whole; but at this point in the *Framework's* life it is clear that stakeholders relate most closely to the individual Goals.

## 1.6.2 Evaluation tools and performance data

Design of the evaluation architecture for the *Framework* involved two strands:

- ✍ Creating qualitative and quantitative tools for use in this Phase 1 of the evaluation, which may also be replicated and extended in Phase 2.
- ✍ Investigating, in conjunction with NCVET and ANTA, potential modifications to formal VET data collection regimes to enable them to yield relevant performance data on take-up and use of flexible learning approaches, to be used in the Phase 2 evaluation and beyond the *Framework*.

### Evaluation tools used in Phase 1

Part 3 details the qualitative and quantitative evaluation tools we created for the Phase 1 evaluation and the types of data yielded. The following summarises key features:

Evaluation tool	Key features
Analysis of project outputs and management reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✍ An essential tool for analysis of the annual program and building up a picture of progress over time.</li> <li>✍ Problems identified with variable quality of project outputs and outcomes and need for more rigorous project design are taken up in Part 2 on management strategy.</li> <li>✍ Value identified of including critical self-reflection processes within projects as integral part of project design and in context of project managers' periodic workshops.</li> <li>✍ Value identified of systematic consultations with project managers in Phase 2 evaluation.</li> </ul>

Evaluation tool	Key features
Consultations with stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ Original program of 40 individual interviews with senior managers and industry leaders, plus workshop with ITAB representatives amended to comprise series of round table consultations with 54 senior managers of STAs, Commonwealth and ANTA; representatives of TDA and ACPET; 11 members of peak industry bodies and ITABs.</li> <li>☞ Consultations provided invaluable feedback on critical success factors, barriers and opportunities.</li> <li>☞ Value identified of repeating consultations in Phase 2 and adding interviews with more TAFE directors, members of ACPET and ACE, and industry (especially through ITABs)</li> </ul>
Case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ 3 case studies undertaken (see Part 4); of collaboration and management (FLAG), leveraging the <i>Framework</i> in a TAFE institute (Hunter Institute of TAFE), and e-learning in industry (TDT AUSTRALIA).</li> <li>☞ Valuable way of going beyond the readily available data to assess impacts and outcomes of the <i>Framework</i>.</li> <li>☞ Value identified of revisiting the case studies in Phase 2 and, if resources permit, adding a new one on impact of <i>Framework</i> communications and advocacy activities.</li> </ul>
External referencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ A minor but necessary component to ground the evaluative activities and findings in contemporary findings elsewhere.</li> <li>☞ Refined over Phase 1 to concentrate on comparable public policy initiatives in a limited number of countries.</li> <li>☞ Value identified of continuing a tightly focused watching brief in Phase 2.</li> </ul>
Online surveys of project participants and RTO managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ Surveys designed and administered online of <i>Framework</i> project participants and senior RTO managers in 2001 and 2002.</li> <li>☞ Responses of participants in both years yielded valuable data on impact of <i>Framework</i>; responses of RTO managers in 2001 too low to yield useful data but in 2002 provided valuable feedback.</li> <li>☞ Value identified of building up trend data on changing perceptions of those involved in <i>Framework</i> and managing integration of flexible learning in RTOs.</li> <li>☞ An alternative option for Phase 2 is to commission NCVET to design and administer a national online survey of VET staff.</li> </ul>

### Quantitative performance data for Phase 2 evaluation

Part 3 details the investigations we undertook, to:

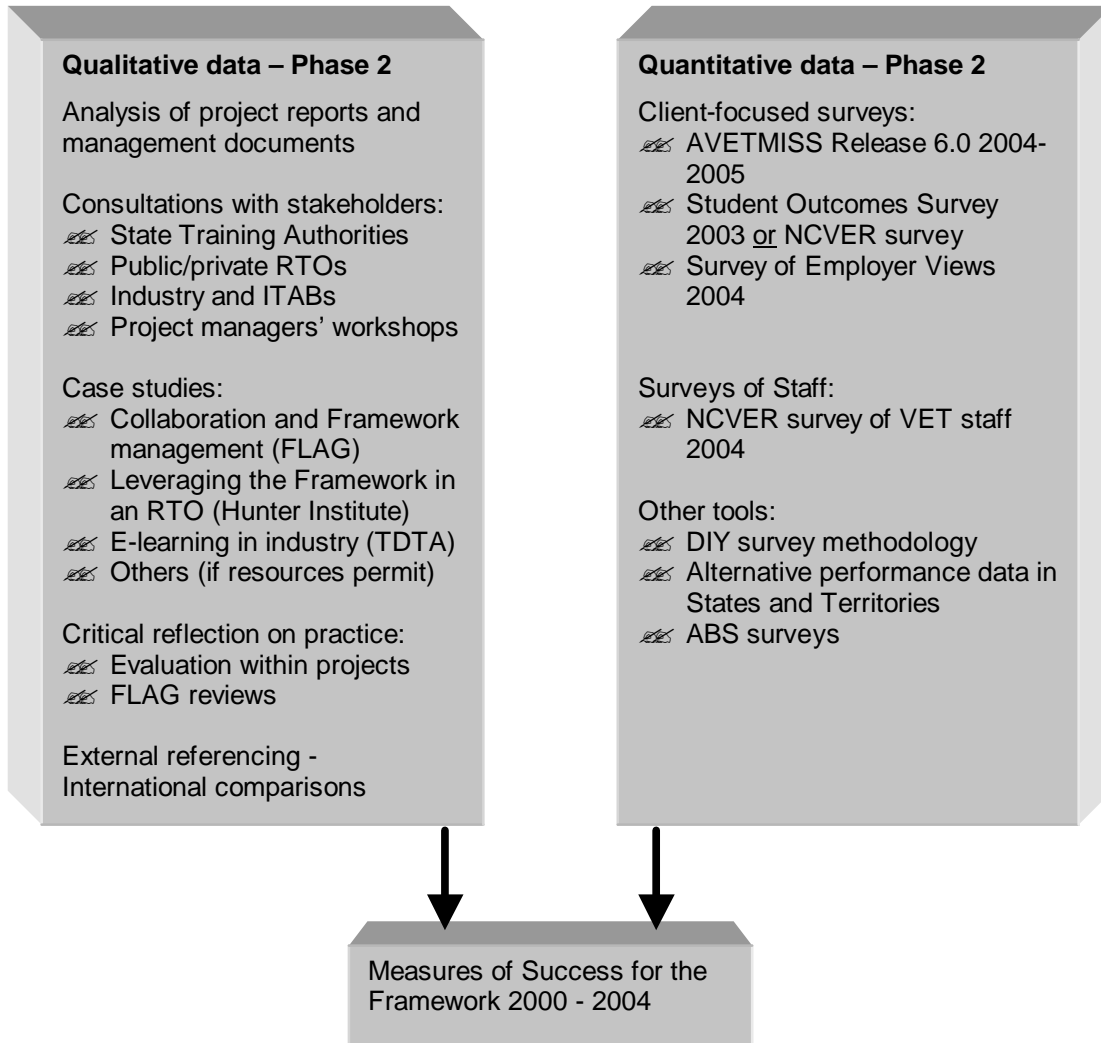
- ☞ In conjunction with NCVET and ANTA, assess what revisions are needed to the national and State formal data collection systems to enable policy makers and VET managers to obtain accurate performance information on take-up and outcomes of flexible/e-learning.
- ☞ Identify other sources of performance data on take-up and outcomes of flexible/e-learning.
- ☞ Advise FLAG on steps required to ensure that at least a first set of data is obtained to assist the final evaluation of the *Framework* 2000-2004.

The following summarises key features:

Performance data	Key features
AVETMISS national data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✂ At present, performance information collected on delivery modes is misleading; current variables cannot yield usable data on take-up of flexible learning.</li> <li>✂ 3 key issues identified:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✂ Defining the terms used for delivery – alternative approach proposed which concentrates on what, how, where and when training occurs.</li> <li>✂ How to capture the multimedia nature of delivery – strategy proposed to address this.</li> <li>✂ Timing of revisions – need for FLAG to recommend on timetable which will allow Release 6.0 to produce data for Phase 2 of the evaluation.</li> </ul> </li> <li>✂ April 2002: FLAG agreed to evaluation team recommendations to take this issue further with NTSC.</li> </ul>
Student Outcomes Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✂ Agreed with NCVET and ANTA that terminology and definitions in present survey require modifications to better reflect current thinking and attitudes towards VET delivery.</li> <li>✂ Consultations with NCVET indicate options for modifying survey for 2003 administration, and agreed preferences for:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✂ Changing current 3 questions in Survey relating to how the course was delivered and the student's satisfaction with the mode.</li> <li>✂ Undertaking separate targeted national online survey of students taking an e-learning course.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Surveys of employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✂ With NCVET, identified value of revising Survey of Employers for next administration in 2004, along similar lines to revision of AVETMISS and Student Outcomes Survey.</li> <li>✂ Identified ABS Training Expenditure and Practices Survey as potential source of useful secondary data on flexible learning training practices in the private sector.</li> </ul>
State online networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✂ Investigation by evaluation team of potential of online networks to yield management information system data on take-up and outcomes of e-learning.</li> <li>✂ Found great diversity in services provided by these networks and complexity in their distributed nature. Central networks unlikely to yield appropriate performance data for national or STA systemic planning.</li> <li>✂ However, potential identified for RTOs to enhance their planning and decision making processes and business management by integrating their online network data with other MIS sources.</li> </ul>
Alternative performance data of States and Territories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✂ Preliminary investigation of other alternative data sources captured by States and Territories which might assist evaluation of <i>Framework</i>.</li> <li>✂ Limited response to the request suggests that, apart from Victoria, there is no localised data collected on delivery types beyond the AVETMISS data.</li> <li>✂ NCVET has designed a DIY, web-based survey methodology to assist TAFE institutes to run their own surveys.</li> <li>✂ Potential identified for FLAG, with NCVET, to add value to the DIY package by designing specific questionnaire 'shells' about take-up and outcomes of online learning.</li> </ul>

## An evaluation architecture for the remainder of the Framework and beyond

In the recommendations below we propose continuation and refinement for Phase 2 of most of the strategies adopted in Phase 1. They can be schematised as follows:



In addition, we have reached the following conclusions about the approach to *Framework* evaluation overall:

The evaluative strategy in Phase 1 took place over an 18-month period and was a combination of monitoring progress and summations at two points – mid-2001 and mid-2002. The experience suggests the monitoring task is better carried out within the *Framework* management itself, at both FLAG and project levels. Internal monitors are better placed to fine-tune on the spot. Critical reflection on practice should be an integral part of quality assurance and 'walking the talk' about good educational and management practice.

Project design and conduct will be improved if critical reflections on purpose, implementation, issues arising, etc are built into all projects as a matter of course. This will probably require assistance to some/many project teams to develop reflection and evaluation skills.

Regular reviews by FLAG of the *Framework*, its objectives, outcomes and processes, continue to be essential to the *Framework's* vitality and FLAG's capacity to adapt to changing circumstances. Kaye Schofield's role as mentor and facilitator of FLAG's review and planning

processes has been a major success factor for FLAG as an entity, FLAG members as learners, and the *Framework* overall.

With internal monitoring built into the *Framework* and project management, the Phase 2 evaluation should be conducted as a summative evaluation incorporating the full range of the evaluation architecture as recommended below. It should commence in late 2004 and conclude in early 2005.

### Recommendations

No.	Recommendations – Evaluation Architecture	Reference*
9.0	<p><b>Framework evaluation overall:</b> That FLAG strengthen its <i>Framework</i> monitoring processes by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✎ Continuing its regular reviews of the <i>Framework</i>'s objectives, strategies and outcomes, in conjunction with assessments of emerging needs.</li> <li>✎ Building into each Goal area and individual projects strategies for critical self-reflection.</li> </ul>	
10.0	That Phase 2 of the <i>Framework</i> evaluation be conducted as a summative evaluation from late 2004, evaluating the <i>Framework</i> and its outcomes against the Measures of Success through a suite of quantitative and qualitative evaluation tools as below.	
11.0	<p><b>Qualitative evaluation strategies</b> That FLAG implement the following suite of qualitative evaluation strategies in Phase 2 of the evaluation:</p>	3.2.1
11.1	Analysis of project outputs and <i>Framework</i> management reports from Years 3-5, and consultations with the <i>Sharing Knowledge</i> project team on their experience and findings.	
11.2	<p>Consultations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✎ Repeat the round table consultations with senior STA, Commonwealth and ANTA managers.</li> <li>✎ Repeat the consultations with representatives of TDA, ACPET and ACE.</li> <li>✎ Repeat the consultations with representatives of industry peak bodies and ITABs.</li> <li>✎ Consultations with Project Managers from Years 1 – 5.</li> </ul>	
11.3	<p>Case studies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✎ Revisit the case studies of collaboration and <i>Framework</i> management (FLAG), leveraging the <i>Framework</i> (the Hunter Institute) and e-learning in industry (TDT AUSTRALIA).</li> <li>✎ If resources permit, add a case study to illuminate the impact of refreshing the <i>Framework</i> to emphasise the communications and advocacy roles.</li> </ul>	4.2.1; 4.2.2; 4.2.3
11.4	External watching brief tightly focused on comparable major public policy initiatives in other countries and in other areas of Australian education.	4.5
12.0	<p><b>Quantitative performance data and evaluation strategies</b> That FLAG implement the following actions to create a suite of quantitative performance data for the Phase 2 evaluation:</p>	3.2.2; 3.3
12.1	<p>Actions in relation to AVETMISS Release 6.0:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✎ Recommend immediately to the NTSC that revisions be made to the delivery type identifier for Release 6.0 of AVETMISS to identify</li> </ul>	

No.	Recommendations – Evaluation Architecture	Reference*
12.2	<p>the what, how, when and where of delivery as per NCVER's technical response.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✍ Recommend immediately to the NTSC that the schedule for Release 6.0 ensure that it is in the field in September 2004.</li> <li>✍ Maintain close liaison through the remainder of 2002 with NCVER and the NTSC about revisions to the delivery type identifier and timetable for AVETMISS Release 6.0.</li> </ul> <p>Survey of students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✍ Recommend to the NTSC that the Student Outcomes Survey be revised for administration in 2003, to modify the present three questions about training delivery in line with NCVER's option 1.</li> <li>✍ If this modification cannot proceed in time for the 2003 administration, FLAG should commission NCVER to design, administer and report on a national online survey in 2004 of student satisfaction with online learning and related aspects of flexible learning. This survey would be administered nationally to 1000 respondents, for an approximate cost of \$21,000.</li> </ul>	
12.3	<p>Employer surveys:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✍ Recommend to the NTSC that the Survey of Employer Views be revised to improve the accuracy of information on delivery and outcomes and incorporate questions on take-up and outcomes of flexible/e-learning.</li> <li>✍ Collaborate with NCVER and ANTA during 2003 to develop specific recommendations to the NTSC for incorporation in the 2004 Survey of Employer Views with a view to data being analysed in the final evaluation of the <i>Framework</i>.</li> <li>✍ Review the outcomes of the 2002 ABS Training Expenditure and Practices Survey with a view to assessing its potential to provide performance data relevant to the <i>Framework</i>, and influencing later administrations of the survey as appropriate.</li> </ul>	
12.4	<p>Commission NCVER to design, administer and report on a national online survey in 2004 of VET staff views about the outcomes and outputs of the <i>Framework</i> (2000 – 2004). This survey would be administered nationally to 1000 respondents, for an approximate cost of \$21,000.</p>	
12.5	<p>Consult with NCVER on leveraging the <i>Framework</i> to add value to NCVER's DIY survey methodology by designing specific questionnaire 'shells' about take-up and outcomes of online learning for use by TAFE providers.</p>	
12.6	<p>That the State online networks investigation be referred to the proposed new Communications program in 2003-2004 with a view to raising the awareness of, and encouraging development of networks among, RTO managers and technical specialists in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✍ The potential for RTOs to enhance their planning and decision making processes and business management by integrating their online network data with their mainstream management information systems.</li> <li>✍ Options and solutions for RTOs in re-engineering their management information systems to accommodate flexible and e-learning.</li> </ul>	3.2.2; 3.4

\* Cross-reference to the relevant section(s) in the report.

