

Australian *Flexible Learning* Framework

Supporting Flexible Learning Opportunities

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AUD\$15 million strategy supports e-learning in VET in 2005

The Australian Government and all States and Territories have confirmed their collective support for a 12 month AUD\$15 million strategy to ensure that e-learning becomes a long term feature of Australia's vocational education and training (VET) system in 2005.

The strategy will provide the nation's public, private and community training providers with greater access to cost-effective e-learning products and resources to support the development and delivery of training that is innovative, widely accessible and tailored to meet a broad range of learning needs.

Combined Governments currently invest close to AUD\$4 billion each year in Australia's rapidly expanding VET system. Individuals are also increasingly investing in developing and expanding their personal and professional skills.

E-learning is now confirmed as a key feature of the VET system's 2005 Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework). As a new strategy, the 2005 Framework will build on the work of the 2000-2004 Framework, but will also strike out in some exciting new directions.

These include meeting the training needs of industry, communities and Indigenous learners. Sustainability will also be a strong area of focus, with States and Territories embedding e-learning within their local jurisdictions through local Coordination Officers.

During its five years, the 2000-2004 Framework provided direct funding and support to more than 20,000 VET practitioners and produced approximately 500 e-learning tools and more than 18,000 resources. These will continue to be available to the VET system.

Chair of the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG), which provides strategic advice and direction to the Framework, Mr Jim Davidson, confirmed the goal of the 2005 Framework is to create "a flexible VET system which meets diverse client needs and helps them succeed in a global environment". Its formal purpose is to "increase the sustainable uptake of quality e-learning within in Australia's VET system".

"The 2005 Framework explicitly supports the National Strategy for VET 2004-2010, 'Shaping our Future' and Ministerial priorities for mainstreaming ICT into all facets of education and training, including VET," Mr Davidson said. "The 2005 Framework will be a strong outcomes-focused national strategy that is based on a rigorous approach to benchmarking, evaluation, and accountability."

Mr Davidson stressed that while the 2005 Framework is a new strategy with new areas of focus, it will also build on the most successful activities of the 2000-2004 Framework by:

- increasing the number of people skilled in e-learning
- building national and international knowledge networks to reduce research and development costs and accelerate innovation
- facilitating national collaboration in the discovery, application and diffusion of technologies which support e-learning
- supporting innovative and entrepreneurial e-learning activities which introduce new or improved e-learning products or processes
- promoting the sharing and dissemination of knowledge between individuals, industry, communities, training providers and State and Territory VET systems.

The 2000-2004 Framework was administered by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA). From July 2005 the functions of ANTA will be transferred to the Australian Government's Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).

"DEST has advised that 12 month contracts will be put in place for 2005 Framework activities. Further commitment beyond 2005 for national collaboration for a continued national strategy such as the Framework rests with Ministers and has not yet been made," Mr Davidson said.

Key features of the 2005 Framework include:

1. The introduction of several new client engagement Projects including Industry Engagement, Indigenous Engagement and E-learning Creative Community Partnerships.
2. Continued professional development funding and support through New Practices and LearnScope (Flexible Learning Leaders is now incorporated into LearnScope). Funding updates for New Practices (including applications and guidelines) and LearnScope will be promoted at the <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/newsandevents> website.
3. Strengthened investment in Flexible Learning Toolboxes, including the launch of new series of customisable e-learning content which will be developed and packaged according to international standards, for availability through an enhanced Toolbox repository of learning objects.

A summary of the 2005 Framework Programs and Projects is outlined below:

Program: Client Engagement aims to strengthen the role of industry, individuals and communities in shaping VET provision to meet their needs. It encompasses three Projects (listed below).	
Project	Description
Industry Engagement	This Project aims to increase industry use of e-learning in nationally recognised workplace learning. The Project will develop sector-specific strategies given the different e-learning needs of industry sectors and enterprises. These will be developed in close consultation with industry sectors and Skills Councils.
Indigenous Engagement	This Project will consolidate existing research and scope the current level of e-learning activity within the Indigenous sector through consultation with Indigenous organisations such as the Australian Indigenous Training Advisory Council

	<p>(AITAC) and through an environmental scan of existing FLAG projects. The specific Project objective is to strengthen the role of Indigenous people and communities in shaping VET provision in very remote, remote, provincial and urban contexts. The Project contains three sub projects: links to employment; capacity building through e-learning; and communication. The Project will consider proposals that build on lessons learned and that are harmonised with the six priorities identified in Partners in a Learning Culture National Strategy and Blueprint for Implementation 2000-2005.</p>
<p>E-learning Creative Community Partnerships</p>	<p>This Project aims to create sustainable demand for, and use of, e-learning in communities, to foster both learning in the communities, and through learning, economic and regional development for the communities themselves. It provides an exciting and innovative platform to enhance and grow community capacity building through effective skills development and to reach under-represented and disadvantaged client groups.</p>
<p>Program 2: Resources and Innovation will take an integrated approach to supporting sustainable e-learning uptake by bringing together a blend of innovative ideas, educational values, client focus and technical standards. It encompasses four Project areas (listed below).</p>	
<p>New Practices in Flexible Learning</p>	<p>This Program's aim is to fund innovative, practical and sustainable approaches to flexible learning in workplaces, communities and training organisations. It is about people and their capacity to turn knowledge into ideas and ideas into actions.</p>
<p>Quality E-learning Resources</p>	<p>This Project will extend recent groundbreaking work in interoperable learning objects to improve the flexibility of e-learning products for VET Training Packages. A new series of customisable e-learning content will be developed and packaged according to international standards, for availability through an enhanced Toolbox repository of learning objects.</p>
<p>E-learning for Target Learner Groups</p>	<p>This Project will focus on e-learning for two target groups: learners with disabilities; and young people in the 15 – 19 age group (including VET in Schools, disengaged youth and school-based apprenticeships).</p>
<p>Learning Object Repository (LOR) Network</p>	<p>This Project will build the capacity of the Australian VET system to share teaching and learning resources that support flexible delivery through the establishment and embedding of agreed principles in the design and development of resources and resource repositories.</p>
<p>Program 3: Capability Building is underpinned by processes which will sustain the changing patterns for workforce development and organisational development. It is based on the underlying principles for the integration of working, learning and knowing.</p>	
<p>LearnScope</p>	<p>This Project focuses on professional development to enhance the professional skills that underpin e-learning and e-business. LearnScope is influenced by recent thinking about the skills development of VET professionals in the 'knowledge era' and will emphasise both individual and team responsibilities to model sustainable professional learning practices in their own learning through a range of strategies.</p>

Australian Flexible Learning Networks	<p>This Project will advance the VET system in establishing sustainable professional learning practices within an environment of online networking, knowledge sharing and knowledge management. It will initiate and sustain a series of 'online' environments which enable learning to take place, facilitating new connections between VET staff, industry, researchers, professional groups, enterprises and communities for the exchange of knowledge about e-learning and its applications within the VET system.</p>
VET E-learning International	<p>This Project will showcase Australian VET leadership and expertise in e-learning with activities targeting strategic international education and training opportunities. It will support the internationalisation of Australian VET by highlighting the capability and leading edge initiatives of the Australian VET system to assist the downstream marketing of VET products and services by others.</p>
Knowledge Sharing Services	<p>This Project will facilitate access to knowledge about e-learning in VET. This includes access to Framework developed resources, facilitated discussions and presentations, and people and networks. The Project will maintain the Knowledge Tree as an electronic journal opportunity for sharing knowledge.</p>
<p>Program 4: VET System Support will support the Framework's purpose to increase the sustainable uptake of quality e-learning in VET and its goal for a flexible VET system which meets diverse client needs and helps them succeed in a global environment by contributing to the improvement of policy, regulatory and system environments and VET business models, which affect the uptake of e-learning.</p>	
E-learning Benchmarking	<p>The purpose of this Project is to provide data that will assess the uptake, use and impact of e-learning in VET. Performance indicators, used to collect the data, may also be adapted and used by individual providers to establish organisational goals and benchmarks for e-learning.</p>
Research and Policy Advice	<p>This Project will provide a high quality and flexible research program that contributes to the achievement of the vision, goals and implementation of the National VET Strategy, 'Shaping our Future' and of the Framework. It will support carefully targeted and rigorous research which will provide timely and evidence-based research to inform FLAG and Framework activities. The Project will commission research projects on significant policy issues.</p>
Access to Broadband	<p>This Project will facilitate the establishment of a Virtual Private Network (VPN), which aims to link individual State and Territory networks to increase affordability, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of communications for the delivery and administration of training.</p>
National Communication	<p>The primary focus of this Project will be to generate strategically targeted market awareness of the enormous potential and benefits of flexible learning, including a strong focus on e-learning for 2005 to stimulate the widespread uptake within the VET system and its clients, including community, Indigenous and industry.</p>

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