

Evaluation of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework 2000-2004

Part E

Evaluation Infrastructure

I & J Management Services

June 2004

Evaluation of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework 2000-2004

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The Evaluation Report and related sections are available online at:
<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/aboutus/keydocuments.htm>

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Part of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework

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



Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
1. EVALUATION BRIEF	2
1.1. Purpose	2
1.2. Background	2
1.3. Evaluation Outcomes	3
1.4. Evaluation Timeframe	5
2. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY	6
2.1. Evaluation Methodology	6
2.2. Evaluation Framework	7
2.3. Consultation schedule	11
2.4. Stakeholders consulted	11
3. DEFINITIONS AND GLOSSARY	16
3.1. Definitions of flexible learning	16
3.2. Glossary	17
4. REFERENCES	18
5. PHASE ONE EVALUATION	21
Summary of the Evaluation of the AFL Framework 2000-2001	21

INTRODUCTION

The Evaluation of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework 2000-2004 is presented in six complementary reports.

- § Final Evaluation Report
- § Part A – Gathering Momentum: Growth in the Uptake of Flexible Learning in Vocational Education and Training since 1999
- § Part B – Connecting Capable People: The Australian Flexible Learning Framework as Strategy
- § Part C – Solving Problems: The Australian Flexible Learning Framework 2002 and 2003
- § Part D – Rising to the Challenge: The Case for Collaboration
- § Part E – Evaluation Infrastructure

Each part presents a comprehensive analysis of the findings against the evaluation objectives and other aspects of the evaluation. The Final Evaluation Report draws all of this together and presents the evaluation's final conclusions and recommendations on collaborative activities to support flexible learning beyond 2004.

Part E – Evaluation Infrastructure

Part E of the evaluation report documents the basic evaluation infrastructure. It contains factual information only and has no analysis, findings or conclusions against the evaluation objectives.

Section 1 presents the evaluation brief and outlines the evaluation objectives and requirements.

The evaluation methodology is documented in Section 2. This includes the evaluation framework which was used to guide the quantitative and qualitative data collection activities. Section 2 also outlines the stakeholder consultation processes and lists persons who directly contributed to the report through participation in interviews or workshops. Many other people contributed to the evaluation through their participation other Framework projects, research and evaluations, the reports of which were reviewed during this evaluation.

Section 3 of the report provides a range of definitions of flexible learning and other key terms used in the evaluation. It also includes a glossary of abbreviations and acronyms used throughout the report. Section 4 documents references used in the report.

Finally, Section 5 of this report contains a summary of the findings of the Phase One Evaluation of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework that was completed in June 2002. The Phase One evaluation has provided a reference point for this evaluation in assessing the changes that have occurred in the VET system over the past four years and the changes in uptake of flexible learning over that time. It also, of course, was an input to the Framework's annual planning cycle and a factor in shaping the changes that have occurred in the direction and management of the Framework over the past two years.

1. EVALUATION BRIEF

1.1. Purpose

In September 2003 the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG) invited tenders from suitably qualified organisations/consultants to conduct an evaluation of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework for the National Vocational Education and Training System (Framework) – Phase Two.

The purpose of the Phase Two evaluation of the Framework was to assess:

- § the uptake of flexible learning in the VET since 1999, particularly the application of new technologies to VET products and services
- § the impact of the Framework as a national strategy
- § efficiency, effectiveness and management of the Framework 2002-2003
- § a case for or against further national investment in flexible learning beyond 2004.

The conduct of the evaluation was to reflect FLAG's mandate as an advisory group to ANTA Chief Executive Officers on national flexible learning matters, including the Australian Flexible Learning Framework.

The tender brief is presented in this section of the report.

1.2. Background

1.2.1. The Framework

In August 1999, the Australian National Training Authority Chief Executive Officers (ANTA CEOs) endorsed the Australian Flexible Learning Framework for VET 2000-2004. The Framework is the five-year strategic plan for national collaboration for flexible learning in Australia's Vocational Education and Training (VET) system. It is designed to support both take-up of accredited flexible learning modes and to position Australia as a world leader in applying new technologies to vocational education products and services.

Each year, the Framework is supported by an annual implementation plan which is endorsed by ANTA CEOs. The annual plans identify a range of specific initiatives to be undertaken across Australia and the associated allocation of resources, within each of the five Goal areas of the Framework.

The Goals

The five goals of the Framework are:

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 communications technologies; and achieves connectivity and associated interoperability in the application of technology to delivering 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 international opportunities for Australian VET products and services.

1.2.2. About the Flexible Learning Advisory Group

The Framework has been developed by FLAG which is a strategically focused group of senior VET personnel advising ANTA CEOs, the ANTA Board, the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), the Board of education.au Ltd and the Australian Information and Communication Technology in Education Committee (AICTEC) on national issues related to the directions and priorities for flexible learning in VET, with particular reference to e-learning.

FLAG is chaired by Jim Davidson, Director of the Victorian Office of Training and Tertiary Education (OTTE), on behalf of the ANTA CEOs. Membership comprises representatives of all states and territories, ANTA, DEST and Adult and Community Education (ACE). The Chief Executive Officer of education.au Ltd is a Standing Observer on FLAG.

1.3. Evaluation Outcomes

Over the five year period of the Framework, up to \$80m will be invested by the Australian Government, State and Territory training authorities. In addition, there is considerable investment of time and the intellectual and creative resources of many participants in individual programs and projects sponsored through the Framework.

The audience for the evaluation report therefore includes the Ministers with responsibility for State and Territory VET systems, the ANTA Board, the CEOs of State and Territory VET systems, the senior executives in those systems with responsibility for aspects of flexible learning, other VET managers, and particularly the “champions” of flexible learning. Each stakeholder has a particular interest in the outcomes from the evaluation.

1.3.1. Framework Evaluation 2000-2001 (Phase One)

In 2001, FLAG commissioned the first phase of the Framework Evaluation 2000-2001.

The outcomes of this phase were:

- § Evaluation Architecture for the Framework
- § Evaluation report on the Framework 2000-2001.

The Executive Summary and the full Evaluation Report (Phase One) can be found at:
<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/aboutus/keydocuments.htm>.

Phase Two of the Framework Evaluation is expected to incorporate, and where appropriate, expand on the evaluation architecture established in Phase One.

With the introduction of the program management model in 2003, Performance Measures have been developed by each Program as a subset of the overarching Framework Measures of Success and Areas of Achievement. The evaluator will be expected to assess achievement of Program objectives against these measures and their contribution to the overall goals of the Framework.

1.3.2. Framework Evaluation (Phase Two)

In broad terms the evaluation will provide:

- § accountability for the expenditure of public funds
- § a case for or against further investment in national flexible learning, including performance data against agreed measures
- § directions for improvement and any future activity for national flexible learning beyond 2004.

The evaluation was to consider the following dimensions:

- § The uptake of flexible learning across the VET sector since 1999
 - What evidence is there of increased client focus and increased flexibility in the delivery of vocational education and training delivery?
 - Has there been an increase in the application of new learning technologies to VET products and services since 1999?
- § Appropriateness for the future beyond 2004
 - Is there a need for a national collaborative approach to flexible learning investment?
 - What alternatives are there to the 2000-2004 approach?
 - Has the certainty of a five year funding commitment been reflected in the outcomes?
 - What timeframe would be appropriate for a future funding commitment?

The evaluation should consider at least three dimensions of the Framework:

- § An assessment of the Framework 2000-2003 as a whole:
 - How well has it performed?
 - Has it made a difference, especially to learners, industry and to providers of VET?
 - Progress in achieving the goals?
 - Are the assumptions on which the Framework is based still appropriate?
 - Has the Framework activity informed states and territories efforts and vice versa? If yes, in what ways? If not, why not?
 - Has the Framework built organisational capability?
 - What other impacts has it had?
- § An assessment of the extent to which the individual programs and projects contribute to the Framework:
 - Are they effective and appropriate?
 - Has the Framework impacted on provider take-up?
 - Is the impact of the Framework greater than the sum of its individual programs and projects?
- § An assessment of the management processes of the Framework:
 - How successful is the collaboration?
 - Is management at the national level through FLAG and, since 2003, using the program management model, efficient and effective?
 - Taking the recommendations of the Framework Evaluation into account, is there evidence of improvement in efficiency and effectiveness?
 - Is management at state/territory level efficient and effective?
 - Is management at the project level efficient and effective?

The evaluation should direct specific attention to:

- § Effectiveness
 - Are the Framework objectives being achieved?
 - To what extent has the Framework contributed to these achievements?
- § Efficiency
 - Measure the efficiency with which the Framework is delivered, having regard to the resources used, the processes by which the Framework is delivered, and the outputs delivered by the Framework.

The evaluation should also identify any key issues that should be addressed further in the third phase of the Framework Evaluation.

FLAG has identified a limited number of information sets around which it will be possible to access data for the purposes of establishing some flexible learning benchmarks for the VET System. These information sets will be made available to the successful tenderer.

The evaluation will be expected to establish performance data for flexible learning against agreed measures as a base to measure progress for any future national program implemented after 2004. An estimation of progress since 1999 will also be made against the 2004 data to demonstrate progress over the last five years.

1.3.3. Linking individual Framework program and project evaluations

The evaluation should take into account the evaluations and progress reports prepared for individual programs and projects. Wherever possible, the evaluation should identify ways in which individual evaluations can contribute to the Framework Evaluation and ways in which the evaluation of the Framework can enhance the value of program/project-level evaluations.

1.3.4. International Comparisons

The evaluation was to also provide an assessment of where Australia stands internationally in the take-up of flexible learning and the extent to which the Framework has impacted on this standing.

1.4. Evaluation Timeframe

The evaluation is assessing the Framework in three phases over the period 2000-2004. Phase One was completed in June 2002, Phase Two, (the subject of this tender brief), will be conducted from November 2003 to 31 May 2004. Phase Three will commence in January 2005 to 30 March 2005.

This tender brief addresses Phase Two only of the three phases of the Framework Evaluation.

Phase 1: February 2001 to 30 June 2002

The first major evaluation report, delivered on 30 June 2002, established the evaluation architecture and provided a formative and summative evaluation of the Framework 2000-2001.

Phase 2: November 2003 to 31 May 2004

The second evaluation report is to be delivered in draft form by 30 April 2004 with a final version delivered by 31 May 2004, incorporating previous outcomes and providing an evaluation of the uptake of flexible learning in VET since 1999 and the impact of the Framework 2002-2003. This evaluation will substantially inform the case for a future commitment for national flexible learning post 2004. Interim progress reports will be specified at a later date.

Phase 3: January 2005 to 30 March 2005

The final evaluation report is to be delivered by 30 March 2005, incorporating previous outcomes and evaluating the Framework 2004. Interim progress reports will be specified at a later date.

2. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

2.1. Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation was conducted in three stages from late November 2003 to early May 2004:

Stage 1	Project planning and development	24 November to 18 January
Stage 2	Data collection	19 January to 14 March
Stage 3	Analysis and report	15 March to 31 May

The proposed methodology was refined during the course of the evaluation in response to a re-assessment of the value of undertaking various consultation activities given the amount of information that already existed from other Framework consultation activities on the views of some stakeholder segments. The final reporting dates to the Evaluation Working Group and FLAG were amended from the original project workplan to accommodate FLAG's forward planning processes. The main activities undertaken during each stage of the evaluation are shown below.

Stage	Activities
1A. Project planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § Meet with Project Manager to discuss evaluation § Commence collection and initial review of Framework documents and reports § Develop draft workplan and review with Project Manager and Evaluation Working Group (EWG) § Revise workplan and deliver final workplan.
1B. Project design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § Document evaluation objectives, define terms and identify performance measures § Develop draft Evaluation Framework § Develop list of key stakeholders § Investigate available data sets and data sources § Compile and review documents and reports § Map current/recent and previously evaluated Framework projects (see Phase One) and consultation against the Evaluation Framework § Review draft Evaluation Framework with Project Manager and EWG § Block stakeholder consultation to meet key stakeholder availability § Revise evaluation framework § Develop consultation schedule § Prepare communication material to promote stakeholder consultation § Develop data collection instruments to fulfill evaluation framework (e.g. interview and focus group questions, data returns, surveys) § Map type and location of existing data on flexible learning benchmarks § Review data collection instruments and promotional material with Project Manager and EWG § Test data collection instruments § Distribute communication materials to FLAG members and representatives.
2A. Desktop review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § Compile and review documentation on 2002 and 2003 program and project aims, objectives, reports and evaluations § Review FLAG processes and decisions § Review Framework, program and project management processes § Review international developments and take-up of flexible learning § Identify and benchmark Framework against similar national strategies § Review program key performance indicators § Document findings.

Stage	Activities
2B. Stakeholder consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § Schedule stakeholder consultation § Promote stakeholder consultation through FLAG members or representatives § Conduct state and territory consultation visits (see also Section 2.3 of this report for a more complete description of the state and territory consultation activities)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § Attend Project Managers' induction workshop and other special purpose forums, wherever possible § Conduct interviews with FLAG Secretariat § Conduct telephone interviews as required § Follow-up consultation feedback and references
2C. Employer survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § A survey of employers was proposed to canvass their experience with the uptake of flexible learning and views on the Framework and future national collaborative activities. In discussion with the EWG this activity was not undertaken, given the availability of information on employer and industry views from recent Framework stakeholder consultations, and with a desire not to unnecessarily burden contributors to Framework review activity.
2D. Benchmarking data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § A survey of state training authorities and RTOs was proposed to capture quantitative data on the uptake of flexible learning and organisational and systemic factors influencing uptake. In discussion with the EWG, given the lack of consistent or comprehensive data and data collection mechanisms across the VET system, the approach to this activity was revised to target capture of relevant information from known data sources, and inviting submission of additional information to the evaluation. § Analyse benchmarking data and document changing profile of uptake of flexible learning
3A. Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § Analysis of qualitative and quantitative information on the Framework's impact, outcomes and management § Analysis of flexible learning environment § Assessment of future options § Review findings and options with Project Manager and EWG § Select subjects for snapshots § Development of interim conclusions and recommendations
3B. Report writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> § Design report structure and format § Write draft report § Write flexible learning snapshots § Discuss report findings with Project Manager and EWG § Complete draft report § Discuss draft report with EWG on 28 April § Prepare final report § Present final report to FLAG on 12 May § Finalise report.

2.1.1. Evaluation Working Group

The evaluation was overseen by an Evaluation Working Group comprising selected FLAG members, including: Rodney Spark (Chairperson); Peter Le Cornu; Graeme Dobbs; Lesley Johnson; Murray Judd; and Nancye Stanelis.

The Evaluation Working Group provided regular input to the formulation of the evaluation workplan and the evaluation framework, as well as guidance on the data collection and analytical activities. The group was provided with executive support by the FLAG Secretariat and Project Manager Julie Ahern.

2.2. Evaluation Framework

The evaluation was guided by an evaluation framework that documented the evaluation's objectives and the issues to be explored in order to respond to these objectives. The first part of the evaluation framework detailed:

- § the Framework's vision, guiding principles and goal areas
- § the Framework's definition of flexible learning
- § the measures of success and areas of achievement for the Framework as agreed by FLAG in response to the Phase One evaluation of the Framework
- § the objectives for the Phase Two evaluation.

The second part of the Evaluation Framework took each of the four evaluation objectives and broke them down into a structured series of questions and identified the stakeholders who would be involved in the various consultative and data collection activities undertaken to answer these questions. The intent was that if answers could be obtained to the questions in the Evaluation Framework then the evaluation would be able to comprehensively address each of the evaluation objectives.

The full set of questions specified in the evaluation framework is shown in the following pages.

2.2.1. Questions for Objective 1: The take-up of flexible learning in VET since 1999, particularly the application of new technologies to VET products and services.

1. What was the level of uptake of flexible learning in Australia and each state/territory prior to the introduction of the Framework in 2000?
2. In general terms, what has been the uptake of flexible learning since 2000?
3. What is the current level of uptake of flexible learning in Australia and each state/territory with regard to ...
 - a) Learners
 - § Are learners offered choice in what, where and when they learn? How they learn? How they are assessed? How they interact with their teachers? And their providers?
 - § Are learners who are offered choice taking up technology-based options?
 - § Is the rate of uptake increasing each year?
 - b) Teachers
 - § What are teachers' attitudes to flexible learning?
 - § How many teachers are equipped to offer flexibility? (i.e. in terms of access to appropriate technology, skills to use learning technologies, having professional development linked to Framework projects, access to flexible learning resources)
 - § How many teachers are actually offering flexibility? (e.g. in use of flexible learning resources, in use of new learning technologies, in what/where/when learners learn, in communication with learners, in assessment) What are the characteristics of these teachers?
 - § Has flexible learning encouraged teachers to be more innovative and entrepreneurial than otherwise would be expected?
 - c) Resources
 - § What technologies are being exploited for delivery of VET products and services? How are these being exploited and what are the benefits?
 - § What flexible learning resources are currently available to teachers for use? (e.g. How many Flexible Learning Toolboxes? What has been developed by states/territories and private providers? What other flexible learning resources have been developed?)
 - § How many of these resources are currently being used anywhere in Australia? (i.e. By how many teachers ... providers ... learners?)
 - d) Provider Managers
 - § How many CEOs, Directors, faculty heads, managers in VET providers are committed to flexible learning?
 - § What are their attitudes to flexible learning?
 - § How many have been involved in and/or participated in flexible learning professional development? What sort?
 - § How many have supported flexible learning professional development in their organisations? What sort?
 - e) RTOs Organisational Capability
 - § How many RTOs have organisational structures that support flexible learning? (e.g. dedicated flexible learning units, management positions)
 - § How many RTOs have technological structures that support flexible learning? (e.g. learning systems, teacher and learner access to computers)
 - § How many RTOs provide professional development in flexible learning for their staff?
 - § Has flexible learning moved into mainstream delivery?
 - f) Industry

- § Are employers committed to flexible learning? If so, how many? What proportion of employers are using electronic learning arrangements? And what are their characteristics?
- § How many ITABS are committed to flexible learning? Has flexible learning encouraged partnerships between industry and VET?
- § What have been the processes for engaging industry? How have these changed since 1999? How successful have they been?

2.2.2. Questions for Objective 2: The impact of the Framework as a national strategy.

4. What were the barriers to flexible learning in 1999? (e.g. technological infrastructure, professional development, lack of resources, funding models, standards, attitudes, communication, leadership, industrial relations, benchmarking data, jurisdictional factors)
 - a) Has the Framework acted to overcome/minimize the impact of these factors?
 - b) How has it done this and to what degree has this been successful?
 - c) Has the Framework changed actions/behaviours/attitudes? (e.g. at state/territory level? of providers?) What actions? What impact? (e.g. flexible practices, funding)
 - d) Has the Framework's emphasis on the supply side limited potential impact?
 - e) How has the environment in which the Framework operates changed since 1999? What impact has this had on the Framework?
5. How has the Framework delivered benefits? *Consider the following points*
 - a) Collaboration (at individual, organizational and state/territory level)? e.g. evidence of closer relationships, partnerships
 - b) Leverage (of knowledge, of funding, of the best minds in the country)?
 - c) Efficiency of investment (e.g. single national approach vs eight state/territory agencies, minimise duplication)?
 - d) Uniformity and quality control (e.g. technology standards, flexible learning resources, interoperability)?
 - e) Equity of opportunity (e.g. all states share in outputs)
 - f) Knowledge management (e.g. harnessing and disseminating information to practitioners, managers, policy makers)?
 - g) Promotion, communication and advocacy (e.g. changing mindsets)?
6. What impact has the Framework had on macro outcomes?
 - a) How well known is the Framework?
 - b) Has the Framework been able to provide real input to national and state decisions on VET, or that influence VET (e.g. policy decisions, regulatory changes)?
 - § What input? On what issues?
 - § Has this input been acted upon? What was the outcome?
 - § Has the Framework complemented national VET strategies? (e.g. *A Bridge to the Future 1998-2003, Shaping Our Future 2004-2010*)
 - § What has been the level of spending by states/territories and RTOs on flexible learning outside Framework activities?
 - c) What new knowledge has been created through the Framework?
 - § What has been created? How did this occur?
 - § How has it been used to effect?
 - § Has the Framework limited innovation by pre-empting what constitutes innovation?
 - d) Is Australia world-class in flexible learning?
 - § Do other countries learn from Australia? Do people visit Australia to learn?
 - § Is Australia able to compete at an international level?
 - § If so, how has the Framework contributed to this?
7. How has sustainability been built into the Framework?
 - a) Has the 'certainty' of a 5-year strategy influenced actions/thinking? If so, how?

2.2.3. Questions for Objective 3: Efficiency, effectiveness and management of the Framework 2002-2003.

8. Has the overall Framework been managed effectively and efficiently?
 - a) What was the rationale for the Framework structure in 2002-2003?

- § What were the assumptions driving the introduction of the Program structure in 2003? Were these validated at the time? Are they still valid?
- § Have synergies between projects been leveraged more successfully under the Program structure?
- b) Has national management of the Framework responded to the findings of the Phase One evaluation? How effective has this response been?
- c) What level of resources has been applied to manage the Framework?
 - § Has management of the overall Framework become more efficient over time?
 - § Has management of the Framework at the state/territory level become more efficient over time?
- 9. Have Programs and projects undertaken in 2002-2003 been delivered efficiently?
 - a) What was the rationale for the allocation of funds to projects in 2002 and 2003?
 - § Has the funding emphasis shifted over time? If so, how and on what basis?
 - b) What level of resources has been applied to manage Programs and projects?
 - § Have these been applied efficiently?
- 10. Have Programs and projects undertaken in 2002-2003 delivered value for money?
 - a) Were Program and project objectives clearly consistent with the Framework's goals?
 - b) Did the Programs and projects achieve their objectives?
 - § What has been the impact of these projects?
 - § What evidence of impact exists? (e.g. Is there quantitative evidence, qualitative examples, case studies, perceptions of impact)
 - § Do they demonstrate progress toward achievement of the Framework's goals? (e.g. in terms of uptake of flexible learning or facilitating Framework processes)
 - § Has the impact been shared across states/territories and the VET sector?
 - c) What factors have made projects more or less successful? (e.g. funding level, project management, project communication, leverage of projects)
 - d) How have Programs and projects worked together as a coherent strategy to enable achievement of the Framework's goals?
 - e) What has been learned from these projects?
 - § How has this been communicated to the VET sector, practitioners and policy makers?
 - § How has this influenced decisions to date?
 - § Have these lessons informed activities in states and territories? And vice versa?

2.2.4. Questions for Objective 4: A case for or against further national investment in flexible learning beyond 2004.

- 11. What are the main factors that will impact on the future uptake of flexible learning in VET?
- 12. What would be the implications of having no collaborative national investment in flexible learning beyond 2004?
 - a) What would happen? What would not happen?
 - b) Would states/territories and providers increase funding to flexible learning and activities previously covered by the Framework? If so, in what areas?
 - c) To what extent would the investment by the Framework to date be under-realised/under-utilised without further investment (e.g. impact on current champions, succession planning, maintenance of flexible learning resources, national access to 'best and brightest', unfinished policy and regulatory initiatives)?
- 13. If there were to be further collaborative national investment beyond 2004, where should it go and how should it be managed?
 - a) Where should it be directed? (i.e. What mix of technological infrastructure, people, resources, policy?)
 - b) What would be must do? Nice to do? Are there minimum spending levels?
 - c) What should be the balance between supply and demand influences on allocation of funds?
 - d) What support is there for collaborative activities?
 - e) Are there alternative models for funding flexible learning initiatives and/or collaboration?
 - f) What timeframe should such investment cover? What returns would be expected?
 - g) At what point does the need for national investment stop? What will it take?

2.3. Consultation schedule

I & J Management Services held consultations for the evaluation in all states and territories during February/March 2004.

Dates	State/Territory
4-5 February	Australian Capital Territory
10-12 February	Northern Territory
16-17 February	Queensland
26-27 February	Tasmania
27 February, 1-3 March	Victoria
2-3 March	South Australia
4-5 March	Western Australia
8-10 March	New South Wales

In addition to the workshops and interviews conducted in each capital city, teleconferences were held to allow regional stakeholders to participate in the evaluation and visits were made to Alice Springs, Newcastle and Wodonga.

Consultations included representatives from the following stakeholder groups:

- § FLAG members
- § Program Directors and Leaders
- § Framework Project Managers
- § Participants in Framework projects (e.g. Flexible Learning Leaders, LearnScope participants, Toolbox developers)
- § FLAG Secretariat
- § State training authorities
- § Education and training agencies
- § Registered training organisations (including directors, managers, flexible learning personnel, teachers and trainers)
- § ACE providers
- § Industry Training Advisory Boards
- § Industry Skills Councils
- § Employers.

2.4. Stakeholders consulted

Hundreds of people from many organisations around Australia contributed directly to the evaluation of the Framework through their participation in interviews and workshops conducted as part of the consultation schedule. These included personnel from each of the stakeholder groups referenced in Section 2.3 and are listed below. Hundreds more contributed indirectly to the Phase Two evaluation through participation in evaluations of 2002 and 2003 Framework projects.

ACE Training Network

Katrina Sommers

ACPET - Queensland

Michael Hall

ACPET - Victoria

Helen Jones

Adelaide Institute of TAFE

Peter Allen
Rita Bennink
Wing-Yin Chan Lee
Dan Nicholas
Doug Purcell

Adult Learning Australia

Rita Bennink

ALPA

Henry Harper

Ambulance Service NSW

Alan Morrison

Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES)

Josie Rose

AngusClyne Pty Ltd

Leonie Clyne

**Australian National Training Authority
(ANTA)**

Sarojini Choy
Lesley Johnson
Paula Johnston
Andre Lewis

Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE

Julie Woodlock

Batchelor TAFE

Patrick Anderson
Jan Schmitzer

Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE

Jan Kelly
Maree Morgan
Sandra Paschkow

Box Hill Institute of TAFE

Anne Jones
Leonie Pope
John Weatherley

Brisbane North Institute of TAFE

Sandra Lawrence

**Business Retail and Information
Technology Training Advisory Council**

Melanie Burke
Craig O'Halloran
Graeme Sawyer

BusinessSA

Paul Eblen
Dianne Hart
Leanne Isaacson
Heidi Jones
Helen Mason
Jenny Parahakis
Gary Rayner
Tim Ridgway
Santi Ruis
Cos Russo
Toni Salvemini
Colin Shearing
Annette Turner Duggan

Canberra Institute of Technology

Janice Anderson
Cathy Baxter
Anne Cameron
Jenny Dodd
Peter Le Cornu
Leonard Lowe
Claude Pogliani
John Smith
Kerry Trabinger
Trixie van Leeuwen
Janice Wain

**Central Australian Remote Health
Development Services (CARHDS)**

Tanya Wooley

Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE

Brad Beach

Charles Darwin University

Faye Acklin
Ruth Quinn
Geoff Sloan

Chisholm Institute of TAFE

Ken Gooding

**Department of Education, Science and
Technology**

Murray Judd

Community Programs Association

Linda Harrison

**Community Services and Health Industry
Training Board**

Brian Spencer

Cooloola Sunshine Institute of TAFE

Frances Howes

**Corangamite District Adult Education
Group Inc.**

Merv Edmunds

Creative Business Consultant

Rosemary Carson

Department of Defence

John Stanfield

Department of Education - Tasmania

Mick Chalmers
Jennifer Dunbabin
Ian Whitehouse

**Department of Education and Training –
New South Wales: Professional
Development Network**

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3. DEFINITIONS AND GLOSSARY

One of the distinguishing features of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework has been that it has existed and functioned in an environment where the term ‘flexible learning’ has not been consistently defined or understood by the people guiding, implementing and benefiting from it. The language of flexible learning has been changing since the 1990s and is continuing to evolve.

This section of the report presents some definitions of flexible learning. A more complete discussion on the many definitions of flexible learning is provided in Section 5 of the evaluation report *Part A – Gathering Momentum*.

3.1. Definitions of flexible learning

The following definitions are taken from one of the Framework’s ‘Quick Guide Series’ which in 2003 attempted to define some of the key terms used in e-learning.¹

e-learning

“e-learning is a broader concept [than online learning], encompassing a wide set of applications and processes which use all available electronic media to deliver vocational education and training more flexibly. The term “e-learning” is now used in the Framework to capture the general intent to support a broad range of electronic media (Internet, intranets, extranets, satellite broadcast, audio/video tape, interactive TV and CD-ROM) to make vocational learning more flexible for clients.” (ANTA, 2003)

Flexible learning

“Flexible learning expands choice on what, when, where and how people learn. It supports different styles of learning, including e-learning. Flexibility means anticipating, and responding to, the ever-changing needs and expectations of VET clients - enterprises learners and communities.” (ANTA, 2003)

Online learning

As a technical term, online learning encompasses a range of technologies such as the world-wide-web, email, chat, newsgroups, and text, audio and video conferencing delivered over computer networks (local area networks, intranets or the public Internet) to deliver education and training, both remotely and in the classroom. Web-based systems range from simple publicly accessible webpages to complex online delivery platforms which manage student access to content, group interaction, online assessment and ancillary functions such as enrolments and student records.

The use of the term ‘online learning’ to describe a mode of education is becoming less common with the recognition that ‘the push for ‘pure’ online learning has largely been replaced by a recognition of the benefits of hybrid or mixed modes, combining online features with face to face interaction in various ways.’ (KPMG, 2002)

Flexible, online and e-learning

In one sense there is a continuum between these terms, online is a subset of e-learning and e-learning is a subset of flexible learning. However there is also a distinction between technology and approach. Online and e-learning are about specific technologies. Flexible learning is a philosophy and an approach, of which the use of technology is one, albeit very important, component.

‘Learning’ vs ‘delivery’

These terms are often used almost interchangeably (as in flexible delivery or flexible learning). Delivery refers to the actual process of the interaction between a student and the teacher or a teaching resource. Learning is used to describe a broader context which also encompasses areas such as organisational policy, student support, and administrative systems. Delivery is often used

¹ Definition of key terms used in e-learning. Australian Flexible Learning Framework Quick Guides series. Version 1.00, Backroad Connections Pty Ltd 2003 for the Australian National Training Authority.

when discussing the provision of education and training from the perspective of the training provider. Learning is more commonly used when discussing the experience of the learner or student. Over the last few years there has also been a shift from talking about delivery to learning reflecting a move from an instrumental approach – training as something that teachers do to students – to a constructivist approach – learning is something that students do assisted by the education and training system.

3.2. Glossary

The evaluation uses the following acronyms.

Acronym	Full name
ACE	Adult and Community Education
ACPET	Australian Council for Private Education and Training
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AICTEC	Australian Information and Communication Technology in Education Committee
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
AQTF	Australian Quality Training Framework
AUD	Australian dollars
CEO	chief executive officer
DEST	Department of Education Science and Technology
EdNA	Educational Network Australia
EWG	Evaluation Working Group
FLAG	Flexible Learning Advisory Group
HR	human resources
ICT	information and communications technology
IR	industrial relations
IT	information technology
ITAB	Industry Training Advisory Board
KPI	key performance indicator
NOIE	National Office for the Information Economy
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
OHS	occupational health and safety
OTEN	NSW Open Training and Education Network
OTTE	Victorian Office of Training and Tertiary Education
PD	professional development
RTO	registered training organisation
SA	South Australia
SME	small to medium enterprise
STA	state training authority
TAFE	technical and further education
TAFE VC	TAFE Virtual Campus
VET	vocational education and training
WA	Western Australia

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5. PHASE ONE EVALUATION

The following summary of the Phase One evaluation of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework 2000-2001 conducted by KPMG Consulting Australia and LifeLong Learning Associates is taken from the Framework's Strategy 2002 Progress Report to the ANTA CEOs in September 2002.

Summary of the Evaluation of the AFL Framework 2000-2001

KPMG Consulting Australia and LifeLong Learning Associates

Key achievements 2000-2001

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.

Key barriers to success 2000-2001

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:

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). It is recommended these be dropped in their present form for 2003 – 2004.
3. Thirdly, returns on the investment are inhibited by a lack of systematic effort 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.

Management of the Framework 2000-2001

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. Refinements are also required in the project design and management processes to improve quality assurance.

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 capacity for cutting edge exploration.

The strategic focus for the remainder of the Framework should incorporate:

1. 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.
2. An emphasis, across all Framework projects, on integrating flexible learning approaches, especially technology-based approaches, into the mainstream of VET delivery and business practices.
3. 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.
4. Development of closer relationships with industry stakeholders in the Framework.
5. A tightly focused, strategy-driven research program which enables FLAG to stay 'ahead of the game' and strengthens its advocacy role.
6. 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.
7. Changes to the management strategy and project design and management processes to enable and support this strategic focus.
8. Preparation of transition strategies for 2005 and beyond.

Funding the Framework 2003-2004

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.

Relative proportions that might be allocated in 2003 and 2004 to each Goal area:

- § preserve centrality of professional development by allocating 35-40% of total funds to Goal 1
- § relative decline for Goal 2 in 2003 to accommodate pause in new Toolboxes, with renewal in 2004
- § funding for new Goal 3 to be set by priorities at the time
- § substantial investment in new Goal 4 in 2003, followed by relative decline in 2004
- § repair of chronic under-funding of program management by allocating 5-10% of the budget to support the new management strategy
- § project funding to include costs of developing robust project design, communications and promotions strategy, and mechanisms for maintaining and updating products.

Transition to 2005 and beyond

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.

Summary of Recommendations for Goals 2003-2004

Retain and refine present Goals 1 and 3; drop Goals 2, 4, 5 in their present form; create two new Goals for research and leverage through communications and advocacy.

New Goal 1: 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.

Priorities and strategies for 2003-2004 to include:

- § maintenance of at least present levels of funding for professional development
- § differentiating priority groups for professional development
- § support for projects exploring how workload and performance management can support and promote flexible learning.

New Goal 2: To provide accessible, usable resources to support teaching, learning and professional development related to flexible learning in the VET sector.

Priorities and strategies for 2003-2004 to include:

- § suspension of new Toolbox development for 12 months to allow time to incorporate the lessons learned from previous rounds
- § evaluation and rationalisation of all relevant Framework websites and associated products to maximise accessibility and effectiveness
- § determination of whether the remaining former Goal 3 projects should continue.
- § assessment of how Framework resources can be maintained and updated.

New Goal 3: To commission targeted research to inform the operations and future development of the Framework.

Priorities and strategies for 2003-2004 to include:

- § a small number of tightly focused, strategy-driven projects, in priorities including telecommunications and technology infrastructure; VET policy which inhibits mainstreaming of flexible learning; industry needs for technology-enabled learning; legal and regulatory barriers to take-up of flexible learning
- § membership of the Goal Steering Committee to include stakeholder interests and expertise in research methods
- § rigorous design process prior to tender.

New Goal 4: 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.

Priorities for 2003 are to develop systematic strategies for:

- § FLAG’s advocacy roles inside and outside the VET system
- § creating communications and promotions strategies, differentiated by client groups
- § incorporating a communications and promotions plan as a required pre-requisite to winning each 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)

Management strategy 2002-2004

A new management strategy is recommended to support the above, as per the diagram below. Key features include:

- § FLAG renews focus on overall strategy and emphasis on communications and advocacy

- § 4 Goal steering committees, each chaired by a FLAG member with direct management responsibility for the cluster of projects
- § smaller number of FLAG members on each steering committee
- § formal roles of 'project sponsor' and 'managing agent' dropped
- § networked Secretariat to support new structure, comprising small central Secretariat supporting Chairs of FLAG and the Working Group; four full-time Goal Program Managers located with the Steering Committee Chair; and locally-based Secretariat support to FLAG members
- § emphasis on detailed project design brief prior to tender for every project.