



Evaluation Report November 2002



Prepared by

I & J MANAGEMENT SERVICES



A Professional development initiative within
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Training System 2000-2004*

Flexiblelearning.net.au

NET*Working 2002 Evaluation

This evaluation of NET*Working 2002 was conducted for the Australian National Training Authority by Ian Phillips of:

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NET*Working 2002 Evaluation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

See it. Do it. Share it. ... was the theme for NET*Working 2002 – an online activity-driven professional development event that over two weeks in August 2002 sought to encourage VET individuals and learning communities to share their knowledge and experiences and highlight advances in flexible learning through the use of online technologies. The event set out to:

- identify how flexible learning is meeting the needs of individuals, organisations and industry
- showcase latest developments in learning technologies
- create new knowledge networks
- weave online into the fabric of learning
- stimulate creative thinking about the application of learning in the online environment
- increase the skills and knowledge of people involved in online learning.

This evaluation addresses the outcomes of NET*Working 2002 in three areas of interest:

- i) educational impact (i.e. Did NET*Working 2002 achieve its educational objectives?)
- ii) process (i.e. Was NET*Working 2002 efficiently planned and managed?)
- iii) participation (Did NET*Working 2002 achieve appropriately extensive and diverse participation and involvement from key stakeholder and equity groups).

Educational impact

NET*Working 2002 was a challenging, stimulating, varied and successful professional development event.

“This conference has helped me see beyond theory ... has added to my knowledge and stimulated further research ... has given me the chance to spread it to other teachers who would otherwise have no possibilities of gaining it ... and, above all, has given me the pleasure of sharing time, information and fun with colleagues all over the world.”
(NET*Working 2002 Participant)

With a myriad of activities on offer over the two weeks many participants who were actively engaged in the event responded to the organisers call and ... Saw it. Did it. Shared it. Through feature events and demonstration of flexible learning tools participants were exposed to new and old ideas, and saw how they might apply them in their educational environment. Through discussions, workshops and chat sessions participants had the opportunity to advance their level of thinking and experience. And through interest groups, instant messaging, the B-log and other formal and informal means they were able to share their experiences with enthusiasm and a sense of fun.

The diversity of the program meant that there was something for everyone, with nearly all of those who participated in the event achieving one or more of their educational objectives. 77% of respondents to an evaluation survey indicated that they had more ideas as a result of NET*Working 2002. 75% got to see how other organisations are using online technologies to support flexible learning, 75% said that they had integrated knowledge acquired from the discussions into their existing knowledge, and 70% accessed resources on innovative and leading edge practice.

“I am researching training and development opportunities for school staff. The conference has been a wealth of information and practical advice about how this can be achieved.”

A feature of the event was the way that people were able to find productive elearning experiences across the range of NET*Working activities. The fact that participants were able to extend their knowledge, resource-base, networks and confidence in so many different ways validates the efforts

made by the organisers to produce a rich and to some degree, an unbounded online learning environment. Conference highlights covered everything from Stephen Downes' Daily to Marc Prensky's digital natives, the Wisdom Tent, Teaching in the Twilight Zone, Toolboxes, virtual tours, email games and role plays. For others it was the fun in the B-log, sharing Cool Tools with colleagues, winning prizes or creating and being involved in special interest groups.

Process

NET*Working 2002 was well planned and managed. Building from a solid conceptual base developed through a consultative exercise late in 2001, the dedicated design, technical development, marketing and sponsorship teams and other event personnel combined to enable the learning objectives of NET*Working 2002 to take centre stage. Where there were concerns or criticisms of aspects of the project design and delivery these were usually isolated and dealt with directly. The technical performance of the event platform is of particular note, in that for many participants technology was not an issue and they were able to concentrate their time and energies on achieving their educational objectives.

Participation

NET*Working 2002 had over 2,600 registered participants, 22% higher than the 2,100 registered in NET*Working 2000. These were drawn predominantly from TAFE institutes (57%) with solid representation from industry, enterprise and government organisations (10%), state training authorities (8%) private training providers (8%) and universities (8%). NSW was well represented with good levels of registration from WA, Tasmania and the ACT. 2% of registrations were from overseas. As with past NET*Working conferences the ACE sector was underrepresented, and in 2002 only 14% of registrations came from Victoria.

Despite the encouraging level of total registrations, the level of active participation was significantly lower than this. 28% of registered participants did not log in to the NET*Working 2002 site, and a further 20% spent less than a total of 30 minutes online over the two weeks, generally logging on only once or twice and having a look around before leaving. The size of both these groups is disappointing given the effort to obtain registrations and the richness of the offerings for those who were active users.

Factors that constrained participants making the most of NET*Working 2002 included:

- not knowing that they were registered
- being initially overwhelmed by the volume of activities available on the site and the lack of a rigid program structure
- participants not allocating time to spend on NET*Working 2002, and having day-to-day work commitments limit participation in this professional development opportunity
- participants not planning their participation in advance and not identifying or missing out on relevant elearning activities
- some delays in distribution of login IDs and password details
- late distribution of the NET*Working 2002 Guide, CD and support material.

Some of these factors were outside the control of the NET*Working 2002 organisers, but are worth noting for future events. Some of these factors highlight specific aspects of the NET*Working 2002 design, which assumed that the primary audience was experienced elearning practitioners with a mature and disciplined approach to their (e)learning program. Clearly, engaging and sustaining active participation in an online event requires both organisers and participants (as elearning professionals) to take responsibility for optimising participation.

Conclusion

Active NET*Workers found the event to be a very rewarding professional development activity. Overall, participants rated it at 7 out of 10, with nearly 50% rating the event at 8 or above. 70% indicated that their NET*Working 2002 experience had made them more likely to participate in future online conference activities. This augurs well for the future, and allows NET*Working organisers to look forward with optimism.

This is not to say that everyone who actively participated in NET*Working 2002 enjoyed it or found it useful. For some it was overwhelming or not attuned to their learning needs or styles. Some were daunted by the open program structure that did not provide direct guidance to workshops on particular topics. A small number experienced local technical difficulties.

However, on balance the overall conclusion is that NET*Working 2002 was a successful event, having an educational impact in a fun and engaging way.

Consequently, the recommendations presented in Section 6.2 of this report are primarily focused on continuous and incremental improvement of NET*Working events and management processes. They identify lessons from the NET*Working 2002 experience that should be considered in future decision-making. The recommendations address issues related to:

- effective program design and support features
- effective program planning, project management and registration processes
- communication to participants in online events and their managers on the importance of planning for and committing time to participate to maximise educational benefits
- potential leverage of the investment in development of the NET*Working 2002 application
- marketing of future NET*Working 2002 events
- timelines for technical development and sponsorship activities
- the link between participation targets and decisions on budget allocation and program design.

Finally, it is worth noting that in an industry where innovation and excellence are highly prized, NET*Working 2002 was one of three Finalists for the 2002 Asia Pacific National ICT Awards - Education Award. Although it did not win, the fact that the event was chosen as a finalist was external validation of the quality of the event.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. NET*Working 2002

Since 1997 NET*Working conferences have been conducted to support the accelerated take-up of flexible learning by showcasing innovative projects and programs developed under *The Australian Flexible Learning Framework* (the AFL Framework). The conferences have been both physical (1997, 1999, 2001) and online (2000).

The overall aim of NET*Working 2002 was to provide a completely online event that over two weeks highlighted advances in flexible learning through the use of online technologies. It sought to enhance and extend the vocational education and training (VET) community established during previous NET*Working conferences and encourage other VET individuals and learning communities and industry to engage in activities and share their knowledge and experiences.

NET*Working 2002's objectives were to:

- identify how flexible learning is meeting the needs of individuals, organisations and industry
- showcase latest developments in learning technologies
- create new knowledge networks
- weave online into the fabric of learning
- stimulate creative thinking about the application of learning in the online environment
- increase the skills and knowledge of people involved in online learning.

NET*Working 2002 was targeted at workplace trainers, teachers, support staff, managers and policy makers in the VET sector, adult education, industry, schools and universities. It aimed to attract those already engaged in the online learning environment, while providing opportunities for inexperienced people to join in and network with more experienced participants.

The theme for NET*Working 2002 was ... See it. Do it. Share it.

As an activity-driven event NET*Working 2002 sought to provide participants with opportunities to engage in online workshops and discussions, learn how to..., network and debate, collect online resources and demonstrate resources and technologies, as well as read and hear about the latest advancements and peruse showcases of best practice. NET*Working 2002 set out to provide forums for special interest groups and opportunities for participants to have fun.

1.2. Evaluation

I & J Management Services was engaged to evaluate NET*Working 2002 and address the outcomes in three areas of interest:

1. Educational Impact – to determine whether NET*Working 2002 achieved its educational objectives. For example:
 - relevance of conference activities to teaching and learning issues currently faced by participants
 - presentation of innovative and leading edge practices
 - ability to translate conference learnings into improved work practices, resource design and management arrangements
 - support for collaboration and networking.
2. Process – to determine if NET*Working 2002 was efficiently planned and managed. For example:
 - marketing

- event organisation
 - technology, design
 - alignment/integration with other AFL Framework projects.
3. Participation – to determine whether NET*Working 2002 achieved appropriately extensive and diverse participation and involvement from key stakeholder and equity groups.

The primary focus of the evaluation was to assess the educational impact of NET*Working 2002.

The evaluation methodology (as outlined in Appendix A) comprised a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection activities including:

- pre- and post-event questionnaires available to all participants
- interviews with participants, presenters, mentors and sponsors
- discussions with the NET*Working 2002 Project Manager and other members of the development, technical, sponsorship, marketing, and administrative team
- analysis of registration data and event usage statistics.

Report Format

This evaluation report is presented in five sections that track (for the most part) chronologically through the planning, development and conduct of NET*Working 2002.

<i>Section 2</i>	Plan it, build it, sell it	... planning, design, development and promotion
<i>Section 3</i>	Join it	... registration and participation
<i>Section 4</i>	See it, do it, share it	... analysis of event features
<i>Section 5</i>	Like it? Love it?	... overall analysis of educational impact
<i>Section 6</i>	Do it again?	... conclusions and recommendations.

This means that although assessment of the educational impact of NET*Working 2002 was a prime focus of the evaluation, this is not fully addressed until Sections 4 and 5. This approach has been adopted to enable the reader to work through and understand what led to the educational outcomes observed and consequently the recommendations for the future conduct of online NET*Working events.

2. PLAN IT, BUILD IT, SELL IT

2.1. Project Management

NET*Working 2002 was managed through a network of small expert teams and individuals with specialist skills or roles. The core project team of Robby Weatherley, David Sanders and Connie Salat from the Professional Development Network of TAFE Educational Services, NSW Department of Education and Training were responsible for overall project management, design and administration.

They were also the focal point for coordination of the teams undertaking other major event activities:

- technical coordination – Hunter Institute of TAFE
- marketing – Jacoby & Reis Consulting and Caroline Thurlow Communications
- sponsorship – Events R Us
- application development – Netspot.

Each of these teams (whose roles are assessed later in Section 2 of the report) was appointed for their particular level of expertise and experience, ensuring that overall there was a very high calibre pool of resources managing the event.

In addition to the main project teams there were also a number of other individuals who were entrusted with undertaking specific activities in the planning, development and delivery of NET*Working 2002 (see Appendix B).

The overall team was geographically dispersed around the country, and collectively was almost certainly more qualified and capable than that which could have been assembled within any individual VET organisation. This approach to project management ensured access to high quality people with specific expertise and broadened the range of input available to event organisers.

2.2. Planning

Many of the outcomes of NET*Working 2002 can be traced back to a Planning and Design Workshop held at Mascot in Sydney on 8 November 2001.

This workshop was attended by members of the NET*Working 2002 Steering Committee, the NET*Working 2002 project manager, members of past NET*Working project management and development teams and other VET personnel. Participants at the workshop were encouraged to bring their expertise and experience in different parts of the VET sector and contribute ideas and suggestions for the conference design. The workshop summarised the NET*Working 2000 market research and evaluation reports and discussed in summary and detailed level issues related to:

- target audiences and numbers
- a conference theme
- technological advancements
- sponsorship and conference pricing
- events and activities
- participant support.

By comprehensively canvassing the role of NET*Working conferences, the different motivations for participating, potential learning experiences and outcomes that might be achieved the workshop established a solid foundation for NET*Working 2002 and led to the development of the objectives documented in Section 1.1. of this report. The workshop outcomes guided the design of NET*Working 2002 and proved to be an effective reference point for future decisions of the Steering

Committee and project team. Clearly an activity of this type 10-12 months in advance of the conference was a critical component in the overall planning and management of NET*Working 2002.

Two outcomes from this workshop were especially significant in the planning, design and delivery of NET*Working 2002. The first was a desire for the event to have an educational focus as an effective professional development activity. NET*Working 2002 would showcase technology and AFL Framework projects and provide opportunities for networking within the context of an online teaching and learning experience.

The second was that if a national NET*Working conference tried to be all things to all people across the Australian VET sector it would diminish the value that could be obtained if the event was focused on a particular target audience. It was thought that NET*Working 2002 should focus on supporting more experienced VET practitioners. First time or base level participants would not be excluded or discouraged from participating but the design of the event would be skewed toward those who were 'already on the way' in flexible learning.

It is important to be conscious of these two focal points when assessing the overall impact of NET*Working 2002.

2.3. Design

The planning workshop sought to build on the experience of previous NET*Working events and in particular the lessons from the 2000 online conference. Some of the issues identified included:

- the value of a keynote speaker program that gave participants the opportunity to engage with speakers
- the need to have a variety of activities, papers, forums and debates
- technological problems, both on the site and at the participants' workplaces
- lack of time for participants to get involved and peer pressure (i.e. where participation online was not seen as 'real' work)
- lack of awareness of mentoring support
- registration problems
- the need to provide access to the site over a longer timeframe.

In response to these and other issues, NET*Working 2002 was designed as an activity-driven rather than paper-driven event targeted at more experienced online practitioners. The technological design assumed that the majority of participants would have a certain level of skills and access to a certain level of technology. It aimed for presenters and participants to be able to log on to the site from anywhere around the world and participate at any time 24 hours a day. It sought to maximise access for people logging on behind an IT firewall at work or from home. The site design also reflected an assumption that while the formal educational aspect of NET*Working was paramount, people also wanted a mix of informal learning and fun social experiences to maintain motivation and stimulate participation. Table 1 outlines the main features of the final NET*Working 2002 design.

Table 1: NET*Working 2002 Design

Activity	Features
<i>Feature events</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key people presenting key activities with opportunities for participant interaction.
<i>Workshops/discussions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Activity-driven workshops which give participants the opportunity to engage in experiential learning through, for example, conducting a class, role playing online, brainstorming online, building a learning object, taking a journey or using a Toolbox. ▪ Workshops and presentations showcasing latest research and developments in online learning. ▪ Facilitated discussions on relevant and contentious issues for general participation or special interest groups.
<i>Exhibition Hall</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An area where sponsors could showcase their products and/or link to their own Internet sites.
<i>Cool Tools</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstration workshops using new and emerging technologies.
<i>Fun area</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The B-log, an informal area for socialising and having fun.
<i>General information</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Information about the event, what's on, daily updates and highlights.
<i>Help</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pre-conference guide and CD ▪ Online mentors ▪ Technical support ▪ Presenter support.

The online event software also included a number of innovative features designed to facilitate individual management of time and participation and communication of information between participants and across the event. These included:

- a **personal profile** that enabled sharing of contact information with other participants, with options to maximise privacy
- **activity registration** where limits on participation were applied to allow for rich interactivity
- a **personal schedule** of events with email reminders to allow participants to plan ahead
- a **personal satchel** for people to select and store favourite papers, links, people, descriptions and discussion areas
- **presenter publishing** that gave presenters a high level of control over their workshop content and activities
- **instant messaging** that allowed participants to see who else was online and contact them
- **daily polls** with questions posted every two to three days and respondents able to review and discuss the emerging results
- a **daily home page message** that allowed organizers to change the headline information on the home page each day
- **video and audio streaming** through Internet Broadcasters that increased the chance of successful downloads by providing 'behind firewall' streaming options.

The effectiveness of the overall design strategy in enabling participants to see it, do it, share it and meet the event's educational objectives is discussed in Section 4 of the report.

Logo

The inspiration for the bee and the honeycomb feature in the NET*Working 2002 logo came from the 'buzzwords' used by the project team in planning for the event: fun, active, learning, sharing, doing and lively. The honeycomb reflects the framework constructed by busy bees and their sharing and networking capacity. Whether or not this link was understood by participants, the bee theme was central to some of the fun elements that people enjoyed about the event (e.g. the Drone Zone, B-a-winner, B-stings).

“I liked the bee following the cursor round the screen.”

The bright orange and green colour scheme was intended to reflect the fun and excitement of the event. It met with a mixed response, from those who loved it to those who did not.

2.4. Technical Coordination

The most important thing to say about the technical outcomes of NET*Working 2002 is that there was not much to say. The application did what it was required to do, was operational for 99.9% of the event (total system downtime over 12 days was approximately 15 minutes), and allowed participants to get on with their NET*Working experience.

The technical coordination team comprised David Hanrahan and David McDonald of the Hunter Institute of TAFE in NSW. They were responsible for development of the technical specifications, vendor selection, vendor management and liaison and provision of technical advice to the NET*Working 2002 Steering Committee and project team. Netspot, in Adelaide, was the successful vendor and provided both the event application and online technical support.

Technical specifications

NET*Working 2002 had a number of technical components. The major one was the event platform developed by Netspot.

The technical team were satisfied that Netspot delivered the conceptual application detailed within the technical specification. The only inclusion that was not provided was the meta-tagged resource upload/download facility, which although the database was delivered, would have allowed users to collaborate on uploaded objects. The decision not to proceed with this component was made in conjunction with the project management team to ensure core delivery requirements were met in line with specified timelines.

A feature of the flexibility involved in the event solution and the effectiveness of the relationship between Netspot and the NET*Working team was the way in which concepts that had not been fully considered in the initial specifications were able to be developed and implemented to enhance participants' experience. The online conference satchel (building on the common online 'shopping cart' idea) and interest groups (stemming from a desire to encourage communities of practice) are examples of this approach that proved to be popular features of NET*Working 2002.

Another outcome that contributed to the smooth technical operation of the event was the selection of Netspot to provide both the technical application and support. By concentrating these activities in a single provider meant that participants had access to technical support from the company that built the site, and therefore fully understood its capability and operations. This also streamlined communication between the project team and suppliers.

NET*Working 2002 also had a flat site at www.flexiblelearning.net.au/nw2002 which provided basic event information to support registration and marketing activities in the months leading up to the event. It included background details on the event's objectives which over time were supplemented by monthly newsletters and profiles of presenters of feature events as these and the range of NET*Working 2002 activities were confirmed.

Performance against plan

The technical milestones set in the initial project plan were met with regard to the gathering of requirements, development of a tender and vendor selection. The technical requirements for NET*Working 2002 were developed by the technical team in conjunction with the project management team in late 2001. This process defined the intended user experience and identified the

required site content and functionality. The technical submission was issued in January 2002 giving potential vendors two weeks in which to respond before the evaluation process was undertaken and completed by mid-February.

There was some variation in timelines prior to the testing phase but these were agreed between the team and vendor and enabled application testing to be completed within scope prior to the commencement of the event in August 2002.

Although the ultimate solution ran essentially to plan and was satisfactory, it is considered that the process would have been enhanced if there had been more time available to undertake activities in the early phases of the project. For example, it is understood that some potential vendors self-selected themselves out of tendering due to the short turnaround timeframes involved in the tender process. A further constraint in this area was that the budget for application development was set before the technical requirements had been defined, potentially restricting innovation and vendor interest. The budget allocated was less than the actual cost of application development.

However, having made the investment in development of the application for NET*Working 2002, there now exists a substantial and flexible application with a range of customised features that has shown itself to be capable of handling a large volume of participants in an online conference. It is not unreasonable to expect that the application has potential beyond its current use. Without pre-empting developments in technology over the next few years it might be possible to re-use the application, with some upgrading, for an online NET*Working conference in 2004 without having to make the same level of investment in application development as occurred in NET*Working 2002.

Conclusion

In summary, the excellent technical performance of NET*Working 2002 was a significant achievement. The technical team's professional approach and project management expertise coupled with Netspot's willingness to work in partnership with the team delivered a high quality result.

*"We knew at 10 o'clock on Day 1 that it was going to go well." (NET*Working 2002 technical team)*

As always there are lessons to be learned to improve future online NET*Working events:

- ensure the project timelines allow for sufficient time pre-development in:
 - conceptualisation of the user experience, full identification of site content and user functionality and development of a site map (storyboard)
 - complete specification of technical requirements
 - determination of budget requirements
 - vendor communication, tender preparation and selection
- endeavour to identify a single vendor that can deliver a complete project solution
- encourage vendors to identify all features and facilities of their chosen application, thereby highlighting potentially innovative solutions to specified requirements.

Taking into account the benefits of an extended technical planning timeline and the value of engaging users in specifying requirements, it has been suggested that an activity of the NET*Working 2003 physical conference develop conceptual requirements for the 2004 online event.

ANTA should also be conscious of the fact that through NET*Working 2002 it has crown copyright on an online event technology that has the potential for application beyond NET*Working events, most notably for ANTA, state training authorities and/or educational providers interested in running future online conferences.

2.5. Marketing

The NET*Working 2002 marketing team based in Brisbane comprised Caroline Thurlow (Caroline Thurlow Communication) and Jennifer Reis (Jacoby & Reis Consulting). The team managed all event marketing according to a detailed plan developed in January 2002 that incorporated branding, advertising, printed materials, media releases/liason and newsletters.

The NET*Working 2002 marketing team set itself three marketing objectives:

1. To communicate key messages of NET*Working 2002 to target audiences through specific marketing activities.
2. To achieve in excess of 2,000 registrations for NET*Working 2002 by July 2002.
3. To encourage increased participation from select sectors.

Marketing messages and activities

The marketing team established key messages related to the focus and format of NET*Working 2002 that were used in media and target communication prior to, during and since the event. Coupled with the 'bee' logo and branding which was used on event letterhead, websites, brochures, promotional material, newsletters and media releases and the distribution of marketing and communications protocols this enabled presentation of a consistent public message and look to the event.

From February 2002 an extensive schedule of activities was undertaken to promote NET*Working 2002. This included:

- monthly media releases to more than 50 education journals and magazines, VET media, training organisations, ITAB's HR magazines, STA newsletters and contacts in private training providers
- monthly e-newsletters to potential participants and sponsors with updates on developments, keynote speaker profiles, feature events and tips for involvement
- printed editorial coverage (e.g. Campus Review, The Australian, Australian Training, Sydney Morning Herald)
- online editorial coverage (e.g. Stephen Downes' OLDaily, ANTA website, TAFE frontiers website)
- advertising (e.g. during March-June advertisements were placed in Australian Training, Campus Review, Adult Learning Australia, Training and Development in Australia, Australian TAFE Teacher).

Collectively these activities raised awareness of NET*Working 2002 and provided information to potential participants. They enabled key messages to be communicated in controlled and uncontrolled environments relevant to the target audiences.

A direct email campaign was proposed but after an initial email prior to the first edition of the monthly e-newsletter it was decided to concentrate on the e-newsletter as the primary form of e-communication. A registration brochure was also printed and distributed to organisations and individuals on a database managed by the project team.

Registration targets

The quantitative marketing targets were generally achieved, with the overall number of registrations for NET*Working 2002 well in line with expectations. Registration numbers moved through the 2,000 mark in early August and with a significant boost in the first few days of the event reached a total of 2,636 (see Section 3 for more information on registrations).

As shown in Table 2, the major ways that participants found out about NET*Working 2002 were through internal organisational communication such as workplace newsletters, memos and emails or

managers and colleagues. AFL Framework projects such as LearnScope and the Flexible Learning Leaders were another useful means of communicating about NET*Working 2002.

Table 2/Figure 1: ‘How did you find out about NET*Working 2002?’

Source*	No. of responses	% of responses
Workplace newsletter	227	25
Email	217	24
Colleague/manager	137	15
AFL Framework Projects	99	11
Website	91	10
Brochure	51	6
Advertisement	38	4
Other	33	4
Total Responses*	893	100

* Information captured on registration form and pre-event questionnaire. 34% of registered participants provided information on this question. Many participants who were registered as part of group registrations did not have individual information recorded with their registration form.

Relatively few participants indicated that they had found out about the event through the brochures and advertisements. This does not diminish the use of this form of marketing but suggests that its value is in keeping awareness high rather than attracting new people to the event.

If internal organisational contacts are a more effective way of promoting an event like NET*Working 2002 than mass media or communication activities, this suggests that the process of communication should be reasonably straightforward as long as the target organisations are known and a supportive contact or conduit into the organisation is known. It is clearly easier to compile this information for TAFE institutes, private training providers and STAs than it is for community providers and industry generally.

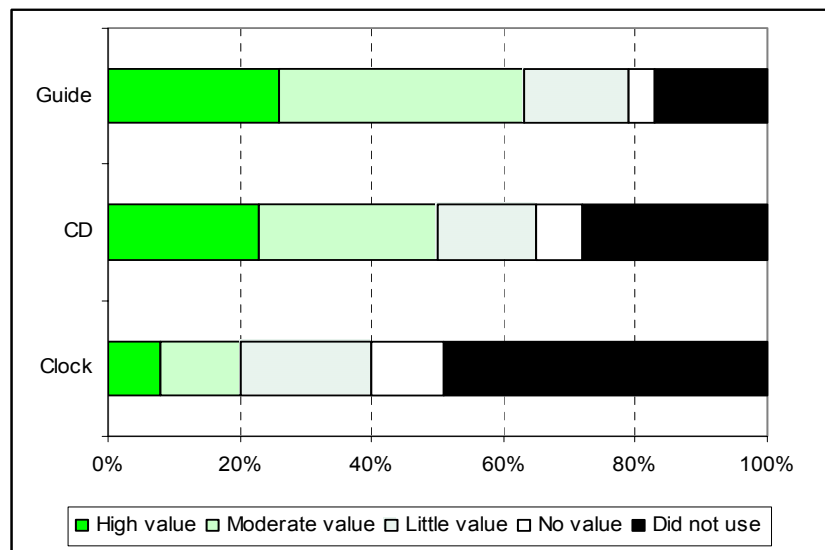
This outcome is reinforced to some extent by the profile of registrations by organisation type (see Section 3.1) which shows that while representation from TAFE, universities and government agencies was above the notional ‘targets’, this was offset by lower than anticipated registrations from the ACE sector (3.4% vs target of 6%) and schools (3.6% vs target of 5%). Whilst progress has been made over the last few NET*Working conferences in attracting general government and industry participation, the ACE sector in particular still remains on the periphery of these activities.

Support material

The communication activities were supported by production of a sponsor’s pack and support material sent to registered participants two weeks prior to the event including a ‘Guide to NET*Working 2002’ and a showbag containing a mouse pad, cardboard novelty clock, sponsor materials and CD (with software plug ins, audio and video files, and Powerpoint presentations from key presenters). All items were branded and sponsored.

As shown in Figure 2, participants indicated that the guide was of high or moderate value, with 50% rating the CD as a valuable aid to their NET*Working 2002 experience. 49% of participants did not use the clock, which was designed to be hung on the back of a chair or near the workdesk to indicate the person was engaged in a NET*Working 2002 activity. Of those that did use the clock, 40% said it was of at least moderate value to them, although it was not always effective.

Figure 2: Value of Support Materials



“The CD has been very valuable and has given me lots of ideas about how to provide some online mentoring and guidance for online teachers.”

“The clock idea was a good one but even when I told people what I was doing, it made little or no impression.”

Where there were concerns about these support materials these were usually related to participants not receiving the materials before the event, if at all. This issue is further addressed in Section 2.7.

Overall marketing impact

The widespread coverage of NET*Working 2002 in relevant media and the final registration levels reflect positively on the overall marketing effort. It also builds on the work of previous NET*Working conferences and the platform for launching future NET*Working events. With a network of media contacts established and the level of credibility associated with a successful professional development activity of this magnitude the task of marketing future events has been made easier.

However, two points are worth noting from the NET*Working 2002 experience.

Firstly, that the scope and quality of the contact database is very important in ensuring the effective distribution of information to target audiences. Once target groups are identified there needs to be a concerted effort to ensure that the channels for getting information to those groups, especially via electronic means, need to be identified. The quality of the database influences the effectiveness of the marketing activities and registration management.

Secondly, that as ever there remains a challenge in translating awareness into registration, and registration into participation. This issue is discussed further in Section 5.

2.6. Sponsorship

Sponsorship for NET*Working 2002 was managed by Adam Atkinson of Events R Us in Brisbane.

NET*Working 2002 attracted total sponsorship of approximately \$100,000 (see Table 3). This figure was below the initial sponsorship target but still a satisfactory contribution in the eyes of the project team. It should be noted that this figure probably underestimates the true level of sponsorship given

the uncosted in-kind contributions of organisations such as the NSW Department of Education and Training and Netspot.

Table 3: Value of NET*Working 2002 Sponsorship

Sponsorship Source	Sponsorship Amount
Cash sponsorship	\$78,727
Value in-kind sponsorship	\$20,597
Total	\$99,324

A total of 190 companies were approached to provide sponsorship for NET*Working 2002, with the initial sponsorship proposal offering nine different packages ranging from \$30,000 to \$750. Each package offered different levels of website exposure, print and email exposure, and complimentary conference registrations. 18 organisations were converted to NET*Working 2002 sponsors.

Table 4: NET*Working 2002 Sponsors

Sponsorship Category	Sponsors
Principal Sponsor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Flexible Learning Toolboxes
CD Sponsor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Netspot
Key Event Sponsor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ TAFE Queensland
Clocks/Mousepads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ANTA
Exhibition Hall Sponsor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ WestOne Services
Cool Tools Sponsor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ New Apprenticeships – Department of Education, Science and Training ▪ TAFE frontiers ▪ TAFE Virtual Campus ▪ Internet Broadcasters
Workshop Sponsor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ TAFE NSW Information Technology, Arts and Media Division ▪ TAFE Queensland Online
Satchel Sponsor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Australian Flexible Learning Framework
Daily Prize Sponsor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Electroboard (digital cameras) ▪ Adelaide Institute of TAFE (training course)
Exhibition Hall Participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ RTO Discover:e (FLAG Promotion and Adoption Project) ▪ LearnScope ▪ Design Planet/QB International ▪ Flexible Learning Leaders

Table 4 shows that the majority of NET*Working 2002 sponsors, and an equivalent majority of the total value of sponsorships, were AFL Framework projects or flexible learning programs run by state training authorities. With the majority of NET*Working 2002 funding therefore coming from a combination of direct ANTA funding and other government funding, this poses the question of whether there was transparency and equity in the overall funding of NET*Working 2002.

In practice, the sponsors indicated that their sponsorship decisions for NET*Working 2002 were consistent with those that are made for any other form of marketing and promotion. For these organisations the perceived benefits were a combination of exposure to participants who might not have already been aware of the program, reinforcement of the program brand and support for a complementary AFL Framework initiative.

NET*Working 2002 had only a handful of sponsors from outside AFL Framework projects, which was a disappointing response from a sponsorship database of which around 75% were private training providers, technology providers, major corporates or other private sector organisations.

The challenges in obtaining sponsorship support from this group were twofold:

- a misalignment between the timing of the sponsorship approach from NET*Working 2002 and the allocation of organisations' sponsorship budgets
- a high level of uncertainty about the sponsorship benefits of an online event.

Many potential corporate sponsors allocate their sponsorship budget on a calendar year basis. With sponsorship decisions finalised and locked in during the November-December period it was difficult for NET*Working 2002 to attract significant sponsorship, having commenced activity in January 2002. Clearly, opportunities to obtain sponsorship for future NET*Working conferences, whether online or not, will be enhanced if the lead time for planning and presenting the sponsorship prospectus to the market allows sufficient time for repeat and potential sponsors to allocate funds within their overall sponsorship budgets. Subject to the timing of the NET*Working conference, this would require a lead time of around twelve months.

The second issue is particular to online events. Online conferences are still relatively rare and from a sponsor's sceptical point of view, untested and unproven. Potential sponsors are unsure about what an online event looks like, what participants are involved, the nature of their involvement, and consequently the opportunities and mechanisms for sponsors to effectively present their product and influence consumer behaviour to generate a 'tangible' positive return on investment. NET*Working 2002 is a significant addition to the body of information that can be presented to sponsors about online events – in terms of reach, participation and possibilities. Reports on NET*Working 2002 have been forwarded to all sponsors. However, in the short- to medium-term the low level of awareness of the potential sponsorship value of online events will continue to constrain sponsorship activities.

In light of these circumstances, the profile of NET*Working 2002 sponsors is not surprising.

To enhance sponsorship outcomes from future NET*Working events the following suggestions should be considered:

- extend the sponsorship lead time to ensure this covers sponsors' budget allocation timeframe
- promote the outcomes of NET*Working 2002 (as well as outcomes from other online AFL Framework events, other relevant online events, and research into sponsorship of online events) to potential sponsors
- endeavour to maximise the level of repeat sponsorship from NET*Working 2002 sponsors
- endeavour to leverage mutually beneficial sponsorship funding from educational and technological suppliers to national and state training authorities and VET organisations.

2.7. Registration Process

The NET*Working 2002 project team handled the registration process, with support from the Hunter Institute of TAFE technical team and NSW Department of Education and Training.

Registration was to commence in March 2002, however, due to delays in setting up the registration infrastructure they did not start until mid-May. Participants were able to register:

- as individuals or in groups (with a single fee for 6-10 registrations)
- for 'earlybird' registration (which attracted a discount in the registration fee).

Payments could be made through cheque (52%) or credit card (35%), with card payments made either online or in the mail. Some payments were made through electronic funds transfer or internal revenue transfer. Presenters and sponsors were offered free registration, and although not all took up the offer around 5% of registrations were issued free of charge.

Participants were offered both paper-based and online registration processes. NSW DET which was in the process of upgrading their online payment system created a registration database with online credit card payment capabilities. The Hunter Institute of TAFE created an online registration tax invoice form for cheque payments. Table 5 shows the range of options available.

Table 5: Registration Options

Registration-Payment Method	Uptake	Location of database	Confirmation of Registration processed by ...	Registration and Payment processed on database by ...
Registration and payment via mail	62%	NET*Working 2002 project team	NET*Working 2002 project team	NSW DET
Online registration with payment by mail	27%	Hunter Institute of TAFE	NET*Working 2002 project team	NSW DET
Online registration with online payment	11%	NSW DET	NET*Working 2002 project team	NSW DET

62% of participants were registered via the printed registration form, with only 38% using online registration. Some organisations used all three options, with the matching of organisation details, participant details, payments and registrations complicated at times through organisations registering under one name while paying under another for participants who belonged to a different organisation.

The general registration process and the existence of these concurrent registration systems resulted in a number of challenges for event organisers and consequent problems for participants.

The NET*Working 2002 project team processed the registrations on the NSW DET database. This proved problematic as there were delays in getting the NSW DET system operational for NET*Working 2002 purposes and lags in obtaining accurate registration information from the other data sources. The absence of a single current registration database and delays in payments made it difficult for the project team to report with certainty on the total level of event registrations at any time, which impacted the NET*Working 2002 marketing and communication processes with participating organisations.

The ‘earlybird’ registration generated a solid level of interest. The initial cut-off date of 20 May 2002 was subsequently extended to the end of May, by which time registrations were well over 1,000. For the following two months registrations continued to come in at a slow but steady rate, with a sharp upturn in the weeks prior to and the first week of NET*Working 2002. Although this was a pattern experienced with previous NET*Working conferences, the project team’s ability to manage the resultant administrative peaks and troughs was compounded by the multiple registration systems.

Group registrations proved popular (80%) but further complicated issues. Many organisations taking out group registrations, especially those with ‘earlybird’ registrations, did not provide individual participant details (e.g. name and email address) at the time of registration. This was information they expected to sort out closer to the date of the conference. Unless otherwise advised, ten spots were added to the registration database. In practice, not all of these organisations took up their potential ten places, so registration figures during the months preceding the event were inflated.

At the end of July, although there were more than 1,900 paid participants around 800 of these had no participant details. The absence of this information meant that organisers were unable to verify participants’ email addresses (as was intended through distribution of newsletters) and had to get in contact with these organisations to get accurate information so that participants could be issued with a login ID and password. When participants received their emails to log on to NET*Working 2002 approximately 10% of the emails were returned, due mainly to incorrect email details being given, misinterpretation of handwriting or participants being on leave.

For approximately 400 participants for whom contact names and details were not available one week prior to the event, pre-event packages were distributed to the primary organisational contact to distribute the pack to participants. In some cases this contact was an administrative officer who was not participating in the conference. Distribution of the pack did not always occur or did not occur quickly or took time where the organisation was located over multiple locations, and, for example in the case of some regional TAFE institutes, not necessarily closely located places. The longer this process took, the shorter the available time for distribution of the NET*Working 2002 Guide and pre-event information pack to participants. Registrants in the days prior to and during the event also experienced some delays in receiving information pack. As discussed later in this report, the late distribution of the pack was an issue that for some participants diminished their NET*Working experience.

“I enjoyed it once I was able to access it with a login and password, which I did not receive until the second week. Due to the delay I missed out on many opportunities and couldn't sign up for some things which had already started.”

“I did not have sufficient time to view the guide and use the CD before the event started as the material was received one day beforehand, even though I had applied within the time and was not a late acceptance. By the time I started to be more confident and feel my way around and I had been through items on the CD and read the material thoroughly - it was all over.”

Finally, some people registered as part of group bookings were unaware that they were registered for NET*Working 2002, did not receive the pack, and consequently did not participate in any way.

2.8. Project Administration

Team Structure

The NET*Working 2002 teams were physically dispersed with the central project management team in Sydney, the technical team in Newcastle, the marketing and sponsorship teams in Brisbane and Netspot in Adelaide. In addition to this, other key project personnel, mentors and the evaluator were based in other metropolitan and regional areas across a number of states. This situation created a communication and project management load to maintain alignment of different event activities. Some opportunities for travel to meet other team members were offered, but these were generally not taken up. Although, it may have made some decision and communication processes smoother, it is generally considered that the dispersment of the project team did not have a material impact on the outcome of NET*Working 2002.

This outcome reflects positively on the project manager and the individual teams. The project manager had confidence in the teams doing their thing which allowed her to concentrate on overall project responsibilities. The teams responded professionally and got on with their respective tasks.

Budget

The overall central budget for NET*Working 2002 was a little under \$500,000, which included all project management, technical development, marketing, product development and support costs as well as payments to guest speakers, facilitators and instructors.

Sponsorship contributions met approximately \$100,000 of this amount, with registrations a little under \$150,000 and the balance from ANTA. The volume of free registrations offered to sponsors and presenters (who made up 6% of the registrations) was an issue for organisers but on balance one which was considered an acceptable cost in the interests of offering a comprehensive and varied program.

Given the registration, travel and accommodation costs in running a physical conference for event organisers, participants and their organisations, the provision of a two week conference facility for over 2,500 people at a central cost of around \$200 per participant is extremely cost effective. Especially as the NET*Working 2002 public site is now an online resource for other people to access and use at no cost.

The cost of registration in NET*Working 2002 varied from \$121 for single registration to \$66 per registration for group bookings of 10 people. 'Earlybird' rates were \$99 and \$55 respectively. With many registrations coming from 'earlybird' or group bookings, on average participants, or their organisations, paid considerably less than \$100 per person to register. With estimated registration, travel and accommodation costs for participation in a two day conference, for example, of around \$1,000 per person (subject to location – and considerably higher for West Australian participants travelling to the east coast), it was not surprising that organisations took up the opportunity to book group registrations. Given this price differential there was probably a fair degree of price elasticity, in which registration prices could have been somewhat higher without influencing total registration numbers (especially for group bookings).

Legal Issues

In response to concerns about the legal risks involved in NET*Working 2002 publishing online information to the Internet, and with a lack of precedents on which to draw, the NET*Working 2002 project team investigated a number of issues to protect the rights of authors, speakers and contributors to online communications. Legal advice was sought from representatives of the FLAG Legal Project and Minter Ellison Lawyers.

As a result of this advice the team produced and published on the NET*Working 2002 site the following conditions/policies based on Australian and international privacy and copyright legislation:

- NET*Working 2002 Terms and Conditions of Use
- NET*Working 2002 Copyright Statement
- NET*Working 2002 Privacy Policy.

It is disappointing that since the event at least one participant has breached the spirit of the event and used information on participants gained from the site for unsolicited product marketing purposes.

In recognition of the valuable legacy of NET*Working 2002 in the numerous discussions and files created for and by the event, public access was provided to selected material from the site. In line with the Terms and Conditions of Use, all participants were given the option of unsubscribing from the NET*Working mail list and removing any postings or information prior to the site going public. Less than 10 people took up this option.

3. JOIN IT

NET*Working 2002 was targeted at the VET sector and industry sectors who are currently providing and/or accessing flexible learning options using new learning technologies, in particular TAFE, ACE and community providers, private training providers, enterprise-based organisations and industry groups/organisations. The audience was envisaged to comprise:

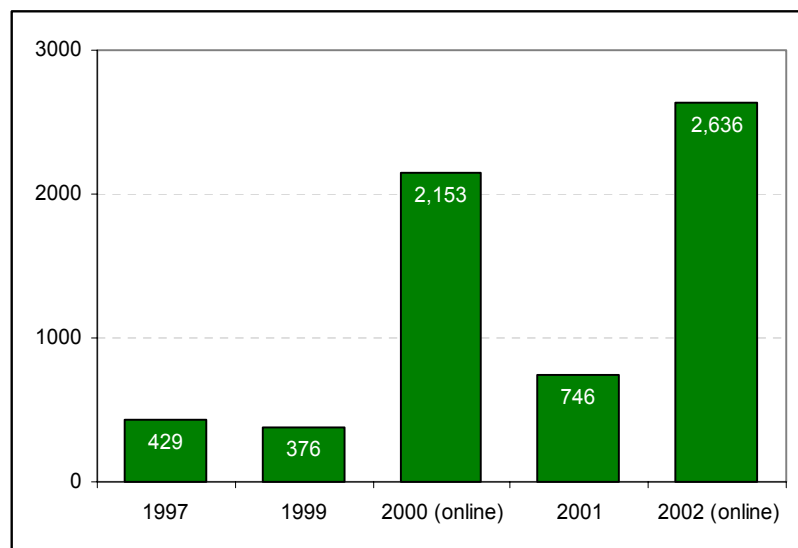
- policy makers and planners
- managers
- teachers, trainers and support staff
- enterprise and industry (both VET providers and industry client groups).

Participation targets were set in the range of 1,000 to 3,000, subject to technical requirements and budget. NET*Working 2002 aimed to attract those already engaged in the online learning environment, while at the same time providing some opportunities for inexperienced people to participate and to link up with more experienced participants.

3.1. Registrations

2,636 people were registered as participants on the NET*Working 2002 site¹. This is a 22% increase in the number of people registered in NET*Working 2000, the previous fully online conference. It also sits toward the upper end of the target range of 1,000 to 3,000 registrations for the 2002 conference. It is notable that the volume of registrations increased significantly from around 2,000 in the week before the event to more than 2,600 by the Thursday of the first week.

Figure 3: Registrations for NET*Working conferences



Gender and Age

The age and gender profile of people registered for NET*Working 2002 is consistent with those participating in previous NET*Working conferences, which have seen females making up 60 to 65% of registrations. In 2002, 65% of registrations were female (see Table 6). This mix was fairly consistent across all age ranges, although there were a slightly higher proportion of males in the 55 and over age group. The majority of people registered for NET*Working 2002 were aged between 35 and 54 years.

¹ Estimates of the exact number of participants in NET*Working 2002 vary slightly depending on the source of the information. The evaluation has used participant information provided from the site, and where possible completed or corrected information on location, organisation type, etc. to fill in gaps in the information collected at registration. As a result, the figure presented in this section of the report may vary slightly from estimates provided from other sources.

Table 6: Age and Gender Profile

Age	Gender			Distribution by Age*		% Female
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	
Under 25	12	6	18	2%	2%	67%
25-34 years	102	46	148	15%	13%	69%
35-44 years	230	93	323	33%	27%	71%
45-54 years	307	166	473	44%	48%	65%
55 and over	47	38	85	7%	11%	55%
Age not given	1,020	569	1,589			64%
Total	1,718	918	2,636			65%

* Distributions based on those 1,046 people that gave their age.

Location

Figure 4 shows that the greatest proportion of registrations (40%) came from NSW. This was also the case in 2000, although the proportion from NSW was well down on that year. This was also the case for Victoria which, with NET*Working 2002 coming at around the same time as Victoria's *Flexible Learning Week*, represented only 14% of total registrations. The numbers from WA and Tasmania were particularly encouraging with the actual number of registrations up on 2000 by 96% (262 vs 134) and 172% (128 vs 47) respectively.

Figure 4: Registrations by Location

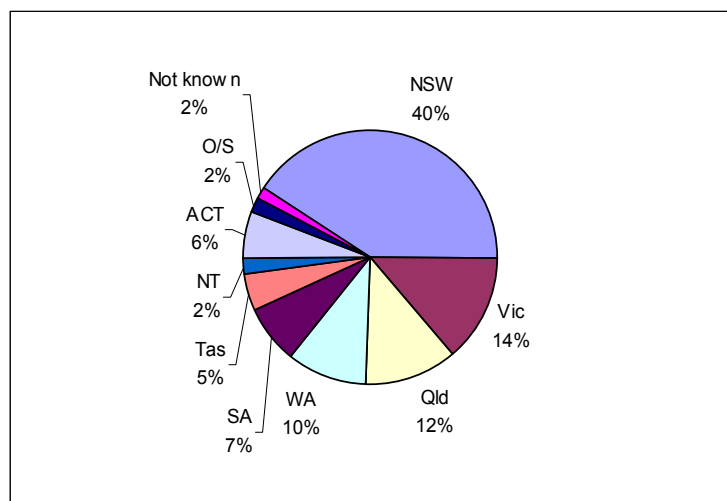


Table 7: Registrations by Location

Event	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	O/S	Not known	Total
NW2002	1,083	356	314	262	195	128	46	161	51	40	2,636
	40%	14%	12%	10%	7%	5%	2%	6%	2%	2%	100%
NW2000	46%	19%	10%	6%	8%	2%	2%	5%	2%	-	100%

The 51 overseas registrations came from a diverse range of nations, with representation from Asia and the Pacific, North America and Europe.

Table 8: Overseas Registrations

Country	No.	Country	No.	Country	No.
Indonesia	7	United Kingdom	10	United States	10
Thailand	4	Spain	1	Canada	4
Singapore	2	Denmark	1		
Hong Kong	1			Argentina	1
Japan	1	New Zealand	4	Aruba (Netherlands)	1
China	1			Egypt	1
Taiwan	1			Israel	1

Organisation Type

As anticipated, registrations were dominated by the TAFE sector with 57% of total registrations, slightly higher than the notional target of 54%. It is likely that the true level of TAFE representation was in fact closer to 60% given the number of registrations from Victorian universities that have TAFE divisions (e.g. RMIT, Swinburne University of Technology, University of Ballarat) which contributed to the solid level of recorded registrations from the university sector. This result is lower than for NET*Working 2000 and given the increased number of registrations suggests that NET*Working 2002 was able to attract greater numbers of registrations from the non-TAFE sector.

The proportion of registrations from industry, enterprises and government organisations was also higher than the 8% target, driven by registrations from the health sector (particularly in NSW and Queensland) and some large government agency and corporate group registrations from South Australia. The response from community education providers was below expectations, which may reflect the lower level of uptake of flexible learning across the sector or the difficulty in communicating to the ACE sector with a general undifferentiated marketing approach.

Table 9: Registrations by Organisation Type

Organisation Type	Registrations			Registrations
	No.	%	Target	2000
TAFE/Vocational college	1,506	57%	54%	67%
Industry, enterprise, government organisation	270	10%	8%	3%
State Training Authority	201	8%	9%	9%
Private training provider	199	8%	10%	4%
University	199	8%	5%	5%
School	96	4%	5%	5%
Community education provider	89	3%	6%	4%
Other	76	3%	3%	3%
Total	2,636	100%	100%	100%

However the level of participation from non-TAFE participants was commented upon.

“I really enjoyed the conference and thought the organisation was excellent. I did however think that the participation was a bit limited. Where was the private sector, the training managers from organisations, the university sector? It would have added quite a lot to a number of discussions to have a broader voice.” (Industry participant)

“There are still not enough teachers involved in the conference - especially discussions. The AFL Framework needs to address more imaginative ways of getting many more teachers involved in online teaching.”

Given the low level and quality of information on the position within an organisation of people registered for NET*Working 2002, this information is not presented.

Previous NET*Working experience

People who registered for NET*Working 2002 were asked when completing both the pre-event questionnaire and the final evaluation to indicate whether they had participated in previous NET*Working events. Of those that participated in these information gathering activities and responded to this question 75% (from 909 responses) and 67% (from 262 responses) indicated that this was their first NET*Working conference. Conversely, only about 30% of registrations were from people who had previously participated in NET*Working conferences (mainly 2000 and 2001).

Assuming that the respondents to the questionnaires are representative of the entire NET*Working 2002 population (and there are no other reasons to suggest that this is not the case), the question arises as to why somewhere in the order of 1,200-1,500 participants from previous NET*Working conferences did not register for NET*Working 2002. The answer is not known, but may be related to one or more of:

- NET*Working 2002 attracting registrations from only a subset of the organisations that had participated previously
- a shift in organisational interest in flexible learning
- changes within organisations of the people involved or interested in flexible learning
- responses to previous NET*Working conferences.

Anecdotal feedback from TAFE institutes that made group bookings indicates that many people registered for NET*Working 2002 would not have participated in previous events. Whatever the reason, this suggests that there is scope for future NET*Working conferences to maximise the use of the registration database from previous conferences in their marketing and communication activities.

Confidence and experience

At registration, NET*Working 2002 participants were asked to indicate their level of experience and confidence in using elearning technologies. The responses (see Table 10) indicate a spread of experience and confidence with 30% classing themselves as inexperienced in the use of elearning technologies. While there was a high degree of correlation between confidence and experience it is noticeable that confidence levels were generally higher than the experience levels. NET*Working 2002 has now provided these people with an elearning experience.

Table 10: Confidence and Experience

Level of experience	Level of confidence				Total
	Very confident	Confident	Somewhat confident	Not confident	
Very experienced	70	3	1	-	74
Experienced	37	126	12	1	176
Somewhat experienced	16	108	262	13	399
Not experienced	9	26	96	141	272
Total	132	263	371	155	921
Very experienced	7.6%	0.3%	0.1%	0.0%	8.0%
Experienced	4.0%	13.7%	1.3%	0.1%	19.1%
Somewhat experienced	1.7%	11.7%	28.4%	1.4%	43.3%
Not experienced	1.0%	2.8%	10.4%	15.3%	29.5%
Total	14.3%	28.6%	40.3%	16.8%	100.0%

Cost effectiveness

NET*Working 2002 demonstrated the capacity of online conferences to allow for a greater and more diverse range of registrations than a physical conference. With an average registration cost per person for NET*Working 2002 of less than \$100 compared with the thousands of dollars an organisation can pay for registration, travel and accommodation to attend a two-day physical conference, online events enable individual organisations to enrol more people in a professional development activity. Instead of sending one or two people to a conference, organisations were able to register five, ten or more in NET*Working 2002. This meant that the learnings were potentially spread across a greater number of people, in different faculties, from management to teaching and support staff. This should facilitate faster uptake of flexible learning initiatives.

3.2. Participation

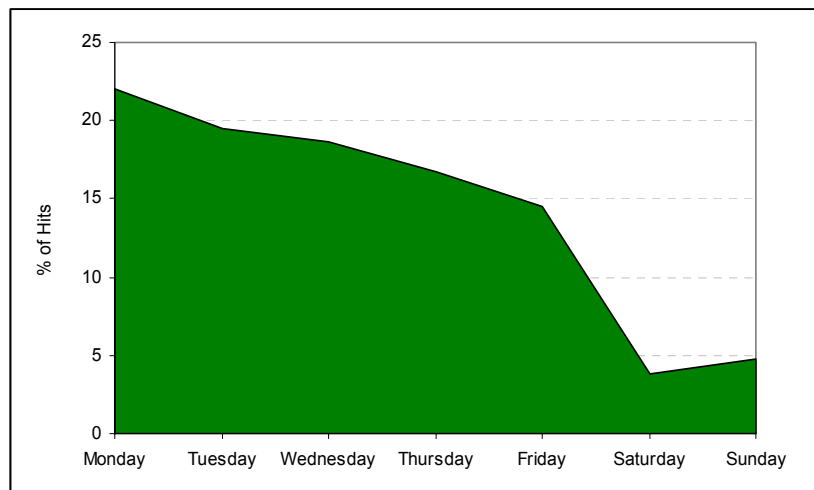
In the period from 16 August NET*Working 2002 to 11 September the NET*Working 2002 site recorded more than a million hits, with participants spending around 5,500 hours online.

Table 11: General Site Statistics

Item		Outcome
Hits	Entire site (successful)	1,008,375
	On 19 August (first day of NET*Working 2002)	119,514
Visits	Approximate logins	14,021
	Average (on weekdays during NET*Working 2002)	1,050
	Average visit length	40 minutes
	Median visit length	18 minutes
Visitors	Unique visitors (different login locations)	3,782

The statistics in Table 11 indicate a solid level of participation in NET*Working 2002 with an average of more than 1,000 visits to the site on the ten weekdays, with the lowest number of hits on the final Friday of the event. Figure 5 shows that hits on the site were highest early in the week and reduced through to the weekend.

Figure 5: Hits by Day of the Week



With a median (non-zero length) visit of 18 minutes and an average of 40 minutes this indicates that some participants spent very long periods of time online (even taking the idle-time termination limit into account).

Figure 6: Hits by Hour of the Day

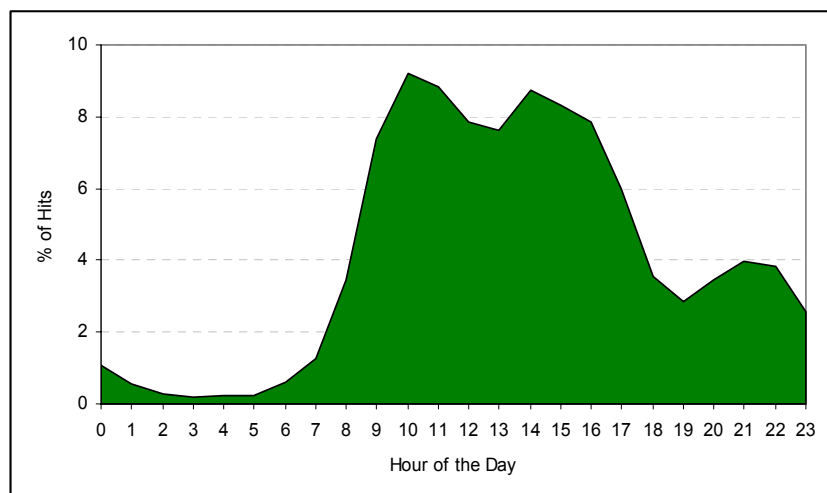


Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of hits by the hour of the day, with peaks between 10 and 11 a.m. and again between 2 and 3 p.m. There was also an upsurge in the evening between 8 and 11 p.m.

Individual participation in NET*Working 2002 varied considerably from those with thousands of hits and more than 40 hours spent logged in to the site to those that did not participate at all.

Although 2,636 people were registered for NET*Working 2002, site statistics show that 737 or 28% did not log in to the site. This outcome is similar to the experience of NET*Working 2000 when 31%

of registered participants did not log in. In 2002, as in the past, the reasons for non-participation are seen to have been:

- lack of time, usually due to other work commitments
- people registered without their knowledge (e.g. people registered through group bookings – see Section 2.7)
- local technical barriers.

Those that did participate in NET*Working 2002 did so to differing degrees. While there is no single or true measure of participation in an online event of this type, the number of hits on the site and the amount of time spent logged into the site are of interest.

The non-participants aside, these indicators show a distribution with a small number of people having a large number of hits on the site and the bulk in the mid range from about 50 to 299 hits.

The distribution by time shows the skew to the lower end of the scale with 28% not logging on and a further 20% spending less than ½ an hour on the site. Add another 12% with 30-59 minutes on the site and 60% of people registered spent less than an hour logged on to NET*Working 2002. This is in stark contrast to the 6% of heavy users with more than 8 hours onsite, some of whom had over 40 hours on the site over the two weeks.

The initial conclusion from this data is that many people participated in NET*Working 2002 at a relatively low level, while a small number were very active with high levels of engagement.

Figure 7: Participation by Hits

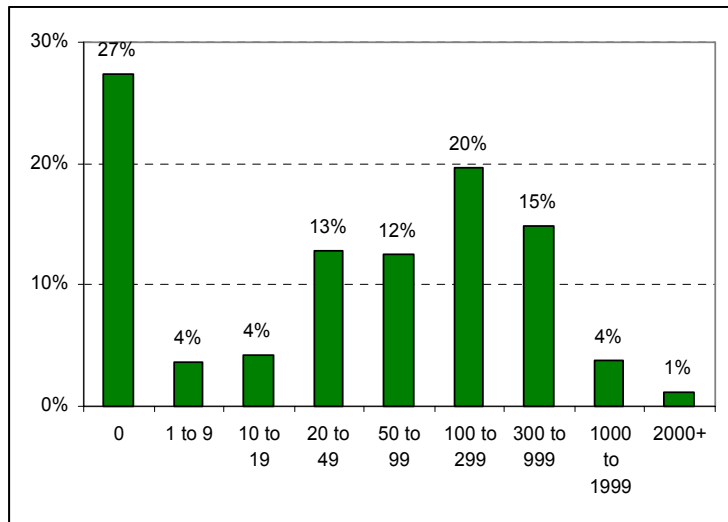
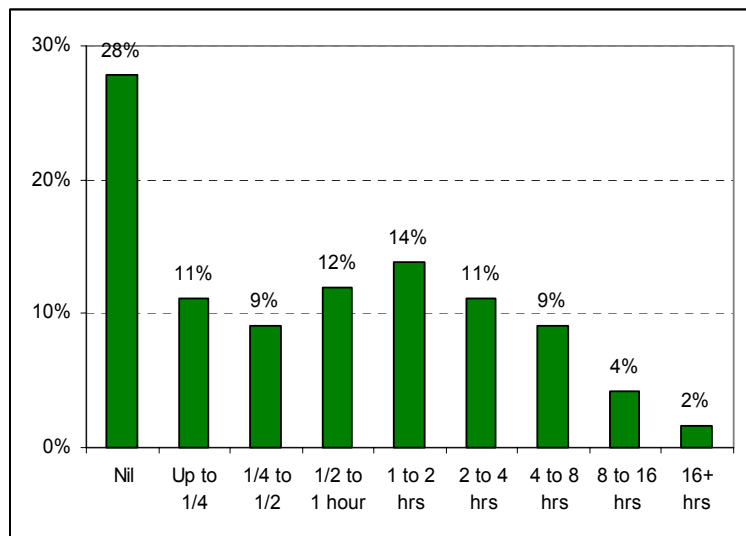


Figure 8: Participation by Time



The post-event survey provides another perspective on participation in NET*Working 2002. Table 12 again shows that there were 8% who considered themselves very active participants while the majority had minimal (16%) or occasional (43%) participation. Table 12 also shows that 31% spent more time participating in NET*Working 2002 than they expected to while 43% spent less time than anticipated.

Table 12: NET*Working 2002 Participation

Participation	%	Time spent participating vs expectation		
		More time	About the same	Less time
Very active	8%	76%	14%	10%

Active	33%	48%	38%	14%
Occasional	43%	19%	25%	56%
Minimal	16%	2%	10%	88%
Total	100%	31%	26%	43%

It is notable that those participants that were active tended to have spent more time than planned, while those that had lesser involvement were more likely to have spent less time participating in NET*Working 2002 than they thought they would.

4. SEE IT, DO IT, SHARE IT

4.1. An elearning feast

NET*Working 2002 presented participants with a smorgasbord of different activities addressing many aspects of elearning, including:

- online content development and products
- learning objects
- online facilitation and moderation
- online assessment
- communication and engagement
- policy, legal, access and equity issues.

In addition to eight feature events and fourteen activities linked to the Year of the Outback, there were 36 workshops, 40 discussions and six showcases and interviews (see Appendix C for full list of program activities).

These 104 published activities were presented and facilitated individually or jointly by 165 different presenters, some involved in as many as four different activities. The list of presenters spanned all Australian states and territories (as well as overseas presenters) and, although predominantly drawn from TAFE providers, included presenters from private RTOs, ACE providers, consultants and academics. With more than 6% of the total number of registered participants actively involved in presentation of the event, NET*Working 2002 offered a significant opportunity for elearning practitioners to showcase their activities and expertise. The number of jointly facilitated activities and the high degree of collaboration from presenters across state and organisational boundaries was also a practical demonstration of the potential of online learning to support virtual learning communities.

NET*Working 2002 also offered participants a range of other learning and support activities including special interest groups, Cool Tools, an Exhibition Hall, How To ... and a B-log.

4.2. Feature Events

NET*Working 2002 presented a series of feature events throughout the two weeks across a range of different aspects of flexible learning. These ensured that participants had access to a selection of Australian and global thinkers and practitioners in online learning, all of whom contributed to live discussions and supplied written, audio and video files that were distributed to participants on the CD.

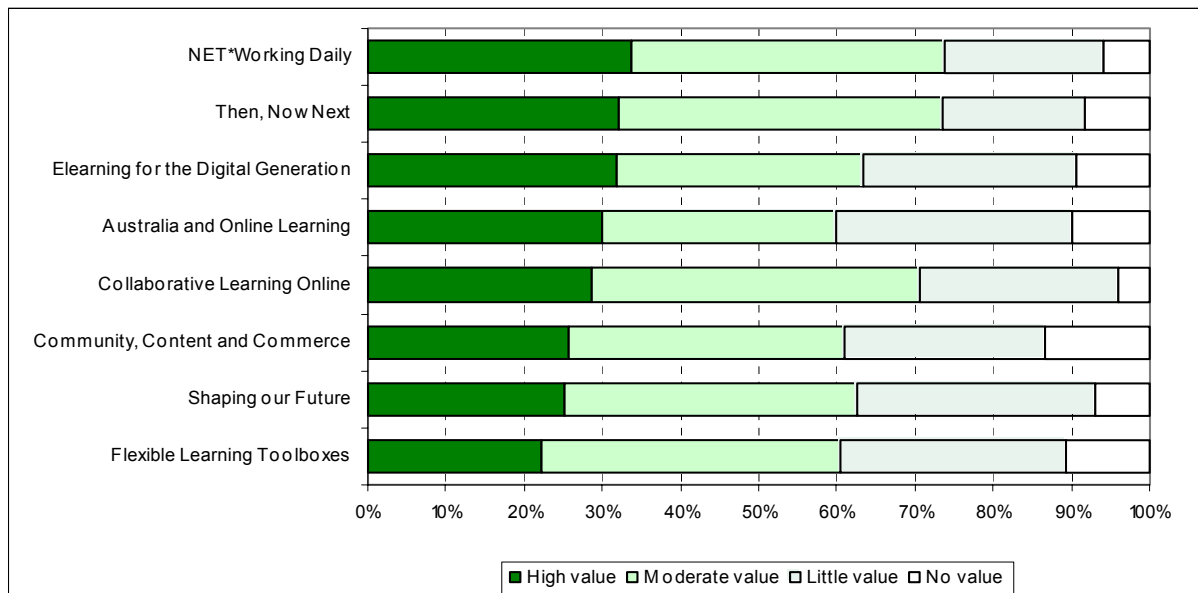
Table 13: NET*Working 2002 Feature Events

Title/Presenters	Event
Flexible Learning Toolboxes Including Brendan Nelson, Minister for Education, Science and Training	NET*Working 2002 launched Toolbox Series 4, which was a major sponsor of the event. The toolboxes were also showcased in the Exhibition Hall and their uptake and use promoted through a range of workshops and discussion activities.
Shaping our Future Moira Scollay, CEO ANTA; Lee Skertchly; Penny Flett; Peter Richardson; Anita Maynard	This group ran a discussion on pre-selected issues to engage participants in dialogue on future issues impacting on the national training agenda.
Collaborative Learning Online: Myth, Magic or just a lot of Bonk? Curtis Bonk, Indiana University, USA	Curtis focused the minds of participants on the essential elements and success factors to watch for in developing and teaching online learning.

Title/Presenters	Event
Australia and Online Learning – Lessons on Strategic Implementation and Effective Learning Peter Tilton, ANZ Bank	Peter delivered a number of live chats and published a paper outlining his experience in managing the strategic issues for online learning in a large corporate organisation.
Community, Content and Commerce Michael Gurstein, New Jersey Institute of Technology, USA Gillian Sellar, Albany GateWay Nancy White, Full Circle Associates, USA	These presenters focused on the changing nature of learning collaboratively using the Internet as an educational medium. They showed participants how to facilitate online communities and demonstrate how physical communities can exploit communications technologies for economic development.
Designing Elearning for the Digital Generation Marc Prensky, corporate training gameware designer, USA	Participants were able to register for one of 100 CDs containing Marc's latest interactive educational games, then participate in live chat and forum discussions.
Then, Now, Next – A forum of past presenters Gilly Salmon, Open University, UK Tom Reeves, University of Georgia, USA Thiagi Sivasailam, QB International, USA Nigel Paine, BBC, UK	This group of pioneering presenters ran a series of activities focusing on what has and has not changed in online learning since they became involved in NET*Working events during the late 1990s. The presenters ran a series of collaborative activities and published a range of resources for participants.

The response of participants to the feature events was very encouraging. Each was well represented on the list of the site's most popular activities with between 500 and 1,500 visits and hundreds of participants either actively engaged in live chat or reviewing discussions and published content. Of those that participated in each event around 20-30% found them to be highly interesting with another 30-40% rating them as of moderate interest.

Figure 9: Level of Interest in Feature Events



One notable aspect of the program of feature events was that it contained activities that appealed to different audiences. The post-event evaluation survey indicated very individual responses to the feature events. Few participants chose to access more than four or five of the events and most of those that participated in more than one event showed markedly different levels of interest in these activities.

However, overall many participants found at least one of the feature events to be of high or moderate interest.

“I finally got questions answered about authentication of online learning that had been burning for years.” (Participant in Curtis Bonk’s Collaborative Learning Online).

“Peter Tilton’s session was absolutely brilliant.”

“Loved ‘Then, Now, Next’ and the whole wisdom tent experience.”

“Live chat with Nancy White was a blast.”

“The paper and presentation from Marc Prensky was the highlight for me ... the digital natives vs digital immigrants concept.”

As a cornerstone of NET*Working 2002, the variety offered by the program of feature events, the levels of participation and the perceived quality of the presentations indicates that this component of NET*Working 2002 was of significant value to participants.

NET*Working Daily

Online author and developer, Stephen Downes from the University of Alberta, Canada provided a daily commentary of NET*Working 2002 events. With a topical review of the activities and events on the site Stephen provided more than just a daily summary of the proceedings, but a pointer to interesting events and conversations, while encouraging critical thinking and a deeper level of participation.

NET*Working Daily proved to be the most popular of the feature activities with more than 2,000 visits over the two weeks of the conference. As shown in Figure 9, 74% of people that viewed NET*Working Daily said that they had a high (34%) or moderate (40%) degree of interest in the activity. Of all the activities and features noted by participants in their conference highlights NET*Working Daily was the most prominent.

“I took time to read Stephen Downes’ commentary for each day and discovered that this and his links were some of the most valuable bits of the conference. It helps overcome the diversity or richness of each day that you don’t easily get as a first timer.”

*“NET*Working Daily ranged from perceptive to rigorous to idiosyncratic, but compulsive reading all the same.”*

Prior to, during and since the conference, Stephen has referenced NET*Working 2002, speakers and workshops and some of his observations on the event on his widely read OLDaily newsletter.

4.3. NET*Working 2002 Workshops and Discussions

Other than the feature events and the Year of the Outback activities, NET*Working 2002 had over 80 workshops, discussions, showcases and interviews (see Appendix C). Workshops ranged from high levels of activity and interactivity (e.g. follow instructions, read material, respond to presenter and fellow participants) to low interactivity papers and asynchronous discussion forums. Presenters controlled each workshop within an online NET*Working template that allowed them to facilitate online discussion, present papers and photographs for downloading, and stream audio and video clips. Some sessions required registration as participant numbers were limited.

These workshops provided a diverse array of elearning opportunities. Examples of NET*Working 2002 workshops include (among others):

- Cross Cultural Communication Online - perspectives from around the globe ... Michael Coghlan
- Email Games: Creative use of a simple technology ... Marie Jasinski
- Getting started with Toolbox materials ... Greg Burchell, Denise Morgan
- Learning objects – A direction in online learning ... Tony Whittingham
- Why use a multi-function, high-tensile, dense mass impacting device when a simple hammer will do? ... Marty Cielens
- Legal Issues in Flexible Learning ... Cathy McNickle, Jenny Dodd
- TruVision: Online learning for people blind or vision impaired ... Michele Jones
- Managers Tips for Implementing Flexible Learning ... Peter Le Cornu

Apart from the feature events, the Year of the Outback Activities and nine discussion workshops on Flexible Learning Toolboxes presented by the Toolbox Champions, these core learning activities were not presented to participants under any streams or themes. To find out what was on participants could either scan a complete list of workshops or a list of those being conducted on a particular day.

In the past, where activities in a conference (and not just online or NET*Working conferences) have been themed, one outcome is that people have missed out on an activity they would have enjoyed because it appeared under a heading that did not immediately appeal to them. The decision with NET*Working 2002 not to stream activities was an endeavour to avoid categorising activities that did not clearly fit under any single heading. While some activities may sit neatly with one another, many addressed multiple aspects of elearning, while the unique nature of others meant they would have been left in the ‘other’ group or allocated to a stream that was not quite right. By not streaming workshops NET*Working 2002 placed the onus on the participant to explore the entire program and plan their event participation. This approach was, in effect, a model of a mature learner taking responsibility for their learning program.

With so much to choose from, and participants devoting in some cases little time to NET*Working 2002, the result was that some activities proved very popular while others did not. Workshop and discussion activities that generated a relatively high degree of interest and participation with hundreds of visits and postings included:

- Teaching in the Twilight Zone: Are you ready? ... Louise Housden, Guy Kemshal-Bell
- City/Country Student Differences in Accessibility and Support: Myth or Fact? ... Jan Whitaker, Louise Housden
- Who put the flex in my ability? ... Guy Kemshal-Bell, Frankie Forsyth
- What do you really think, feel ...? ... Frankie Forsyth, Jan Whitaker
- Participate or perish? Looking for balance in participation and assessment models for online learning ... Lyn Campbell, Ted Clark
- Where does the teacher fit in? ... Guy Kemshal-Bell, Peter Robertson
- Your First Time ... Robert Pulling, Lyn Ambrose
- A Touch of FAME: Engaging teachers and students online ... Val Evans, Jenny Kingham, Ian Newton, Greg Webb.

*“After looking around various workshops I am so pleased to find this site. This site seems a good way to start practising posting. It seems that writing it is so much more permanent than saying it. Thanks for providing this site for us newcomers.” (First time NET*Worker from the ‘Your First Time’ site)*

Through a combination of topical subjects, presenters’ reputations, catchy titles and internal event promotion people came to and participated in these and other popular activities. At the same time other activities focused on specific elearning issues or processes attracted moderate but still healthy levels of engagement from interested participants.

Then there were activities that attracted moderate or low levels of participation that were extremely engaging, productive or successful for those that found them. Events like the virtual tour of Rabaul in PNG with Peter Hillery, Marie Jasinski's email games and Margaret Barron's At Risk online role play were highlights for those involved.

At the other end of the spectrum were those activities that did not catch the eye of the roving participant and generated little or no activity. Despite the work presenters put into preparing material and activities, some workshops became lost in the mass of opportunities and without a signpost to lead people to their door suffered accordingly. With so much on offer this was almost an inevitable outcome, but still disappointing for presenters and event organisers.

"As a workshop presenter, the total absence of participation in the chats and workshop were disappointing, but I understand we were not alone." (Presenter)

*"In any conference there are the lost discussions. I know - I hosted one in Wisconsin. This afternoon I browsed through the less travelled regions of Net*Working 2002 looking for some items that were in the main overlooked by conference participants. I found some good sessions ... sessions like Brian Mayne and Ann MacCann's 'The educational design of e-learning'. It's a good discussion, examining the 'nitty gritty' of how to make an online educational experience a meaningful learning experience. Though the presenters set up a discussion area for each principle, carefully primed with an outline and discussion questions, the forum remained empty. I think that this could have been a popular topic." (Stephen Downes, NET*Working 2002 Daily)*

Year of the Outback

Australia is celebrating the Year of the Outback in 2002. As a community service NET*Working 2002 featured a number of workshops related to regional and remote areas and/or delivered by presenters from regional and remote places. These included:

- 'Visual Stories' showing a visual approach to indigenous education in Alice Springs
- 'Living and Learning (and Technology)', an account of growing up in the bush by one of the original students of the Broken Hill School of the Air
- 'The Deniliquin Ute Muster ... Historic Wool Wagon Trek', brought to life by online facilitation and photos from a recent historic re-enactment
- 'Outback Computer Training' which highlighted the use of sound and video in providing remote IT training in Mt. Isa.



As was the case with the feature events and other workshops and discussions, the response to these activities was mixed. Many NET*Working 2002 participants did not log in to these activities and none of the workshops were high on the list of hits on the NET*Working site. Of those that did tap into these activities some did not find them very interesting, with only 52% of participants finding the activities to be of high or moderate interest.

Yet at the same time, some NET*Working 2002 participants accessed these activities simply because they were profiled by the Year of the Outback theme, and the activities became conference highlights. For example, Harvey Feldstein's 'Cyberkids do it easy - South Oz School of the Air in action' provoked a very positive response. This workshop invited participants into a real virtual classroom where students use voice or keyboard, view live images of each other and collaborate on the Internet whiteboard.

“I loved taking part in the School of the Air lesson with the kids in outback SA. It really revitalised my quest for getting past IT being used at the Word/Excel stage and more into a living component of education at the primary level. I want my kids to learn like this.”

“I really enjoyed the demo from the ‘Cyberkids do it easy’ session where we actually sat in on a Year 5 class, as well as the virtual wool trek with Jacqueline Bates.”

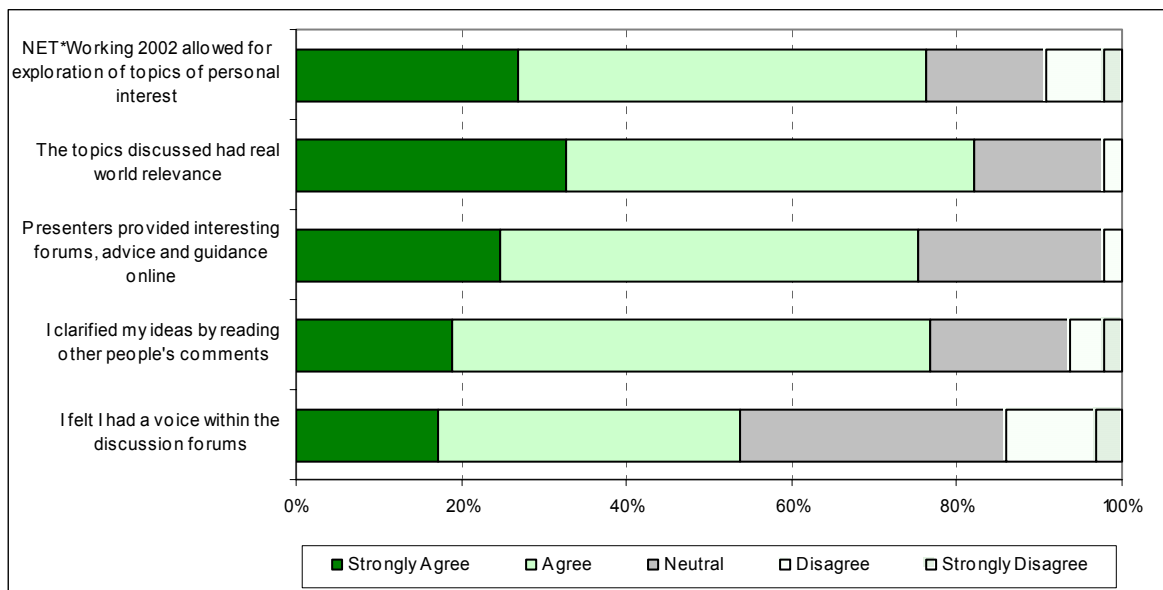
“My highlight was Sue Lear’s story about distance education at Quinyambie and then later being part of her chat.”

So once again, although these activities were not highly subscribed, and for some presenters did not provide an obvious return on their investment in preparing and presenting a workshop, they did make a positive impact on a small number of participants.

Participant feedback

Participants’ response to the NET*Working 2002 program of feature events and activities was generally positive, with the majority indicating relevance and value in the activities presented. Whilst many participants indicated separately their being overwhelmed by the volume of activities on the program, 76% of respondents to the post-event survey acknowledged that NET*Working 2002 had allowed them to explore topics of personal interest. 82% agreed that the topics had real world relevance and 75% felt that presenters had provided interesting online learning forums.

Figure 10: Feedback on NET*Working Activities



One concern noted by respondents was that only 54% felt that they had a voice within the discussion forums. This reflects in part the lack of confidence and experience of relatively new NET*Workers. It was also noted that the presentations had not maximised the full potential of learning technologies.

“I was disappointed that most of the conference presenters did not actually use innovative ways of conducting their sessions. Many were just Powerpoint presentations or screeds of written text. I expected something more interactive, interesting and different.”

This highlights the fact that some activities were led by first time presenters without significant experience and that for many practitioners and students this fairly basic level of interactivity is where they are currently at.

Overall, participants had a positive response to the variety and quality of activities on the site.

“I hope the site stays up for a while so that I can mine it for the nuggets.”

“I would have loved to have been in EVERY session and read EVERY opinion.”

4.4. Other NET*Working Activities

Besides the published feature events, workshops and discussions, NET*Working 2002 offered participants a range of other formal and informal learning and networking activities: special interest groups, Cool Tools, Exhibition Hall, How To ..., B-log and polls.

Special Interest Groups

NET*Working 2002 had a facility that enabled participants to establish their own special interest groups. This was an area of open space in which participants could create discussions, publish their own learning resources and attract others to join them to learn and share resources. Whilst not defined in the original technical specifications, the idea for interest groups arose out of a desire to stimulate and support communities of practice within NET*Working 2002, and strongly supported the NET*Working 2002 objective to ‘create new knowledge networks’.

Interest groups proved to be a very popular feature of the event with 48 groups established and around 70% of those who visited the groups finding them of high or moderate interest. The groups tended to focus on engaging people within an organisation (e.g. Canberra Institute of Technology, Southbank Institute of TAFE, Kangan Batman TAFE) or on a special topic of interest (e.g. communities of practice, assessment support, adult literacy, instructional design, storytelling).

Groups such as the CIT one, for example, provided people with a chance to share their NET*Working experiences in a virtual environment, creating an effective cross-organisational learning and networking activity. As those involved knew one another, and were supported by complementary group activities within CIT, the group also represented a ‘safe’ online environment for those that were less experienced, and they were encouraged to participate and post messages. Through this they gained confidence with their online interactions that they were able to translate to the wider range of NET*Working 2002 activities.

“The most exciting thing for me has been this ‘place’ – the CIT interest group ... to ‘hear’ that many of us are ‘talking’ the same language, having similar thoughts and feelings ... which interestingly I have found difficult to crystallise and express in any of the ‘real’ forums.” (Novice participant)

The topic-focused groups allowed individuals to stimulate ongoing discussion with other participants on topics of particular interest. With up to 200 messages posted in individual interest groups these in some cases generated a greater level of response than some of the activities on the published program. Even some interest groups that had only a moderate response with half a dozen people contributing ten to twenty messages proved effective in giving participants yet another avenue for presenting their ideas, challenging other ideas and seeking answers to the questions in their minds. Of particular note was the fact that while some of the interest groups were initiated by experienced NET*Workers, many were created by people who were not formally presenting activities but took the opportunity to facilitate their own online group, extending their skills and confidence.

Some participants nominated participation in the interest groups as their conference highlight and a valuable elearning experience, especially those that initiated interest groups.

“The intense gratification of seeing my interest group grow beyond the boundaries I had envisaged.”

“Finding that my interest group was popular and talking to everyone with the same interest.”

Cool Tools, How To ... , and Exhibition Hall

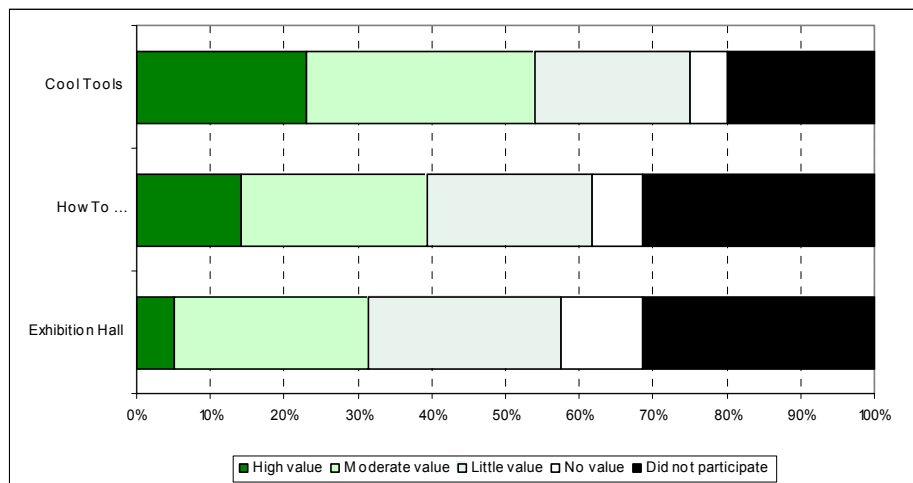
The NET*Working 2002 team researched and published a series of online tools and articles to manage and support the teaching and learning environment.

The Cool Tools aimed to provide novices and more advanced participants with a range of software tools to increase their skills in computer and Internet applications. Although they were cheap or free the tools listed were intended to make courseware development a little easier or more interesting. For example:

- Web Community In-a-Box
- Crossword Generator
- Maths Symbol Generator
- Thumbnail and Slideshow Creator
- File Splitter
- Clean Text Editor
- DIY Survey Package
- PDF File Generator

Participant feedback on the Cool Tools was strong with 23% of respondents indicating that these were of a high interest and value to them. The feedback from those who took the time to explore the tools was typically one of finding elearning gems, and in keeping with the NET*Working 2002 theme wanting to share them with their colleagues.

Figure 11: Feedback on other NET*Working Activities



“Especially intrigued by the crossword generator. I can't wait to share that with everyone. And I've always wanted to have a go at designing a web page!”

“I've just had a go with the Cool Chat Room and it really is as easy as you say. With very little knowledge it all worked so cleanly and so easily. This is just so useful!”

“There are many resources here that can be used easily by staff who are still a little afraid of anything to do with e-learning.”

“Have already created my first crossword and will be able to use this tool for many different learning scenarios. Have also shared with our LearnScope team.”

“What an excellent idea to provide this little service for us. Thanks a lot!”

The How To ... articles were a collaborative manual in which some people who have struggled with the mysteries of developing courseware online told how they resolved some of the mysteries of the web. They presented written resources and materials to support practical skill development, particularly in relation to technical support for courseware development and online moderation. For example:

- FTP(ing) – Putting your Files on the Web
- Key commands
- Zipping that file
- PC & Web Audio
- Using Scanners
- Find & Download Software
- Avoiding virus hoaxes
- Flash, some ways of getting started.

39% of participants found the How To ... s of high or moderate interest, which while not a large number, given their target audience and practical nature represents a valuable contribution to the elearning experience of a significant number of participants.

Disappointingly, the Exhibition Hall in which sponsors were able to showcase their products was not as popular as other activities and generated only a moderate response. In all 31% of respondents found sponsors’ exhibitions to be of interest, although it is not known to what degree this translated into sales of sponsors’ products.

“I found the Exhibition Hall disappointing. I had expected this to be a showcase of samples of courses and learning objects both commercially produced and those produced by institutions.”

Although the audience visiting the Exhibition Hall was only of moderate size, they were willing to be engaged. The challenge for future NET*Working event organisers and sponsors is to provide a forum that gives participants a practical opportunity to explore the potential benefits of the sponsors’ products. This will be enhanced where there are a variety of products on display with different applications using different technologies in different learning environments. It must allow exploration and have easy access to product support.

B-log

The NET*Working 2002 B-log with its ‘bee’ theme was the hub of informal conference activity. The B-log provided a safe environment (except for bee stings) for people to practice their online skills, discuss their experiences and unwind at the end of the day. The B-log included:

- Drone Zone – which allowed participants to network informally and engage in social discussion
- B-a-Winner – which encouraged people to share their digital images, sounds, jokes and poetry, resulting in a ‘B-log Gallery’ presentation at the end of the fortnight showcasing people’s work
- B-Hive – which was an informal space where people could share and discuss weblogs they had created
- B-Sting – which was the ‘cocktail bar’ where participants could find new recipes for their favourite poison.

The upsurge in participation in NET*Working 2002 in the hours between 8 and 11 p.m. can be partly attributed to people finding time to participate in the event after work, and to a fair degree to the B-log. While not to everyone’s taste (and 40% of post-event evaluation respondents indicated that they did not participate or found the B-log to be of no interest), the B-log was an immensely popular site

for a group of NET*Working participants. The discussions ranged far and wide, the jokes went from 'LOL' to terrible, and the poetry was b-tween inspired and rudimentary. But it was fun and imaginative and 'sensational' and 'fantastic' and never meant to be taken too seriously.

Yet, the informal nature of the B-log did not mean that it was devoid of educational benefits. For many who participated and really enjoyed the B-log also got the opportunity to share some of their thoughts from the activities they had participated in and continue their learning experience, just in a less formal, though no less valuable, way.

"The buzzy B-log zone was a good learning experience for me. I was in need of a testbed and found the B-hive quite supportive."

Polls and Prizes

NET*Working 2002 had daily polls on issues of interest to participants and organisers. These addressed issues related to where they were accessing the site from, the amount of time participants were spending online and where they were spending their time. Hundreds of people participated in the polls with 45% of respondents indicating that they found these to be of high or moderate interest. Particularly valuable was the chance for people to discuss their responses, which generated even more opportunities for sharing their NET*Working experience.

"I was interested in the polls and the results. I thought these were a great idea because they helped me reflect on my participation and then compare myself to others."

With the correct answers to a program of cryptic clues, puzzles and challenges, NET*Working 2002 made the daily prize awards a fun and rewarding way of increasing learning and collaboration. Prizes provided by sponsors and international presenters included a Graduate Certificate in e-Learning, digital cameras, books and resources. Event organisers used the prizes to advantage by setting Treasure Hunts that required participants to find 'knowledge nuggets' throughout the site. By hunting for treasure participants became more familiar with the site, searched through feature events and activities, gathered information on flexible learning resources and got to know more about fellow online practitioners.

4.5. Links to other AFL Framework Projects

Goal 1 of the AFL Framework ... creative, capable people ... aims 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. The Framework highlights the importance of national collaborative activities in developing the depth of the national VET skills pool in flexible learning, in ways not achievable at institutional or individual system level.

NET*Working 2002 has made a direct and significant contribution to achievement of this goal, and in doing so has proactively sought to integrate and showcase other AFL Framework projects.

Flexible Learning Toolboxes

Flexible Learning Toolboxes were a major event sponsor and featured throughout the scheduled program. In addition to the launch of Toolboxes Series 4 by Dr. Brendan Nelson, Minister for Education, Science and Training through a pre-recorded webcast, tours of the Toolboxes provided access to the latest multimedia learning tools. There was also a program of discussion activities run by the Toolbox Champions over the course of the event.

- About Toolboxes (featuring Series 2 and 3) ... Melanie Sorensen, Ian Kenny
- Getting started with Toolbox materials ... Greg Burchell, Denise Morgan
- Where does the teacher fit in? ... Guy Kemshal-Bell, Peter Robertson

- The discussion continues ... Vivienne Blanksby, Melanie Sorensen, Doug Purcell, Andrew Meers
- The Who, What, Why and How of Customising ... Julian Comacchio, Janice Wain, Andrew Meers
- Teaching and Learning Online with Toolboxes – The Facilitator’s Role ... Doug Purcell.
- Toolboxes for Everyone ... Melanie Burke, Glenda McPherson
- Tales from the Bush ... Melanie Burke, Peter Hogan
- How you can get involved and get support ... Vivienne Blanksby, Robby Weatherley, Lindy Smith.

These activities were generally well subscribed and attracted a variety of interest from experienced practitioners and first time NET*Workers.

Other AFL Framework activities

NET*Working 2002 was also able to leverage the results and findings of other AFL Framework activities. Approximately 30% of the non-feature events had a former Flexible Learning Fellow or Leader as sole or co-presenter. The contribution of this group to the sharing of ideas and experiences in elearning among Australian practitioners increases the return on investment made by the AFL Framework in this earlier professional development program, and exposes new elearning practitioners to those that have been leading Australia’s advancement over the past few years.

Other AFL Framework activities to feature in the workshop program included:

- Online Learning: What the FLAG research says ... Hugh Guthrie
- Flying a Kite for VET - Flexible Learning Innovations ... Carol Hampton, Ros Gill, Leura Cathcart
- Putting flexible learning into practice - The Australian Flexible Learning Framework can assist you ... Julie Ahern, Lindy Smith

4.6. Mentoring and Other Support

A significant feature of NET*Working 2002 was the formal and informal support available to participants through the NET*Working 2002 mentors, Guide, site tutorial and help desk.

Mentors

Four mentors (i.e. Frankie Forsyth, Donna Hensley, Vicki Marchant and Jo Murray) were contracted to be available by phone or email to assist participants in their planning, accessing and participation in NET*Working 2002. In addition, an Interest Group (i.e. ‘Making the most of NET*Working 2002’) was established to provide an online point of access to the mentors for people seeking any form of assistance. Through these mechanisms the mentors provided responsive, helpful and practical advice, tips and guidance to a number of participants, many of them relatively new to an elearning environment. Queries were often related to:

- posting messages and participating in online activities
- communicating with other participants through live messages and discussions
- finding people and activities on the site and linking to useful references.

The mentors were able to promote relevant features of the site (e.g. Find People, the ‘Your First Time’ workshop) and provide an effective way of delivering one-to-one and one-to-many support. Although the mentors’ support was not in very high demand, their contribution was highly valued from those participants that sought their support. Every word of support and encouragement, every piece of advice, every pointer in the right direction made someone’s day a little easier. Their inclusion in the overall package of support mechanisms available ensured that participants, especially those relatively

new to online events, could access a constant dedicated presence to answer any questions about the event or elearning generally. The mentors are to be commended for their efforts.

It was also notable from review of postings and messages that there was a very high level of informal support offered to participants by people outside the formal mentoring group. There are numerous examples littered over the NET*Working 2002 site of people asking ‘How do I ... ?’ and ‘Has anyone else ... ?’ and having their call for help heard and responded to by a nearby participant. This outcome reflects the positive community spirit that was engendered during the event.

“I think a lot of experienced people worked hard to make people like me (inexperienced) feel welcome, safe and valued.”

Other support

Pre-event planning was supported through the distribution of the Guide to NET*Working 2002 (see also Sections 2.5. and 2.7.). The Guide contained basic tips to optimise participation, including information in setting goals for the event, program activities, minimum technical requirements, logging in, getting around the site, facilities and tools on the site, and how to contribute to online chat and discussions. As noted previously, 63% of respondents found the Guide to be of high or moderate value, although some did not receive it until after the event had commenced.

Technical support was provided by Netspot via email and a Freecall telephone service. The major issues were related to logins (e.g. ‘Where’s my password?’) and advice on overcoming technical bugs in the system during the first few days of the event. Netspot proved responsive to demand and provided prompt efficient technical support.

Generally, where NET*Working 2002 participants needed and sought technical or navigational support, and even a boost in confidence, this was readily available through formal or informal means.

5. LIKE IT? LOVE IT?

Each NET*Working 2002 participant was able to construct a unique learning experience. Activities that were popular and interesting to some were never noticed by others. Features that some people loved were hated by others (as if to prove Thiagi's thoughts on 'contradictions'). Consequently, the findings and analysis presented in this section of the evaluation need to be read in light of the differences of opinion and experience that exist.

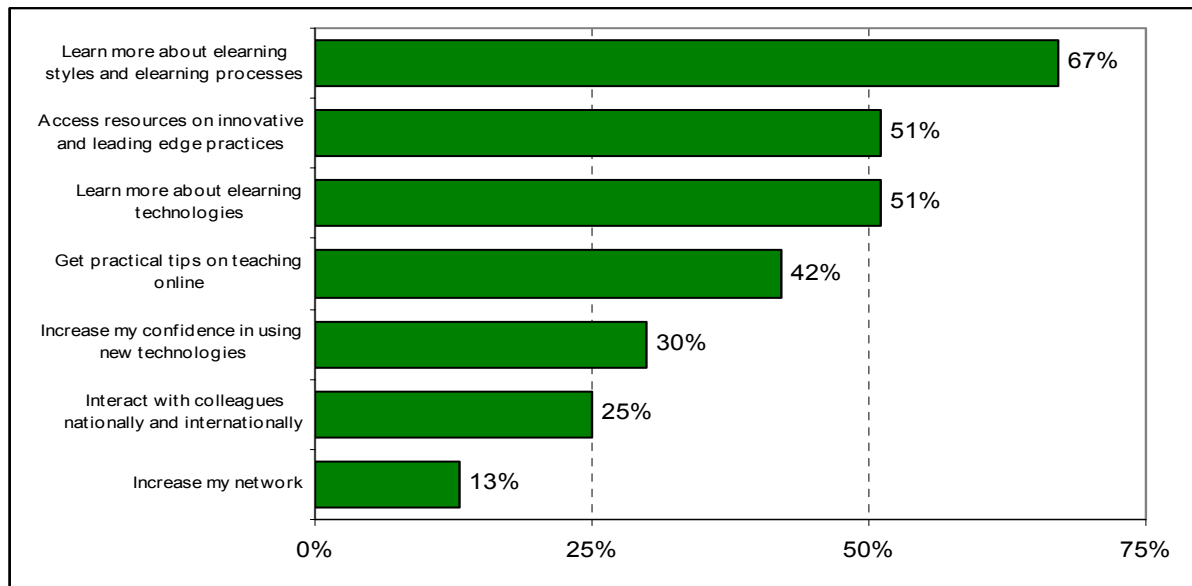
5.1. Educational Impact

NET*Working 2002's educational objectives were to:

- identify how flexible learning is meeting the needs of individuals, organisations and industry
- showcase latest developments in learning technologies
- weave online into the fabric of learning
- stimulate creative thinking about the application of learning in the online environment
- create new knowledge networks
- increase the skills and knowledge of people involved in online learning.

Prior to NET*Working 2002 participants were asked to identify up to three things they hoped to achieve by participating in the event. Consistent with the overall NET*Working 2002 objectives, the overwhelming response from two-thirds of respondents was to learn more about elearning styles and elearning processes. More than 50% of respondents also indicated their interest in accessing resources on innovative practices and finding out about elearning technologies. Fewer people saw the networking and peer interaction benefits as of primary importance.

Figure 12: Learning Objectives

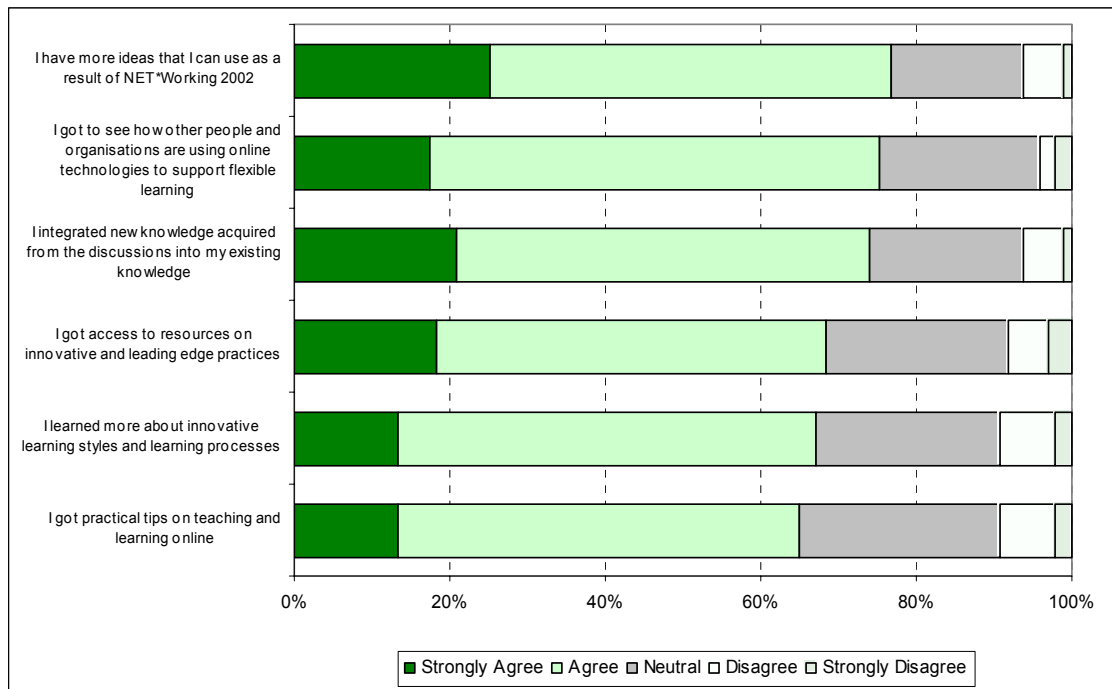


When asked about these same issues at the end of the event, the quantitative and qualitative responses indicate that NET*Working 2002 had a commendable degree of success in meeting its educational objectives.

The first four NET*Working 2002 objectives and the four highest ranked learning outcomes of participants related to showcasing, stimulating and integrating flexible learning into teaching and learning practices. Figure 13 shows that around 65% to 75% of respondents agreed with statements

indicating positive outcomes against these objectives. In all cases less than 10% of respondents indicated that they had not achieved the desired outcomes.

Figure 13: Learning Outcomes



Review of comments on the NET*Working site and evaluation forms supports these findings with most active participants accessing a range of activities and event features that allowed them to witness, discuss and engage in different elearning approaches and technologies.

*“NET*Working 2002 motivated me to consider communities of learning and how to utilise many types of learning strategies that are learner focused.”*

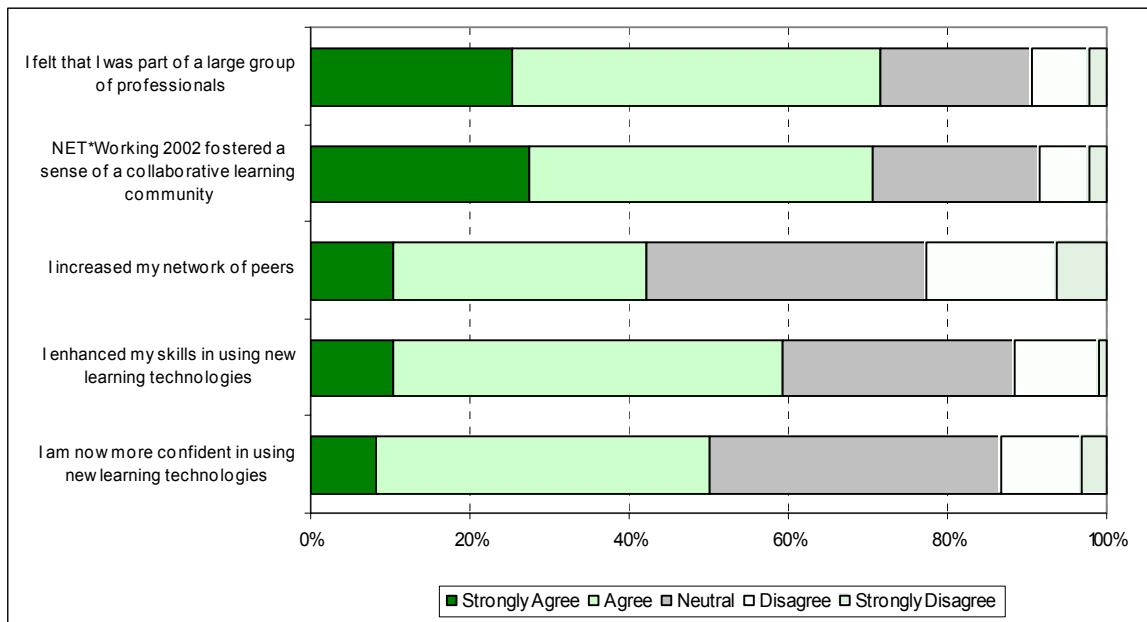
“I have found a multitude of information, ideas and concepts at this conference.”

*“NET*Working 2002 provided me with more sources to quote to defend our current strategies.”*

The remaining objectives of NET*Working 2002 and participants were related to the development of peer networks and elearning confidence and skills. Figure 14 shows that these were also achieved, although notably, just as participants saw these as less important objectives, the level of achievement of these outcomes was lower than for the learning outcomes identified above. While around 70% of respondents found that NET*Working 2002 fostered a sense of as collaborative learning community only 42% believed that they had increased their network of peers as a result of their participation.

59% of respondents indicated that they had enhanced their skills in using new learning technologies and 50% indicated increased confidence in use of technologies.

Figure 14: Skills and Networking Outcomes



The collaborative side of NET*Working 2002 was illustrated in the way participants engaged in formal learning activities and encouraged others to participate. It was also evident in the support, advice, guidance and encouragement offered by some more experienced practitioners to first timers who struggled early in finding their way around the site and were tentative early in their participation in activities.

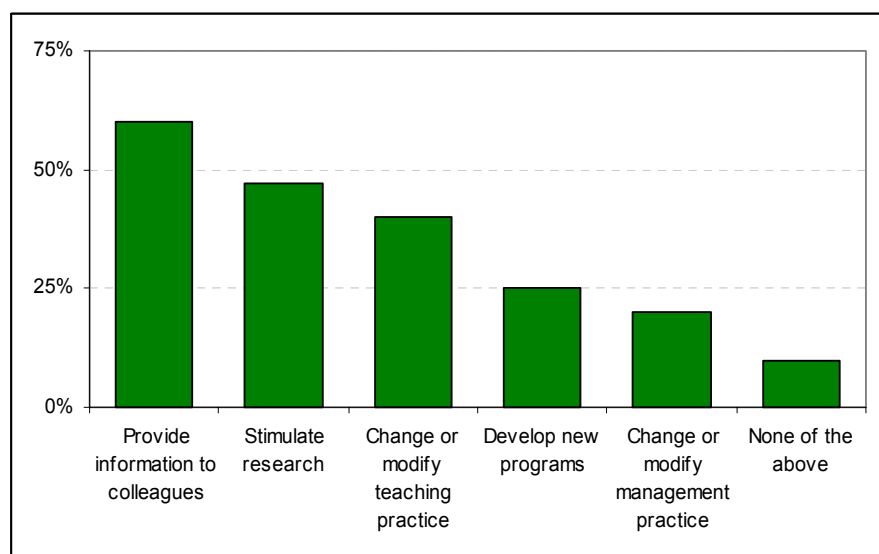
“This conference oozed inclusiveness and fostered confidence and online comfort.”

“I feel more confident in delivering and facilitating flexible learning.”

“This has given me the confidence to try online conferences again.”

90% of respondents to the post-event evaluation survey indicated that they would change their approach to flexible learning as a result of participating in NET*Working 2002 (see Figure 15). Most identified more than one change in their approach. 60% intended to keep sharing their NET*Working 2002 experience by providing information to colleagues. 40% anticipated changes to

Figure 15: Anticipated Changes to Approach to Flexible Learning



modify their teaching practice and 25% expected change to their management practice. The feedback from participants identified a range of practical outcomes from the event related to research, teaching practice, communication and access to resources.

"I had intended to introduce online delivery to our diploma course next year. What I have learned has helped me to go more quickly into the structure and given me some pointers in exactly how to set up the course."

"I'm going to investigate a games-based approach to numeracy elearning for my students."

"I will modify the way I 'market' the concept of elearning to the reluctant groups I encounter."

The responses of those who did not anticipate that NET*Working 2002 would facilitate changes in their flexible learning practices were reflected in an overall dissatisfaction with the event. For these participants NET*Working 2002 lacked real or relevant solutions to their learning objectives.

"I felt the whole thing was too strongly focused on TAFE. I was turned off the event because of this."

The perceived focus on TAFE, as noted by some non-TAFE participants, was exacerbated by the absence of clear 'signposts' to workshops and activities that were in the program that might have been of particular interest to industry, ACE, private RTO, school and government participants. All participants were looking for discussions and demonstrations that had relevance in their training, teaching and learning environment and were encouraged where the material presented illustrated this application, even if it was based in a different sector.

There was also a level of criticism or concern among individual participants about the absence of discussion or practical guidance on selected topics. More often than not there was in fact an activity that might have met the individual's learning need if they had been able to find it. Difficulties they may have experienced if looking for these sites were in the titles of activities not identifying all the issues that would be covered, and the flexible nature of discussions where seemingly peripheral topics can become central to a discussion if the facilitator and participants allow the discussion to take that path.

5.2. Participation

Making the most of NET*Working 2002

"If I was in South America I would arrange for a Spanish speaking guide to help me find my way around. Online I go to the navigation links guide and then create a map of where I travel, where I have been and where I want to go."

As indicated in earlier sections of this report, there was wide variation in the level of participation in NET*Working 2002. For the 50 people who spent more than 16 hours online over the two weeks of the event NET*Working 2002 was an engaging and even compelling experience that provided them with a rich source of information, ideas and inspiration. For another 100 to 150 who spent between 8 and 16 hours online the event clearly offered a substantial professional development opportunity and they committed themselves to participating fully and actively. Another 250 people spent between 4 and 8 hours online, some through extensive participation in a few activities and others with many short visits to explore what was going on, drop in on selected workshops and discussions and share ideas with colleagues.

Time online is far from a perfect indicator of participation in an online event of this sort. There are some people who spent only an hour or two on NET*Working 2002 who report positive learning benefits through access to resources, having seen how others are using technologies to support teaching and learning, and development of contacts with other practitioners.

However, it is fair to say that the 700 people who were registered for NET*Working 2002 and did not log in at all are unlikely to have gained much benefit from the event (although they can still access the public site and have the CD and support resources provided to registrants). And the 300 who after one or two logins spent a total of less than 15 minutes online are also unlikely to have gained greatly from the experience.

So there was a huge difference between registration and participation in NET*Working 2002, especially active participation. Was this a function of NET*Working 2002 or, as NET*Working 2000 had a similar outcome, an inherent feature of online events? [This is not to suggest that physical conferences are free from passive or non-participation.] The answer seems to draw together many of the basic aspects of the design and delivery of NET*Working 2002.

NET*Working 2002 was designed primarily with an experienced elearning practitioner in mind. To avoid pigeon-holing presenters' activities under headings that were inappropriate, to open up the program to any issue related to elearning, and to encourage participants to explore the event, the organisers did not put place a rigid structure around the program. Aside from the feature events and activities noted as relating to Toolboxes or the Year of the Outback there were no streams or themes. Therefore, the onus was on the participant to plan their NET*Working 2002 experience. In fact the first section of the NET*Working 2002 Guide addressed just that issue and provided tips to optimise participation:

- allocate time for participation
- plan NET*Working 2002 program to avoid missing out
- set some personal goals.

Those people that like mature disciplined responsible (e)learners set themselves objectives, planned their participation and committed the time to be involved in NET*Working 2002 had a great time. The majority that did not do this struggled to come to terms with the site and event, at least on their first attempt. Some came to terms with the flexible structure and found their way into the event. Others tried for a short time and gave up.

“It was a fantastic experience however I completely underestimated the amount of time I would need to prepare and participate in the forums.”

For some, their cause was not aided by delays in getting onto the site and not receiving the Guide before they started participation, if at all.

“We did not get our passwords until Friday afternoon by which time the conference was half way through! In addition, I still have not received a CD or any other support material. I gained no benefit from the conference.”

While this significantly reduced the time and/or their capacity to prepare and plan for NET*Working 2002, the experience of those who did have the support materials in advance of the conference indicates that most would still not have done the preparatory work to optimise the value of their participation.

Compounding the problem was the sheer volume of potential activities available in NET*Working 2002. The terms ‘overwhelming’ and ‘daunting’ were frequently used. It has been noted that there were over 100 formal NET*Working activities, and the fact that some of these had very low levels of participation might suggest that they could have been dropped from the program to reduce the scope and complexity of participants’ early exploratory and navigational tasks. However, these are decisions that can only be made in hindsight, as some of the events that proved popular and conference highlights for selected participants were ones that might not have survived a tighter more limiting acceptance test.

Participation in NET*Working 2002 was further constrained by participants not allocating or being allocated time out of their normal working day to 'attend' the conference. At an offsite physical conference it is easier for a participant to push the day-to-day activities aside for a while and focus on their professional development activity. Participants found this harder when they tried to fit participation in NET*Working 2002 around their normal working load, and that participation left them at their desk in an active work environment, with the phone ringing and the email beeping and colleagues and managers and students passing by.

"I found it impossible to spend the time required to derive the most benefit from the conference. Physically going to a conference means you are there and cannot be distracted by urgent work tasks. The technology is not the problem. It is the discipline to make the conference a priority."

*"I found that work commitments interfered with participation in NET*Working 2002, although I had cleared my schedule for maximum participation and decided what areas I wanted to be involved in. Colleagues ignored the clock although its use had been explained and they had been asked to respect those times when it was in use."*

"Combining Networking 2002 with working fulltime and doing another online facilitating course was just way too much. I couldn't help wondering if the more active participants actually had locked in work commitments."

Many participants lamented the lack of time they had or made available to participate in NET*Working 2002, and sought to 'do better next time'.

The challenge for event organisers, as has been found by elearning practitioners, is to be able to facilitate active participation when ultimate responsibility for learning and engagement rests with the participant. For despite the information provided in the NET*Working 2002 Guide and the work of the mentors and the scheduling features on the site, a substantial number of participants did not get as much from NET*Working 2002 as was possible. A more structured design might overcome some problems, but introduces others. Changing the timing or length of time of the event is not the solution.

"It was hard to sustain interest and time for two weeks. I'd prefer a one week conference."

"I just wish it was longer than two weeks as there were so many things happening at the one time I felt that I missed out on much discussion I could have benefited from."

Given the similar conclusions of the evaluation of NET*Working 2000, it may well be the case that despite the efforts of organisers and designers of the next fully online NET*Working event, this issues remains.

Inexperienced NET*Workers

In its planning and development, although not so explicitly in its marketing and communication material, NET*Working 2002 was primarily targeted at more experienced practitioners, whilst also offering a productive elearning experience for first time or inexperienced NET*Workers. In some cases it was able to achieve this very effectively, while other participants struggled to get into the event and lost interest or enthusiasm.

"As a first timer it was rather daunting, but it has been a valuable learning experience both in terms of learning from others as well as involvement in this form of conferencing."

Factors that assisted inexperienced practitioners to make the most of NET*Working 2002 included:

- time to plan their participation with the aid of the NET*Working 2002 Guide
- local organisational encouragement and support (e.g. CIT interest group)
- communication with the NET*Working 2002 mentors
- finding and participating in activities targeted specifically at first timers (e.g. ‘Your First Time’ ... Robert Pulling, Lyn Ambrose).

*“After looking around various workshops I am so pleased to find this site. This site seems a good way to start practising posting. Thanks for providing this site for us newcomers.”
(First time NET*Worker from the ‘Your First Time’ site)*

The challenge in addressing the needs of both experienced and inexperienced NET*Workers was noted by one participant.

“The only reservation I have is regarding the extent to which these online conferences reach out to beginners, especially those from non TAFE RTOs who are at the bottom of the learning curve in use of the online environment. Some LearnScopers from small RTOs reported to me to being entirely baffled on opening up the site for the first time. I don't think they stayed around for too long. Although there was something in this for everyone, clearly the site as a whole is designed for fairly advanced TAFE sector e-practitioners and perhaps later adopters or quasi-adopters.

I don't have an answer to this, as bringing it down to a lower common denominator would destroy the richness of the experience. I think the answer is in providing support to these beginners, in face-to-face induction sessions and follow up support sessions. Face-to-face support at the local level is critical. In this respect the Interest Groups facility can be a very good ice breaker, as experienced in the CIT's Interest Group. This is the way to go in the next event ... areas for local VET communities, LearnScopers, etc. to start paddling and getting the weather reports before surfing the big waves.”

NET*Working 2002's design included some of the critical success factors identified below, through provision of mentors and special interest groups. For some first time NET*Workers they also had the local support that resulted in them having a more productive elearning experience.

5.3. Design and Delivery

Design

74% of respondents to the evaluation survey said that they found the site attractive and easy on the eye. 50% said that they found it easy to navigate around the site.

“Three cheers to the designers of the interface. I thought it was fantastic ... easy to navigate, became very personal very quickly, everything was a click away ... thought through on a human scale as well as a technical one.”

However, 32% did not find the navigation easy. With a large volume of information available, these participants sought greater guidance on how to get around the site, discover what it had to offer, access key features and make the most of their NET*Working 2002 experience. As many participants did not have or allocate sufficient time to familiarise themselves with the site when they first logged in they missed out on what was available and used aspects of the site inefficiently. This may be aided in the future through provision of a prominent site map or short online tutorial available to participants when they log in, especially early in the event.

Overall, however, aside from issues related to the question of whether to stream or not to stream workshops activities, a matter on which people were divided in their response, the site design received a positive endorsement from a majority of participants.

Technical

The evaluation of NET*Working 2000 indicated that “frustration with technical issues caused either by lack of experience, the site or the readiness of participants’ organisations continued to be a main problem for participants and event organisers.” NET*Working 2002 was not without some technical issues but these were mostly isolated and often individual or organisational issues beyond the control of event organisers and site designers and developers.

“A few teething problems were fixed up quickly and site went on to demonstrate brilliant stability for a large event handling an incredible amount of simultaneous dataflow.”

“Amazing WebX implementation.”

*“The technical problems related to my organisation rather than NET*Working 2002.”*

Overall, 31% of evaluation respondents indicated some technical problems in using the site, which ranged from very minor to more restricting. Examples and concerns included:

- ‘poor search engine’
- inability to load the CD because of organisational and network restrictions
- firewall problems
- absence of sound cards.

As noted previously, some of the criticisms and concerns with the site were related to participants not identifying the support mechanism, feature or advice they were after, although these were available on the site (e.g. ability to review postings, expanding tool for seeing all messages in full, helpdesk support). Again, the core technical requirements for best access to NET*Working 2002 were specified in the Guide, but participants or their IT departments did not necessarily read or get this information.

The relative absence of technical problems was a credit to the project and technical team.

5.4. Highs and Lows

With thousands of people and a vast array of learning opportunities available over a two week period it is not surprising that NET*Working 2002 elicited different responses from different people. The evaluation survey captured some of the highs that participants got from their NET*Working experience.

“A brilliant conference. I loved 2000, and in the level and quality of information and discussion 2002 was even better.”

“This is one of the most VIBRANT and useful online events that I have been involved in. Any criticism is entirely in the interest of seeing it become SUPERB!”

“Thank you for making this a professional development highlight of the year for me, and many others colleagues I have talked to. We became increasingly enthused as the days went by and our greatest regret is having to finish off!”

“I need psychological counselling ... some sort of debrief to bring me down ... I haven't cooked for 12 days and my kids can now fend for themselves four year old included! A positive spin-off of the conference.”

“Please put the other 24 hours back in my days.”

Aside from the many people who were registered but for whatever reasons did not participate in NET*Working 2002 at all, a small number of people who did get actively involved were strident critics of the event for not living up to their expectations.

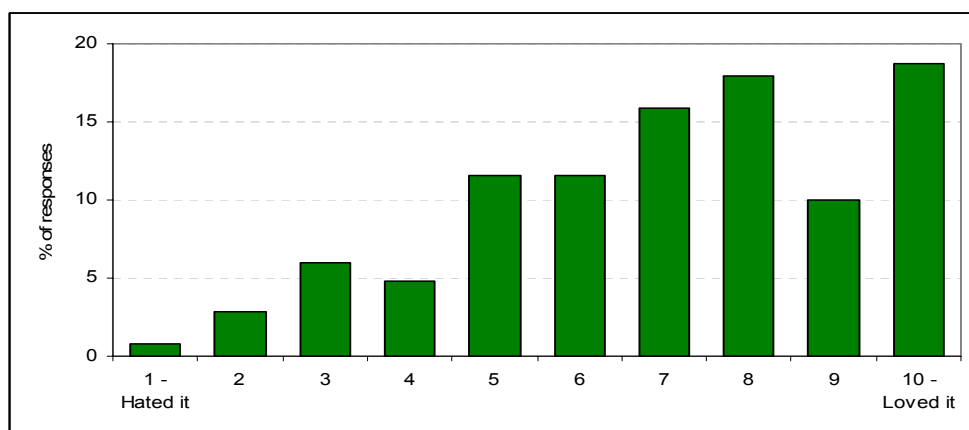
“This is an example of not encouraging people to participate. There were too many forums and an appearance of ‘the old and faithful’ participating. There have to be practical workshops if new practitioners are to be encouraged. There was regurgitation of past and current issues with no one providing ‘real solutions’. Many of the ‘experts’ provided a lesson of jargonisation at the expense of intimidating ‘newbies’ to the event. Unless one is involved in a large institution this conference did not provide or encourage those outside this inner sanctum to participate. I have no doubts there was a significant amount of effort went into this event, and for your personal efforts ‘Well done’.”

“I thought that it was a big waste of our organisation’s money and my time. Time that I allocated to attend specific events were wasted due to facilitators not turning up. I found the site less than easily arranged. In the discussion boards that I was involved in the topics seemed irrelevant to real life situations. As I didn’t receive the pack at all it was all the more difficult. I wouldn’t bother paying money to attend again, which is a shame as I was extremely keen to participate in my first conference.”

Overall

However, overall the feedback from those who actively participated in NET*Working 2002 was that it provided a rich, productive and varying elearning experience. On an overall scale from 1 (‘I hated it’) to 10 (‘I loved it’) respondents rated NET*Working 2002 at an average of 7.0 out of 10. This is a significantly positive result. As indicated throughout this evaluation (and in Figure 16 below) the result was the combined response of a cohort of people who really enjoyed NET*Working 2002, a group for whom it delivered benefits and positive learning outcomes, although to a lesser degree, and a group who were dissatisfied with the event. Nearly 50% of people rated the event at 8 or above yet 10% scored NET*Working 2002 at 3 or lower.

Figure 16: Overall Enjoyment of NET*Working 2002

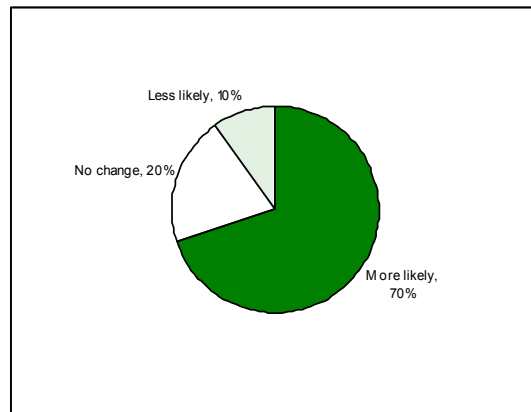


This does not, however, account for the people who were registered for NET*Working 2002 and did not participate at all, or whose participation was extremely low.

When asked if, as a result of participating in

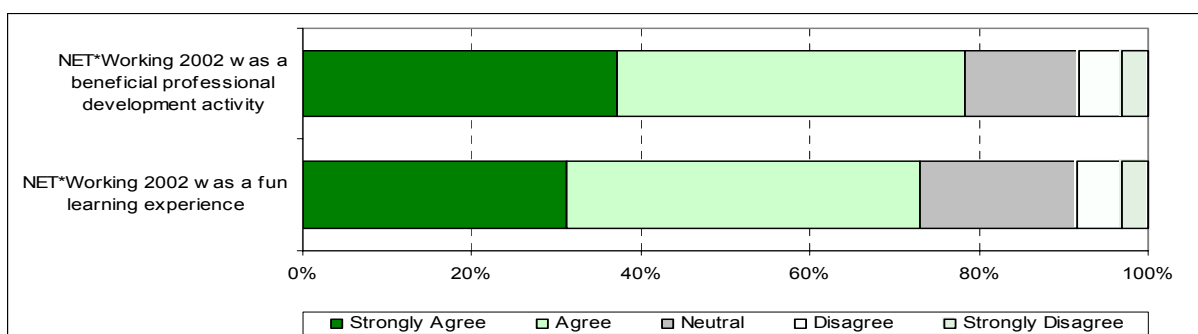
Figure 17: Future Participation in Online Events

NET*Working 2002, they were more or less likely to participate in future online events conference activities the response was clear. 70% indicated that they would be back for more. On average this group rated NET*Working 2002 at 7.9 out of 10. In addition, quite a few of the respondents who said NET*Working 2002 had no influence on their future participation are ones who are experienced elearning practitioners who rated NET*Working 2002 highly and would participate in future events anyway. Only 10% of respondents said that having participated in NET*Working 2002 that they would be less likely to participate in similar events in the future. Understandably, there was a fair degree of overlap between this group and those for whom NET*Working 2002 had not met their learning objectives. On average they rated NET*Working 2002 at 3.8 out of 10.



Finally, it is worth noting that NET*Working 2002 set out to be a fun and engaging professional development activity for elearning practitioners. And according to 70 to 80% of respondents, in this ... it was successful.

Figure 18: Satisfaction with NET*Working 2002



“The whole team should be warmly and soundly congratulated - a fantastic effort and a world class event. Now that you're opening it to the public what a fabulous learning tool it would be - probably the best I've seen - for engaging and sustaining interest.

For me the best and most exhilarating effect was in the creation of a 'parallel universe' in which one could imagine another perspective, another life, another personae, and another workspace. The closest thing to being a participant in a two week, action packed, fun filled, thought provoking and mind boggling - in the flesh networking, conferencing and collaborating event. An elearning experience!”

6. DO IT AGAIN?

6.1. Conclusions

NET*Working 2002 was huge. There was so much on offer from different presenters on different topics, with different learning opportunities through formal and informal and individual and collaborative means, that many participants found the whole experience overwhelming, at least in the first instance.

*“The only problem with NET*Working 2002 was how BIG it was. This was its strength and weakness.”*

Therefore, in drawing conclusions from the story of NET*Working 2002 as told in the preceding sections of this evaluation, let them be very simple.

1. **Registration** – Over 2,600 people registered for NET*Working 2002. They came from all states and territories and overseas. They came from different types of organisations. This didn't perfectly match organisers' expectations or the distribution of elearning practitioners, but the level of registration was a credit to the organising and marketing teams.
2. **Design** – NET*Working 2002 combined feature events from profile presenters with nearly 100 workshops and discussion activities. Participants could also enhance their elearning knowledge and experience through involvement in special interest groups, viewing Cool Tools and How To ... s, joining the B-log and fun polls and prize challenges. Although targeted at more experienced practitioners there were activities that first timers used to find their NET*Working feet. There was almost something for everyone.
3. **Technical** – The application worked to specification. For most (but not all) participants the platform was transparent and they could focus on their learning activities rather than technical hitches. Congratulations to the technical coordinators and Netspot.
4. **Participation** – Not everyone who registered participated. 28% of registrants (more than 700 people) did not log in to NET*Working 2002 at all (compared to 31% in NET*Working 2000). The reasons related to lack of dedicated time, lack of knowledge about their registration and local technical barriers. Overall, 60% of participants spent less than one hour on the site. Again, time was the major factor limiting further involvement, although the initial sense of being overwhelmed by the volume of activities and the absence of a rigid design structure turned some people off. This low level of engagement was in sharp contrast to the 9% who spent four to eight hours online and the 6% who spent more than eight hours and in some cases over forty hours online over the twelve days of NET*Working 2002.
5. **Making the Most of NET*Working 2002** – Those people, that like mature responsible (e)learners set themselves objectives, planned their participation and committed the time to be involved in NET*Working 2002 had a great time. The sense of excitement and enthusiasm (and exhaustion) from people in their contributions on the live site and to evaluation activities indicates a very high degree of satisfaction from this group of active participants. Those people with very low levels of participation missed out on much that was on offer.
6. **Meeting Educational Objectives** – The majority of active participants met their learning objectives and those of event organisers. Participants were able to see how other people and organisations are using online technologies to support flexible learning and meet the need of individuals, organisations and industry. Participants were able to access resources on leading edge practices. The events and activities on offer stimulated thinking about the application of

learning in the online environment. To a lesser degree skills and confidence in using new learning technologies were increased. Overall, NET*Working 2002 generated an enthusiasm for now sharing it and doing it back in the workplace with colleagues, staff and students.

7. **The keys to success** – One of the factors behind the success of NET*Working 2002 for those who got involved was that because there was such a variety of elearning opportunities available, there was always something to suit and engage any individual's interest. Consequently the list of event highlights that provided the most fulfilling learning experiences covers everything from Stephen Downes' Daily to Marc Prensky's digital natives, the Wisdom Tent, Teaching in the Twilight Zone, Toolboxes, virtual tours, email games and role plays. For others it was the fun in the B-log, sharing Cool Tools with colleagues, winning prizes or creating and being involved in special interest groups. Through variety, and a generally high quality of activities, NET*Working 2002 delivered for some a rewarding and enjoyable professional development experience.

So, NET*Working 2002 was a wonderful elearning experience for some participants who got together and saw it, did it, shared it. It has created a wonderful resource for all elearning practitioners. Those who didn't access it missed out. Those who did access it but didn't have or give the time needed to optimise the value of their participation also missed out.

It was well managed and drew on the resources of highly capable people from across the VET sector and specialist technical, marketing and promotional areas.

The question is, 'How can event organisers and designers encourage people to participate more actively in future events?' Information on how to make the most of NET*Working 2002 was published in the NET*Working 2002 Guide, but not everyone availed themselves of this information. [Due to logistical problems some people did not have the opportunity to do this, which was a regrettable outcome.] The site design encouraged exploration, which suited some people but not others. The variation in how people reached their most positive experiences highlights the differences in learning styles and preferences, making it very difficult for any conference of any type to cater for all people. NET*Working 2002 sought to overcome this by offering a vast array of elearning opportunities, but not everyone found the one that was best suited to them, even though it may have actually been on offer.

There are things that could have been done better. In a continuous improvement culture there always will be. Just as NET*Working 2002 built on the findings of NET*Working 2000, so to should future NET*Working activities learn from this experience. NET*Working 2002 sets a benchmark for similar activities.

Where to from here?

With the accumulated experience of NET*Working 2000 and NET*Working 2002 it is worth asking the question ... is there value in a fully online NET*Working conference?

The answer is 'Yes'. NET*Working 2002 set and met its educational and marketing objectives. It provided participants with the opportunity to be part of a diverse multi-layered extended professional development and networking activity. It demonstrated much about the benefits and challenges of flexible learning – for participants, presenters and organisers.

An online conference is not the same as a physical conference and in many ways should not be compared with one. The style and volume of interactions and communications and the learning approaches are quite different. But because of the absence of physical boundaries, one thing it is possible for an online conference to do is to provide significant flexibility in scale and scope. Once the technical infrastructure was in place, NET*Working 2002 could easily have coped with more active

participants. Without advocating this, it could easily have coped with more workshops and discussions. And it could have done this very cost effectively.

So apart from the fact that it makes sense for there to be a major periodic online event in the calendar of the AFL Framework, NET*Working 2002 has shown that it is possible to do this as a quality presentation, with a model that could reach out and simultaneously engage an enormous number of experienced and less experienced elearning practitioners.

6.2. Recommendations

The response to the recommendations arising from the NET*Working 2000 evaluation was evident in the planning, design and delivery of NET*Working 2002. For example:

- implementing a range of support strategies for participants
- providing adequate time to test the site prior to the commencement of the event
- exploring available technical options for the conference platform
- maintaining the NET*Working 2002 site as a useful resource after the completion of the event
- showcasing AFL Framework projects.

The following recommendations from the evaluation of NET*Working 2002 are primarily focused on continuous and incremental improvement of NET*Working events and management processes. They identify lessons from this year's experience that should be considered in future decision-making.

Good online event practice

The success of NET*Working 2002 was the net result of a wide range of contributions from a multitude of elearning practitioners – organisers, developers, presenters and participants. There were also features of the event and site design that contributed to the learning and networking opportunities available to participants. Where appropriate these features, or their extensions, should be considered for inclusion in design and delivery of future online AFL Framework activities.

Recommendation 1

That as in NET*Working 2002, future online AFL Framework activities include where appropriate the following design and support features:

- special interest groups (to facilitate organic development of communities of practice)
- a 'satchel' (to enable participants to build their own conference and reference resource)
- instant messaging (to facilitate communication between participants)
- online mentors (to support participants in meeting their practical educational, navigational and technical needs)
- fun activities (to stimulate and motivate participation).

Marketing and Promotion

The distribution of NET*Working 2002 participants by organisation type reflected the experience of previous NET*Working events. Whilst 2002 attracted a solid level of participation from universities, government and semi-government agencies, the level of involvement from the ACE and industry sectors remained relatively low. Overcoming this will require a combination of effective marketing and promotional activities directly into those target groups with a conference program that meets their particular elearning issues. If a greater level of engagement from these sectors is desired, there will need to be some specific allocation of resources and development of program content, rather than reliance on a general professional development offering.

Taking the ACE sector as an example, to attract more participants from the ACE sector the marketing messages should be targeted at the sector through communication channels, in a language and in a form that appeals to ACE. They should be backed up by a conference program that in the first instance presents ACE participants with clear signposts as to where to find activities and tools that are particularly relevant to ACE. Once a level of engagement has been created participants are likely to branch out into the wider program and explore what it has to offer. This is not to imply that participants from the ACE sector did not find NET*Working 2002 extremely valuable – some did. Nor is it suggesting that organisers need to develop a complete parallel program for ACE (and industry ... and government ... etc.) – they do not. It is simply making the point that to optimise the level of engagement, all participants need to be very quickly able to answer the questions, ‘Why should I commit my time to this event?’ and ‘What’s in it for me?’

Recommendation 2

That participation targets for sub-sectors of the target audience be a primary input, at the earliest opportunity, to decisions on budget allocation, marketing and program design.

Recommendation 3

That information from the registration database from NET*Working 2002 be used to support marketing activities of future NET*Working events.

Participation

Participants who planned and dedicated time to their participation in NET*Working 2002 had a rewarding elearning experience. However, given the number of people who participated in NET*Working 2002 to only a small degree, and their expressed concern about conflict with continuing work commitments, it may be worthwhile in future online events establishing communication messages for managers and supervisors that encourage them to support staff having dedicated time to actively participate in the activities offered.

The success of the CIT and other organisation-specific interest groups suggests that participation is activated where ‘attendance’ in the conference is part of a sanctioned and holistic professional development activity.

Recommendation 4

That future online events strengthen messages to:

- participants on the personal value in planning their event participation and dedicating time to participate
- managers and supervisors about supporting participation in online activities as legitimate and important professional development activities
- managers to stimulate participation of their staff through conduct of onsite support activities prior to, during and after the online event.

Program design and project management

This evaluation of NET*Working 2002 has highlighted the fact that the model of the mature adult learner, taking responsibility for, planning for and fulfilling their online learning objectives does not extend to all elearning practitioners. Different learners have different learning styles. They gather, assimilate and analyse information differently and have preferences in the way that they communicate as part of the learning process.

NET*Working 2002 offered a diverse range of learning forums and networking opportunities to cater for different learning styles. Organisers of future NET*Working 2002 events should continue to offer variety in program design and content that facilitates engagement and participation by different types of learners.

Recommendation 5

That as with NET*Working 2002, future NET*Working events endeavour to explicitly accommodate different learning styles in the design of the event program, support features and application development.

The success of NET*Working 2002 owes a great deal to the planning that went into the event and the performance of the team that managed its design and delivery. The planning session conducted late in 2001 established objectives for the event and provided a focus that was able to be carried throughout the subsequent ten months of development. The structure of the project team, which comprised small teams, 'experts' and aides undertaking specific tasks with a core project team managing the overall project ensured a highly professional outcome. This approach should be encouraged for future NET*Working events.

Recommendation 6

That as with NET*Working 2002, future NET*Working events have a strategic planning session to set objectives and directions approximately 12 to 15 months before the event is scheduled to occur.

Recommendation 7

That as with NET*Working 2002, future NET*Working events adopt a project management approach that utilises the breadth of professional expertise that exists in relation to promotion, development and delivery of online professional development activities.

Application development

Having invested in development of the application for NET*Working 2002, there now exists a substantial and flexible application with a range of customised features that has shown itself to be capable of handling a large volume of participants in an online conference. It is not unreasonable to expect that the application has potential beyond its current use. Without pre-empting developments in technology over the next few years it might be possible to re-use the application, with some upgrading, for future online NET*Working activities. This may provide significant budget advantages for these activities. It may also be possible to leverage this investment where state training authorities or networks of training providers want to use an online application for similar professional development or networking opportunities.

Section 2.4 also identifies areas in which technical coordination of future online events could be enhanced.

Recommendation 8

That consideration be given to leveraging the investment that has been made in developing an application for NET*Working 2002 by re-using and/or customising the application for future online NET*Working events and related activities.

Recommendation 9

That application development timelines for future NET*Working events allow for sufficient time up

front to fully conceptualise and define the user experience and required functionality.

Sponsorship

As noted in Section 2.6, some attempts to generate sponsorship, especially from corporate sponsors, were constrained by a misalignment between the timing of the sponsorship approach from NET*Working 2002 and the allocation of organisations' sponsorship budgets

With many potential corporate sponsors allocating their sponsorship budget on a calendar year basis, sponsorship decisions are finalised and locked in during the November-December period. This made it more difficult for NET*Working 2002 to attract sponsors as it commenced activity in January 2002. Obtaining sponsorship for future NET*Working conferences, whether online or not, will be enhanced if the lead time for planning and presenting the sponsorship prospectus allows sufficient time for repeat and potential sponsors to allocate funds within their overall sponsorship budgets. Opportunities for obtaining sponsorship of multiple NET*Working events should also be explored (e.g. obtaining in 2003 a sponsorship commitment for both NET*Working 2003 and NET*Working 2004).

Recommendation 10

That sponsorship lead times be set to cover sponsors' budget allocation timeframes.

Registration processes

The major concern with the organisation and delivery of NET*Working 2002, from a participants' perspective, was with the distribution of the NET*Working 2002 Guide, CD and other support material and the distribution of login IDs and password information. Both issues were constrained to some degree by the absence of complete and accurate participant information from the registration processes, a process that itself proved cumbersome with separate systems operating in parallel to accommodate different registration and payment options. To facilitate more effective management of the event, participant support and planning of participants these processes could have been improved.

Recommendation 11

That for future NET*Working events:

- there be a single master registration process that captures up-to-date accurate and complete information on the number and profile of conference registrations.
- online registration be encouraged as the preferred method of registration
- the process allow registration details (especially for group registration) to be updated directly
- registration, production and distribution timelines be set to ensure that all participants registered as at approximately two weeks prior to commencement of the event have support material delivered to them no less than one week prior to the event.

APPENDIX A – EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of NET*Working 2002 was undertaken in four broad stages between February and November 2002. The basic methodology is detailed below.

Project Stage	Activities	Outputs
<i>1. Project Planning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review NET*Working 2002 objectives, background documentation and the evaluation of NET*Working 2000 ▪ Document intended outcomes and targeted stakeholder groups ▪ Identify preliminary evaluation questions ▪ Review and agree project objectives, plan, milestones and deliverables ▪ Plan for integration of evaluation activities into the NET*Working 2002 program, website and communication material. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project workplan ▪ Evaluation activity schedule
<i>2. Questionnaire Development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop evaluation questions covering all aspects of NET*Working 2002 for completion by participants online prior to and after the event ▪ Test questionnaire ▪ Prepare information about the evaluation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluation questions
<i>3. Data Collection and Analysis</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conduct interviews/workshops with personnel involved in planning, marketing and administration of NET*Working 2002 (both before and after the event) to address process issues ▪ Encourage participants to complete the online evaluation questionnaires prior to and at the conclusion of the event ▪ Monitor online activities and postings during the event ▪ Manage evaluation interest group on the event site ▪ Analyse website statistics ▪ Conduct telephone interviews with event personnel and a selection of participants, presenters and sponsors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quantitative and qualitative evaluation data
<i>4. Report and Recommendations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Draft and review evaluation report ▪ Present draft report to Steering Committee ▪ Finalise report and recommendations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Final report consolidating evaluation findings and recommendations

As part of the post-event consultation the evaluation spoke to a selection of project personnel, presenters, sponsors and participants. It should be noted that while most of these people had a particular interest in aspects of NET*Working 2002 (or in some cases had dual roles – e.g. Steering Committee members and presenters), they were nearly all participants in the event. Their contribution to the evaluation therefore addresses multiple perspectives.

APPENDIX B – NET*WORKING 2002 TEAM

NET*Working 2002 was managed and delivered by a core project team from the NSW Department of Education and Training. Specialist teams were appointed to undertake technical development, marketing and sponsorship functions. In addition, there were also a number of other individuals who were entrusted with undertaking specific activities in the planning, development and delivery of NET*Working 2002: The entire team included the following people.

Name	Role
Professional Development Network - Robby Weatherley - David Sanders - Connie Salat	Project Manager Project Team Project Team
Hunter Institute of TAFE - David Hanrahan - David McDonald	Technical coordination
Jacoby & Reis Consulting - Jennifer Reis Caroline Thurlow Communications - Caroline Thurlow	Marketing
Events R Us - Adam Atkinson	Sponsorship
Netspot	Application development
Marie Jasinski	Coordinate feature events and manage and support these presenters
Sue Denham	Coordinate the Year of the Outback program
Vivienne Blanksby	Coordinate the toolbox presentations
Rose Grozdanic	Coordinate the B-log
Helena Gregory	Manage presenter input
Marie Banfield	Support development of the pre-conference package
Stephanie Champion	HTML editor
Val Evans	Coordinate the facilitators of the discussion groups
Frankie Forsyth Guy Kemshall-Bell Louise Housden Jan Whitaker	Discussion group facilitators
Vicki Marchant Donna Hensley Frankie Forsyth Jo Murray	Mentors
Bullet Creative IMPART Corporation ArtProjects Creative Jan Gillbank Ee-Leng Kok	Print and web designers
Jack Gilding	Assist with documentation of technical requirements
Andrew Bowman Bo Schafers	Prepare material for the Cool Tools and How To ... components of the site

APPENDIX C – NET*WORKING 2002 ACTIVITIES

Participants in NET*Working 2002 were able access and participate in the following feature events, workshops, discussions and showcases.

Feature Events

Title	Presenters
Flexible Learning Toolboxes Launch and associated events	Including Brendan Nelson
Shaping our Future	Moira Scollay Lee Skertchly Penny Flett Peter Richardson Anita Maynard
Australia and Online Learning – Lessons on Strategic Implementation and Effective Learning	Peter Tilton
Collaborative Learning Online: Myth, Magic or just a lot of Bonk?	Curtis Bonk
Community, Content and Commerce	Michael Gurstein Gillian Sellar Nancy White
Designing Elearning for the Digital Generation	Marc Prensky
Then, Now, Next – A forum of past presenters	Gilly Salmon Tom Reeves Thiagi Sivasailam Nigel Paine

Workshops (Year of the Outback)

Title	Presenters
Living and Learning (and Technology)	Sue Lear
Visual Stories - Indigenous education in practice in Alice Springs	Greg Crowe Christopher Brocklebank
Carpentry on Thursday - Thursday Island that is	Brian Reggler Martha Goldman
Community Telecentre - Nyngan	Louise Fisher
Community Telecentre - Tibooburra	Joanne Nicholls
Cyberkids do it easy - South Oz School of the Air in action	Harvey Feldstein Roger Edmonds
The Deni Ute Muster ..Historic Wool Wagon Trek	Jacqueline Bates
Engaging Industries - Training in the Pilbara	Peter Smith Rob Stowell
Internet Community Hour - Albany	Gillian Sellar Karen Melzack
Beyond the Outback - Tele-learning	Michael Barbour
Online Tools for Indigenous Teachers Cairns/Brisbane	Martha Goldman Peter Andrews
Outback Computer Training - Remote Delivery in North West Queensland	Gary Wood
Pedagogy of the Distressed - Out of Alice Springs	Fred Richardson
VET in the Desert - Ngaanyatjarra Community College, Warburton	Pam Collier

Workshops

Title	Presenters
A Touch of FAME - engaging teachers and students online	Val Evans Jenny Kingham Ian Newton Greg Webb
Access 1 Step 1	Melanie Sorensen Ian Kenny Rhonda Daniell
An introduction to an Integrated Elearning System to support Blended Learning	Noel Stubbs
Blended learning - The Strategy for Competitive Advantage	Kathleen Norman
Community Service work training using Multi Modal Delivery	Keith McGinn Elynne Eaglemead
Cross Cultural Communication Online - perspectives from around the globe	Michael Coghlan
A Virtual Tour of Rabaul, PNG	Peter Hillery
About Toolboxes (featuring Series 2 and 3)	Ian Kenny Melanie Sorensen
At Risk – An online role play	Margaret Barron
DIY Survey Package	Matthew Hardy
Email Games: Creative use of a simple technology	Marie Jasinski
e-Moderation : The key to teaching and learning online	Claire Brooks Chantelle Cox
Exploring Learning Objects in Teaching, Learning and Training	Cecilie Murray Garry Putland
Getting started with Toolbox materials	Greg Burchell Denise Morgan
How to run a virtual classroom	Harvey Feldstein
How you can get involved and get support	Vivienne Blanksby Robby Weatherley Lindy Smith
Hunting for gems in the flexible learning information jungle	Matthew Jackson Jack Gilding Lin Thompson Jennifer Gibb Lindy Smith Tamara Carpenter Nicole White
Introducing online learning into mainstream school education	Shayne Baker
Learning in a Parallel Universe...part2...Participating	Simon O'Mallon
Learning objects - A direction in online learning	Tony Whittingham
LEARNINGFUTURES.NET	Jock Grady
Let the show begin in the Virtual Arena	Sally Drummond
Marketing the unmarketable to the unwilling for non-marketers	Marty Cielens
Online Presentations - Not the same old slides please	Nan Allen Nick Grainger Jono Tobin
Putting flexible learning into practice - The Australian Flexible Learning Framework can assist you	Julie Ahern Lindy Smith
Resource Generator - professional development online	Bernadette Delaney

	Georgie Cane
See it. Do it. SHARE IT! - An Evaluation of NET*Working 2002	Ian Phillips
Strategies for building on-line academic communities	David Cillay
Teaching and Learning Online with Toolboxes – The Facilitator’s Role	Doug Purcell
The benefits of cultural diversity in online learning	Lyn Goodear
The discussion continues	Vivienne Blanksby Melanie Sorensen Doug Purcell Andrew Meers
The Who, What, Why and How of Customising	Julian Comacchio Andrew Meers Janice Wain
Toolboxes for Everyone	Melanie Burke Glenda McPherson
Using Mobile computing to achieve learning anywhere	Sandi Barber
What 'clicks' in Online Learning	Raju Varanasi Peter Baldwin
Why use a multi-function, high-tensile, dense mass impacting device when a simple hammer will do?	Marty Cielens

Discussions

Title	Presenters
Are you sure its okay for you to do that? Regulatory frameworks for flexible learning	Jennifer Dunbabin Frankie Forsyth
Australian Business Week brings curriculum alive	Denise Dunn
Benefits of using web technology for teachers and facilitators	Janice Anderson
Beyond the learning map, online teaching resources a continual dialogue with students	Andrew Bowman
Online & Just in Time - Change and e-learning	Peter Holmes
City/Country Student Differences in Accessibility and Support Myth or Fact?	Jan Whitaker Louise Housden
Copyright Licensing - Online and Live	Carol Fripp Sylvia Smale Meredith Graham
Cultural Encounters of the Third Kind	Jackie Stokes Margaret Lloyd Bronwyn Stuckey
Delivering Online to the Pacific Islands - the highs and lows	Julie Collareda Bill Clark David Brooks
Flying a Kite for VET - Flexible Learning Innovations	Carol Hampton Ros Gill Leura Cathcart
From Battery Hens to Free Range learners	Joeena Simpson
From Policy to Practice: Flexible Learning issues from around Australia	Marjorie Blanco Catherine Burrows Elizabeth McPherson Mike Brough Valerie Hazel Karen Ho
How libraries are supporting students for online learning	Stephen Barnett
How to discover and contribute to EDNA Online	Nancye Stanelis

Title	Presenters
	Dan Nicholas
How to listen Online	Jess Chalmers
Is gender an issue in e-learning	Robin Miles Maria Rickert Jo Smith
Is Online Talking Really Working?	Marlene Manto Janet Simpson
Legal Issues in Flexible Learning	Cathy McNickle Jenny Dodd
Let's play Daddy and Mommy	Albert Ip
Magnificent 7 Revealed	Elizabeth Pohl
Managing an online discussion group	Gloria Poedjosoedarmo
Mentoring in Cyberspace	Robert Pulling Lyn Ambrose
Online as 'deschooling'; Illich's inadvertent prophecy	Deborah Bowman
Online facilitation	Bradley Beach Nita Schultz
Our experience in digital stories	Peta McGrath Hana Patetl
Participate or perish? Looking for balance in participation & assessment models for online learning	Lyn Campbell Ted Clark
Planning and Implementing Clicks Within Bricks	Jan Whitaker
Staff development as a process of Change Management with online support	Lola Krogh Frank Duggan
Supporting Students in the e-learning environment	Cathy McNickle Ros Gill Barbara Whyte Valda Davey Prue Blaikie
Tales from the Bush	Melanie Burke Peter Hogan
Teaching in the Twilight Zone: are you ready?	Louise Housden Guy Kemshal-Bell
The evolving context of online vocational education	Jean Macnish Sue Trinidad
The Knowledge Pool: An E-Journal in Flexible Learning in VET	Frank Bate Josephine Murray
The thirst for knowledge: The Tropical North Queensland Blend	Colleen Hodgins Robin West
Walk on the Wild Side-Assess Online	Margaret Dix Patricia Hyde
What do you *really* think, feel,,,?	Frankie Forsyth Jan Whitaker
Where does the teacher fit in?	Guy Kemshal-Bell Peter Robertson
Who put the flex in my ability?	Guy Kemshal-Bell Frankie Forsyth
Women & E-Quality: Learning and Earning in the Knowledge Economy	Lorraine Larri Carol Daunt Helen Wilkinson Margot Stowe Kerrilin Hazeltine

Title	Presenters
Your First Time	Robert Pulling Lyn Ambrose

Showcases/Interviews

Title	Presenters
eLearning Training: Catching up with the Future	Catriona Ward
Jump into the deep end of assessing!	Josephine Murray Jean Macnish Frank Bate Frankie Forsyth
Online Learning: What the FLAG research says	Hugh Guthrie
TruVision: Online learning for people blind or vision impaired	Michele Jones
Managers Tips for Implementing Flexible Learning	Peter LeCornu