

2008–2011 Australian Flexible Learning Framework Strategy

Flexible Learning Advisory Group

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Australian Government

**Department of Education, Employment
and Workplace Relations**

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1. Foreword

We are on the verge of an era in which e-learning will be mainstreamed across the vocational education and training system.

The need is there: from employers and individuals who expect greater choice and control over the time, place and content of training, both to cope with skill shortages and to minimise work downtime for training. The demand will be there: from the current and future Generation Y students, for whom technology is integrated in their entertainment and social interaction. The technology will be there: the Minister for Vocational and Further Education has spoken of connecting all VET providers to a dedicated high-bandwidth network to enable e-learning to be mainstreamed across the VET sector. And, thanks to the achievements of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, the foundation infrastructure of standards, content and capability is there.

The last eight years have taken the Framework on a significant journey: from the first Framework in which the focus was on raising awareness of the benefits of e-learning and skilling VET practitioners in its implementation, to the second Framework with its focus on engagement with clients. In both cases the Framework kept a strong focus on building a national e-learning infrastructure of resources, standards and professional support for use by training organisations and practitioners.

This new Framework Strategy is rather different: it's about supporting businesses and organisations that share a vision for the future and have demonstrated a commitment to e-learning. It's about looking to a future in which learning is tailored to learners who are more able to take control of their own learning, and teachers being effective managers of learning.

It's also about continuing to build and capitalise on the investment to date in infrastructure, and making use of the pool of knowledge and expertise that has been built through past Framework activities.

To achieve this vision, there will be some significant changes to the way the Framework operates. There will be:

- a focus on investing funds where there is the greatest potential for achieving results – with a sound business case within an RTO or business/industry
- less focus on experimentation and one-off projects, and more on embedding and integrating e-learning
- scope for multi-year projects with sustained impact beyond the life of the funding
- integration of professional development within other activities, rather than as a stand-alone activity.

This is a Framework designed to position the nation's vocational education and training system for the future.

Jim Davidson
Chair, Flexible Learning Advisory Group

2. Introduction

Since its inception in 2000, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework) has invested in the uptake of quality e-learning in the vocational education and training (VET) sector. It has enabled, facilitated and supported the transition of Australia's training system to the information age. As a result of Framework activities, a foundation has been laid for e-learning to be mainstreamed across the training sector. The essential infrastructure – resources, standards and repositories – are in place and the sector is ready to capitalise on past achievements, while continuing to invest further in the uptake of e-learning.

The 2008-2011 Framework Strategy is focused on making e-learning an integral part of the national training system by increasing demand for e-learning from individual learners and increasing demand from businesses by investing in partnerships between businesses and registered training organisations (RTOs) that demonstrate how e-learning can help meet business challenges. At the same time, the Framework will maximise and build on the national investment to date in essential e-learning infrastructure.

In summary, this Strategy is about:

- building on the national investment in resources, standards and repositories
- investing strategically in partnerships between businesses and training providers
- empowering learners to take control of their own learning.

This represents a shift in focus from previous Frameworks. The first iteration of the Framework (2000–2004) focused on demonstrating and raising awareness of the potential of e-learning and building capacity across the sector. The second Framework (2005–2007) added a focus of engaging directly with clients from key policy groups: youth, mature-age workers, industry, Indigenous communities, and learners with disabilities. Now the emphasis is on integrating and embedding e-learning in training providers and businesses.

	2000–2004	2005–2007	2008–2011
The emphasis:	Capability building	Client engagement	Integration
The Strategy:	Demonstrating and raising awareness of the potential of e-learning	Engaging with clients from key policy target groups	Embedding e-learning in training providers and businesses
The focus:	Building provider capability	Strengthening the role of clients in shaping VET provision to meet their needs	Capitalising on the infrastructure and knowledge created to date

There are now clear models of effective client engagement and many VET practitioners are adopting flexible and innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Access to professional development opportunities and knowledge-sharing activities has spurred the uptake of flexible learning. The Framework has also developed a national network for accessing e-learning resources and an effective mechanism for agreements on technical standards. It has researched issues for the benefit of all jurisdictions, such as copyright, intellectual property and mobile technologies.

All of this has been achieved through a model of national collaboration that has delivered returns that multiply the value of investment by individual governments.

3. The context 2008–2011

The VET world in 2008–2011 will be markedly different from that which existed in 2004, when the last Strategy was developed. In particular, there will be increased expectations that training providers will be responsive and flexible. Employers and individuals expect greater choice and control over the time, place and content of training, and they increasingly expect technology to form a significant part of delivery. Governments and businesses expect more training to be delivered while managing cost pressures, rapid changes in the workplace, changing demographics in the labour market and the impacts of critical skill shortages across the economy.

These demands will require a multi-faceted approach with a range of solutions, of which e-learning will be an important component.

A need for more skilled people and higher-level skills

A critical undersupply of skilled workers across industry groups means the VET sector must deliver urgently needed skills. This will require flexibility, greater variety and the delivery of more VET qualifications. Continued investment in boosting the uptake of e-learning and associated technologies will help meet these demands.

E-learning and associated technologies enable access to a greater variety of courses and training that can be delivered at a time and place that suits learners and firms across regional, remote, rural or metropolitan Australia. They also enable personalised content and delivery strategies for groups or individual learners with particular needs. At the same time, e-learning opens up ways of developing learners' higher-level interactive and cognitive skills to meet the demands for higher-level skills needed in modern workplaces.

Both learners and employers should also benefit from new ways of assessing and recording their training achievements. Being able to recognise prior learning in a personal record is vital in a modern training system. Technologies allow for the creation of portable and easily accessible records that individuals can update as they upgrade their skills and move between employers and industries throughout their working lives.

Increased expectations of VET

The VET system is also expected to keep increasing its contribution to the productivity of Australia's workforce. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has

requested a thorough examination of the VET system to ensure it takes a prominent role in developing and deepening the skills of the Australian workforce. There are also expectations that the national training system will play a significant role in government, industry and regional economic development strategies.

Several policy documents highlight the need for flexible approaches to training, made possible with e-learning and technology. *Skilling Australia*¹ stresses the importance of flexible and accelerated pathways, with businesses and industry directly influencing policy as well as delivery. It particularly emphasises the need to provide for the learning needs of mature-aged workers, who are encouraged to stay longer in the workforce. *Shaping our future*², the national strategy for VET for 2004–2010 suggests that there is still untapped potential for the use of flexible and technology-assisted learning.

Various state, territory and Australian Government policy initiatives prioritise the education and training needs of 15–19 year-olds seeking flexible pathways through school, training and workforce participation. These include fast-tracked apprenticeships, the appearance of new training providers, such as the Australian Technical Colleges, and innovative partnerships allowing multi-site delivery of training and school-based learning.

At the same time, there are issues within the VET sector that e-learning can help to address. These include managing the implications of practitioner shortages in critical areas and the need to retain practitioners with contemporary skills in teaching and assessment both on and off campuses. E-learning also helps deal with the cost pressures generated from ageing, inflexible bricks and mortar infrastructure, and the expectations for training resources to keep pace with changing technology and industry demands.

The ubiquitous use of technology

A recent report³ suggests that information and communications technology (ICT) will remain the main technological driver of productivity growth in Australia over the next 20 years. Already, technology is being adopted by industry and education with remarkable speed. In the workplace, 90% of businesses are online while 100% of medium-sized businesses, and 94% of small businesses, use personal computers⁴.

In the training sector, awareness of e-learning has grown substantially. Framework activities have generated practitioner enthusiasm for e-learning, world-class products and a national capability to investigate and explore new technologies and ways they can be used to meet the needs of the training sector. Training providers are innovating in personalised delivery, online student support services and self-service. Students are becoming accustomed to technology advancing at a rapid pace and they quickly take it

¹ *Skilling Australia – New directions for vocational education and training*, Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005.

² *Shaping our future: Australia's national strategy for vocational education and training 2004–2010*, Australian National Training Authority, 2003.

³ *Forecasting productivity growth: 2004–2024*, Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, 2007.

⁴ *Australia online 3rd quarter 2004 statistics*, Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, 2005

for granted. To them, technology used in education is a delivery structure – the same structure used in other parts of their life for other purposes.

As demand for flexibility increases and broadband networks expand, expectations for realising the opportunities presented by ‘virtual’ infrastructure for VET are also growing. Connecting into the broader ICT infrastructure will maximise returns for learners as well as businesses. For VET practitioners, resource developers and learners, e-learning is emerging as a key strategy for delivering and completing training qualifications in an economy in which technology is ubiquitous.

4. A vision for 2008–2011

From 2008–2011, the Framework’s emphasis will be on making e-learning an integral part of the national training system. In this way, the Framework will contribute to a VET system that is best equipped to respond to the challenges of a modern economy and the training needs of Australian businesses and workers.

The vision of this Strategy is for a future in which:

...learning is tailored to learners

E-learning is 21st Century learning: not restricted by place and time, but happening when and where it suits learners. Learning is personalised to suit individual learning needs, making it an engaging experience, and attracting those who may not otherwise have engaged in education and training. Collaborative and ‘networked’ learning are the norm.

...learners are more in control

Because of the wide variety of e-learning options available to learners, they take more control of their own learning, are able to choose their training provider and use pathways to their advantage. When they graduate, they are more employable due to their exposure to ICT learning skills. There are also mechanisms for recognising and recording the skills they acquire, from a variety of sources, in ways that make sense to employers.

...teachers are effective ‘managers of learning’

Due to their skill at using ICT to enhance the learning experience, teachers access quality learning resources that are up-to-date and easily adapted – and many of the resources are freely available. Many of them have moved from a ‘teaching’ paradigm to a ‘facilitation and management of learning’ paradigm. While they remain as committed to ongoing professional development as they have always been, much of their development is focused on new environments – for example, peer-to-peer – and a greater engagement with industry.

...businesses are committed for the right reason

Enterprises invest significantly in workforce development because they understand the returns they will reap from the investment, and flexible approaches mean that learning can fit around other business priorities.

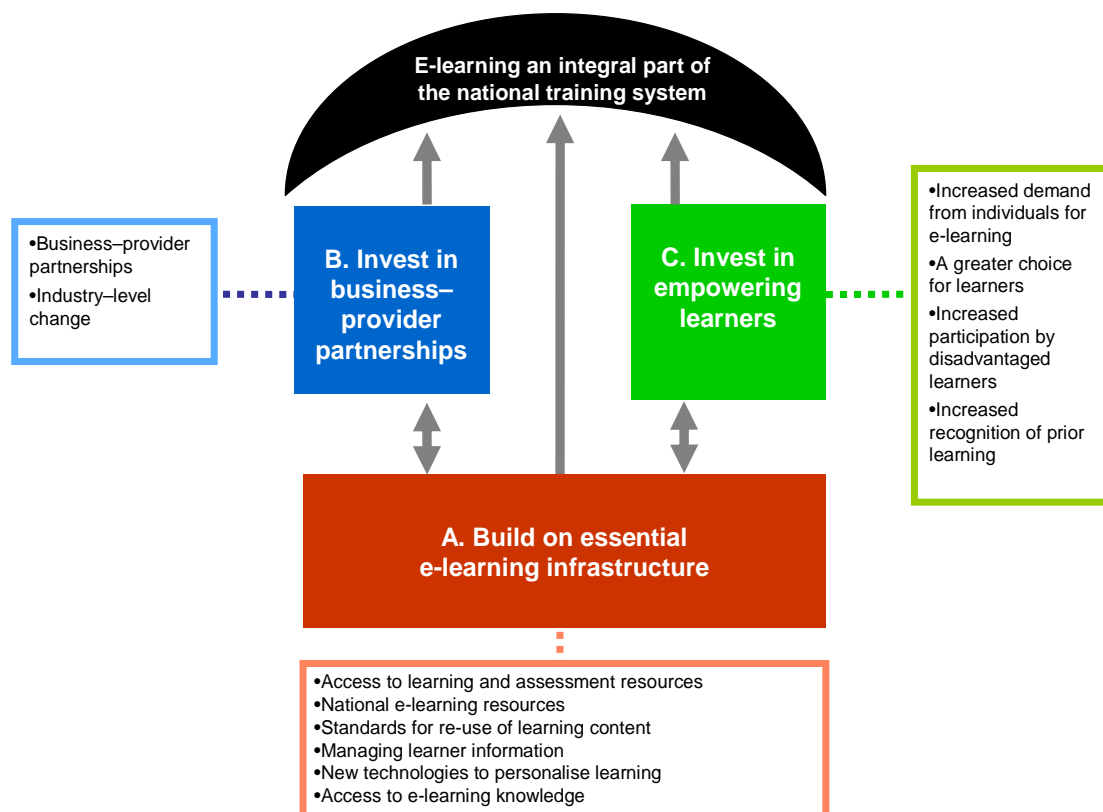
...there is a sustainable e-learning infrastructure

The support needed for all the above is available through a pool of national resources, a system of national technical standards, and evolving and innovative approaches to the use of new technologies.

5. The 2008–2011 Framework Strategy

To achieve this vision, the Framework has three strategic priorities. They are to:

- A. Build on essential e-learning infrastructure
- B. Invest strategically in business–provider partnerships between RTOs and business or industries
- C. Invest in empowering learners.



In achieving these priorities, there will be a strong emphasis on embedding effective approaches to e-learning based on national standards and products, on integrating professional development across all Framework activities, and on maximising the benefit of insights and knowledge that have been gained so far.

Previous Frameworks have made a significant investment in the capability of the VET workforce over the last nine years: \$43 million invested in building the capability of 21,000 practitioners, via more than 1,600 projects. This Framework will continue to build the capability of VET practitioners, but in the context of embedding good practice in RTOs and businesses.

The Framework will continue its collaborative approach of pooling resources and expertise across the nation to meet its goals.

To ensure a strategic use of funds with maximum possible impact, all activities will be underpinned by the following principles:

- decisions on funding will be based on investments being made where there is the greatest potential for achieving results against the broad Strategy
- funded activities will be based on a sound business case within the RTO or business/industry
- activities will be expected to build capability and encourage knowledge-sharing within the RTO and/or business/industry, with the recipients' ICT infrastructure supporting e-learning
- participating organisations will need to comply with national standards, make use of tools and infrastructure that have already been developed, participate in benchmarking and ensure that content developed is accessible via the Framework's Learning Object Repository Network (LORN).

A. Build on essential e-learning infrastructure

A key priority of this Framework is to ensure ready access to a supporting infrastructure for training providers who are pursuing e-learning as a business goal. This includes building on established national agreements on standards to enhance the national learning resource-sharing infrastructure and to maintain a pool of quality learning and assessment resources. Using a similar model, a framework will be established for electronically managing learner information, which will support COAG and Australian Quality Training Framework agendas for recognition of prior learning (RPL) and assessment. Further work will be undertaken to establish standards and guidelines for emerging technologies that support personalised learning. The same principles will be used to provide access to a collected body of knowledge resources.

Access to learning and assessment resources

LORN will be consolidated as the major source of online training and assessment materials for the Australian VET system, housed in a way that ensures that it is embedded as a truly national resource. This shared national infrastructure will be extended to include the broadest possible range of repositories of resources suitable for VET learners. Online licensing and e-transactions will be incorporated into the

repository service. The LORN business model will provide incentives for the sharing of materials developed by training providers, industry and enterprises, including commercial publishers able to meet LORN requirements. Arrangements for ongoing governance and management will be decided following negotiations with Ministerial companies and jurisdictions, with the aim being to establish a structure that will hold over time.

National e-learning resources

National Flexible Learning Toolbox (Toolbox) e-learning resources now cover close to 1,000 competency units and support 60% of training packages. The production of these national resources will be streamlined to provide a more rapid response as urgent new training and assessment needs are identified. Older Toolbox material in priority areas will be updated to meet new training package requirements, technical standards and technology formats. The Toolbox focus on modelling educational quality will be retained while incorporating online assessment and RPL tools. A continuing field service will support RTOs and businesses in using and customising Toolboxes.

Standards for re-use of learning content

The work described above will be underpinned by research and update of interoperability standards to ensure portability of learning content and ease of use across platforms. There will be a continued emphasis on jurisdictional and cross-sectoral collaboration in the establishment of standards and in the governance arrangements for LORN. Guides and tools will be developed to support both the training and system management communities.

Managing learner information

Recent Framework research has shown the potential of e-portfolios to provide a systematic electronic method for learners to record and control access to evidence of their learning. By allowing third-party access to their e-portfolio, learners can support RPL claims, provide evidence for assessment during training, and present a well-documented résumé for multiple learning and employment purposes.

Realising the full promise of these tools requires a cohesive national approach based on standards that ensure information is reliable and portable. The Framework will build on its research to promote national collaboration on standards adoption across jurisdictions, seeking alignment with existing initiatives and structures for managing learner information. This work will be undertaken in consultation with other education sectors, industry and key stakeholders (such as the Australian Information and Communications Technology in Education Committee and the Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)) to establish policy and business rules and streamline electronic processes for verification, security and efficient transfer of learner information between systems.

New technologies to personalise learning

The new Framework will ensure that the promise of emerging technologies is exploited fully and directed to learner groups who are likely to benefit. It will leverage work

already undertaken in investigating the potential of new technologies and ensure that the learning is captured and disseminated.

Newly emerging areas will be identified and trial activities supported, with a view to developing shareable expertise in these areas. This will include the educational potential of new community and entertainment technologies and content distribution technologies.

Technical standards to support new technologies will be identified to promote successful experiences for users. Information on standards and their use will be provided in a form suitable for both technical and non-technical audiences. There will be a continued emphasis on supporting network managers to cater for users of new e-learning technologies and applications in the configuration and access arrangements of their networks. Where appropriate user support tools and teaching guides will be developed and expert users will be supported to act as mentors to others.

Access to e-learning knowledge

The Framework will maximise its impact on the broader VET community by strengthening the strategies used for creating and sharing knowledge. This will involve adopting new information discovery and dissemination technologies to establish a national e-learning knowledge network.

The flexiblelearning.net.au website and its related repository of support resources will be revamped to provide streamlined search access to the body of knowledge created through past and current projects. By establishing principles for information content packaging to support federated searching⁵, the Framework's new knowledge repository will provide the first stage in a national e-learning knowledge network, extending to repositories owned by jurisdictions and other organisations. This major initiative will draw on higher education developments to establish information repository networks to support research. The flow-on benefits of this work will impact more broadly on knowledge management.

Finally, to ensure that VET practitioners can share knowledge and expertise about e-learning, the Framework will fund initiatives that encourage online communities of practice and mentoring by VET professionals with expert knowledge in aspects of e-learning. Field workers will support the dissemination of knowledge at state and territory level and facilitate connections between practitioners with common interests.

⁵ Federated searching is the use of a single search request to simultaneously search across disparate data sources (such as repositories of learning resources). Federated search functionality aggregates search results to return a single result list to the user.

	Goals	Strategies	Outcomes
A1	A strong repository network infrastructure	<p>Promote LORN to RTOs, enterprises, teachers and trainers</p> <p>Support multiple organisations to contribute to repositories</p> <p>Provide a seamless licensing and transaction system</p> <p>Establish a service agreement for operational management under the auspice of the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG)</p>	<p>Immediate desktop access to Australia-wide pool of relevant learning resources</p> <p>Repository membership by all jurisdictions</p> <p>Repository membership by RTOs, business and commercial publishers</p> <p>LORN operates as a fast and reliable national infrastructure according to nationally agreed service-level key performance indicators.</p>
A2	A significant collection of national e-learning resources being used by RTOs across all jurisdictions	<p>Streamline processes for rapid development of Toolbox materials in skills shortage areas</p> <p>Continue to extend training package coverage of Toolbox resources</p> <p>Maintain, review and update existing Toolboxes including integration of assessment and RPL tools</p> <p>Support RTOs and business to use and customise Toolbox materials</p>	<p>Toolbox resources able to be deployed rapidly</p> <p>Toolboxes maintained and expanded to cover priority skill shortage areas</p> <p>Increased uptake of RPL and online assessment</p>
A3	A system that can implement national technical standards that ensure portability and re-use of learning content	<p>Maintain collaborative focus on relevant research and update standards</p> <p>Provide national ratification process for standards</p> <p>Promote content standards nationally</p> <p>Develop implementation guides and support tools</p>	<p>Effective research and ratification process for national standards, supported by jurisdictions</p> <p>National standards for content access used in all jurisdictions</p> <p>Guides and tools available to support easy application of standards</p>
A4	A cohesive national infrastructure for managing learner information to support RPL and other transition processes	<p>Research and pilot required standards</p> <p>Work with jurisdictions and other sectors to reach agreement on standards</p> <p>Develop policy and business rules for a national approach</p> <p>Establish relevant national coordination</p>	<p>Key standards researched and piloted</p> <p>National and cross-sectoral agreement on standards and e-portfolio model achieved</p> <p>Policy and business rules identified</p> <p>Operating national infrastructure in which state and territory tools for managing learner information can deliver local requirements while supporting national coverage</p>
A5	VET sector is quick and effective in adapting new ICT to support personalised learning	<p>Ongoing systemic support for the use of new and emerging technologies which will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ develop broad workforce capability in using new technologies ▪ monitor, research, develop and maintain standards for new technology areas 	<p>The benefits of emerging learning technologies identified and promoted</p> <p>Nationally agreed standards for new ICT available, supported by guidelines for both teachers and technicians</p> <p>Interconnected wide area networks that facilitate mainstream uptake of e-learning</p>

Goals	Strategies	Outcomes
	Develop and promote network standards that enable user access to e-learning applications and resources	
A6	A body of knowledge about e-learning readily available to the VET sector	
	Develop technical standards and search criteria for an information repository network	Immediate desktop access to Australia-wide pool of relevant e-learning knowledge
	Consolidate the flexiblelearning.net.au website and the related repository of support resources as a key element of the national knowledge network	Information repository standards and implementation guides to support knowledge management
	Extract learning and insights from past projects	VET sector confidence in the range of information and support available for e-learning
	Encourage connections between novices and expert e-learning practitioners	Increased use of well-considered e-learning approaches
	Ensure field workers are available to support and connect local initiatives	

B. Invest strategically in business–provider partnerships

This priority will enable industry to be more productive by developing and adopting workplace e-learning solutions in partnership with training providers. As demonstrated by the Framework’s Industry Engagement Project, a productive training partnership with a provider can be the key to helping businesses develop an effective e-learning solution that addresses their unique business challenge. E-learning increases the capacity of businesses to respond to changing skill demands, it reduces the cost of training and rapidly develops the skills of their workforce. According to the survey conducted by the Framework in its *Review of the use of e-learning in six industries*, one of the most common barriers to businesses implementing e-learning is the lack of in-house expertise to introduce it, along with uncertainty about its effectiveness. A partnership with a provider gives a business access to the technical and educational expertise it needs to implement e-learning.

Business–provider partnerships

This strategic priority will focus on business–provider partnerships that are meeting national objectives, such as the objective to shorten the duration of Australian apprenticeships, or to speed up the acquisition of qualifications through skills recognition for mature-aged workers. It will also encourage strategic engagement of industries in consultative activities which establish e-learning as part of that industry’s long-term planning for learning. In addition, by focusing on partnerships between training providers and businesses, the strategy aims to increase the responsiveness of training providers to industry demands.

Funding will be available to seed partnerships between training providers and businesses where there is a sound business case for e-learning within the business. These partnerships may also include e-learning specialists who provide specialist skills in developing innovative e-learning solutions. This seed funding is intended to kick-start

e-learning in each business, with the expectation that the investment will lead to ongoing commitment to e-learning within the business and to the relationship with training providers. It will build the capability of the business to implement e-learning as well as deliver good business outcomes. The outcomes of the projects will be made available to other businesses, to assist in demonstrating how to implement e-learning. The funding will also provide a catalyst for training providers to develop innovative e-learning solutions and sustainable relationships with businesses.

Industry-level change

Major multi-year targeted whole-of-industry projects will also be developed that assist industries to establish e-learning as a key strategy for learning in that industry. This will involve a planned consultative approach with key industries targeting their priority areas. These projects will involve clusters of businesses in an industry area, working in collaboration with training providers responsive to the industry needs. These major projects will be funded where there is a sound business case for e-learning within the industry and a pressing imperative to find an innovative solution. This component of the Strategy will initiate planned sustainable integration of e-learning for workforce development in a range of industries.

To facilitate the success of the strategy a campaign will be developed and implemented to ensure that industry participants are fully aware of the steps needed to implement e-learning and to encourage industries, through industry regulators, to implement e-learning to meet industry training requirements. A key aspect will be the use of industry champions to advocate the benefits of implementing e-learning in conjunction with training providers and how to do it. The funding will also help businesses to develop strong business cases for e-learning projects, which can be funded internally within the business or attract external funding. A highly visible industry-focused website and network of industry champions will underpin this campaign strategy.

All projects will involve training providers that comply with national standards, participate in e-learning benchmarking and make use of tools and infrastructure that have already been developed. All projects will ensure that content is developed in accordance with national standards and is accessible via LORN. The projects will build capability within training providers as well as produce outcomes for the businesses involved, ensuring that the Framework has long-term benefits for training providers and their business partners.

The outcomes of this strategic priority will be increased uptake of e-learning by businesses and industries. E-learning will be seen by businesses and industries as a key strategy for addressing their workforce skill needs. There will be more significant and long-lasting partnerships between employers and training providers, leading to effective and sustained embedding of e-learning.

For industry, the long-term outcomes of partnering with training providers to use e-learning will be improved workforce performance. For training providers, the long-term outcomes will be improved capacity in providing e-learning solutions to meet industry needs and sustainable relationships with businesses that have the opportunity for development in a range of areas, strengthening the objectives of the national training system overall.

	Goals	Strategies	Outcomes
B1	Increase the number of e-learning partnerships between training providers and businesses	Invest in industry engagement projects	Increased number of significant partnerships between firms and training providers utilising e-learning to increase workplace performance
B2	Increase demand from businesses for e-learning	Equip training providers and businesses to develop business cases for e-learning	More employers demanding e-learning solutions from training providers
		Promote benefits and returns on e-learning investment based on real-life examples	Increased use of e-learning in workforce development
		Develop exemplars that can demonstrate a potential multiplier effect	Increased investment by businesses in e-learning
		Identify needs, barriers and the kinds of messages and approaches different businesses will respond to	Increased capacity of business to meet priority skill needs
		Encourage 'industry advocating to industry' by identifying industry champions	
B3	Whole-of-industry e-learning solutions to critical issues	Develop multi-year consultative projects	Increased investment by industry in e-learning for long-term workforce development
		Use industry-based mechanisms (industry associations, road-shows and business media) to communicate the benefits of e-learning and to influence businesses	

C. Invest in empowering learners

A significant emphasis for 2008–2011 will be to implement strategies that empower learners to take control of their own learning. Because e-learning enables learning to happen in any place, at any time, and at any pace, it gives individuals access to education and training in workplaces and in geographically and socially isolated circumstances.

The outcome will be more learners with increased skills, and learners who are better prepared for employment and work-based e-learning, through increased ICT skills and access to training. Changes to the ways in which learners access training and gather the evidence of their learning will enable them to better manage their own career choices and help them to achieve a desired work–life balance.

Increased demand from individuals for e-learning

This strategic priority will lead to a sector better able to meet increased demand for qualifications through the implementation of delivery strategies based on e-learning. Learners are increasingly dealing with technology in every aspect of their daily lives and there is opportunity for further examples of training providers harnessing this interest in the delivery of training.

The outcome of this strategy will be greater implementation of e-learning by training providers as they are stimulated by learners choosing to undertake their studies with competing providers that can provide e-learning options that meet their needs.

Increased demand for e-learning access will be driven by the increasing preponderance of 'e-engagement' in other aspects of individuals' lives such as banking, communication and entertainment. The 'just-in-time' convenience of these experiences will extend their expectations of education and training.

Demand will be increased through encouraging employment agencies, community groups, and other organisations who work with groups of learners, to develop partnerships with training providers and use e-learning delivery. Some success has been achieved with the Framework's Client Engagement Program, and this will be built on through strategic targeting of partnerships between training providers and appropriate organisations. The organisations will advocate strongly for the learners they represent and expect training providers to use e-learning to meet identified needs.

A greater choice for learners

Learners will become increasingly engaged in learning outside the classroom, supported by technology. The Framework will move beyond its earlier focus on raising awareness, and will target those RTOs that demonstrate a high level of organisational commitment to using e-learning to benefit learners by:

- developing e-learning as part of a clear business case related to their own strategies for learning and systemic organisational change
- clearly indicating the impact in terms of improved learner outcomes and improved employment prospects
- providing solutions that empower learners by improving choice, increasing access, improving pathways, and personalising learning
- developing entire courses or significant components that can be accessed outside the classroom.

The Framework will encourage groups of training providers – for example, a TAFE Institute, a Community Education college, and a private provider – to collaborate in maximising outcomes for learners. It will also encourage training providers to partner with regional groups to meet the unique training needs of individuals within a region. Finally, the Framework will provide advice and support to help RTOs, at both an administrative and strategic level, to implement and embed e-learning.

Increased participation by disadvantaged learners

This strategic priority will continue to improve outcomes for learners with special needs including youth at risk, Indigenous learners, learners with disabilities and mature-age workers, and learners who are disadvantaged because of their location and/or their inability to access technology. Through the Framework, there are now many well-documented processes through which trainers can effectively use technology to improve and promote e-learning for these groups.

The Framework will also continue to identify the potential of technologies to support and engage groups of disadvantaged learners, both directly and via trainers and training providers. As with previous Framework activities, this will increase the pool of knowledge and experience available to support training providers in effectively assisting disadvantaged learners and learners with special needs.

Increased recognition of learning

Many learners already gain much knowledge from outside formal learning and assessment structures. This trend will only increase and accelerate along with the amount of information and knowledge accessible via the Internet and mobile devices. The challenge for many learners and their training providers is to recognise this learning in a way that contributes to the issuing of qualifications. This strategic priority is about increasing the opportunity for learners to gain recognition of their learning.

The Framework will fund projects that can demonstrate ways in which technology can be used to increase recognition of learning. These activities will use the national infrastructure developed for managing learner information (see section A). Projects will focus on areas of skill shortage where information and knowledge is readily available in workplaces or the community or on the Internet. This strategic priority will identify ways in which information is used by Australian learners to gain vocational qualifications.

Goals	Strategies	Outcomes
C1 Increased demand from individuals for e-learning	<p>Identify needs, barriers and the kinds of messages and approaches different individuals will respond to</p> <p>Develop ways of raising individuals' expectations of provision of e-learning</p> <p>Promote e-learning training providers to individuals</p> <p>Work with employment agencies and advocacy agencies to build learner demand</p>	<p>More individuals requesting e-learning opportunities from training providers</p> <p>Learners experiencing and benefiting from a greater choice of training providers</p> <p>Training providers better meeting identified training needs by e-learning</p>
C2 Greater choice for learners via non-classroom-based learning	<p>Provide targeted, contestable funding to support RTOs to embed e-learning</p> <p>Develop mechanisms for advising and supporting RTOs, at an administrative and strategic level, to implement and embed e-learning, including the development of e-learning business cases</p> <p>Identify where RTOs are using e-learning and experiencing returns and promote benefits</p> <p>Develop mentoring arrangements between RTOs that are involved in e-learning and ones that are not</p>	<p>Better customisation of learning</p> <p>More learners engaged in more learning outside of the classroom using e-learning</p> <p>Reduced time spent on-campus</p> <p>Increased number of RTOs in which e-learning is embedded</p> <p>Increased demand from RTOs for support to introduce e-learning</p>

Goals	Strategies	Outcomes
C3 Increased participation by disadvantaged learners	<p>Share knowledge already gained about how e-learning can increase engagement</p> <p>Identify and demonstrate the ways in which e-learning can increase engagement by groups not already engaged in learning, including Indigenous learners</p> <p>Mechanisms for automatic follow-up of students</p>	<p>More disengaged and disadvantaged learners engaged through e-learning</p> <p>Emphasis on personalising learning with new technologies in initiatives supporting target groups</p>
C4 Increased recognition of learning	<p>Provide targeted funding for projects that assist students to gain recognition of learning through e-tools</p> <p>Use the standards in the e-learning infrastructure to capture learning</p> <p>Identify learner groups that regularly engage in learning and are seeking vocational qualifications</p>	<p>More learners gaining recognition for units of competency and qualifications beyond those based on formal structures</p>

6. Evaluation of the Framework

The Framework will continue to evaluate its success using data that measure:

- uptake and use: the uptake of e-learning, and the volume and sophistication of use by clients (individual learners and industries/enterprises), by training providers and by the VET system
- impact: the degree to which the application of ICT to vocational learning has changed behaviours and outcomes for clients.

The primary data source for assessing uptake, use and impact will be the *Benchmark survey of e-learning in VET*. Where necessary, the survey will be fine-tuned to ensure it provides data that is relevant to the strategic priorities in this iteration of the Framework and that it provides information necessary to communicate the return on investment in terms of outcomes for clients. Care will be taken to ensure that the results of progressive evaluation studies are communicated to the Framework's various stakeholders in the most appropriate ways.

In particular, evaluation will focus on the following indicators, which correspond to the intended outcomes of each of the strategic priorities:

Indicators of uptake, use and impact	
Individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Importance of availability of e-learning, as compared to other factors, in individuals' decisions about courses and training providers ▪ Percentage of students whose learning outcomes were improved because of e-learning and ways in which they benefited (a mixture of measurement of learning outcomes and perceptions of learning outcomes) ▪ Number of students gaining recognition of work-based and self-directed learning through e-tools
Business and industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Percentage of businesses offering e-learning opportunities to employees ▪ E-learning as a percentage of all structured training provided by employers ▪ Number of industries investing in e-learning for long-term workforce development
Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extent to which public, private and community providers are accessing VET e-learning resources ▪ Percentage of VET providers offering online enrolment, information and student support services and assessment ▪ Percentage of courses offered by providers off-campus ▪ Percentage of providers with an organisation-wide e-learning strategy ▪ Percentage of practitioners who are using e-learning tools to facilitate a personalised approach to learning
The VET system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Range and affordability of VET learning materials available for electronic download ▪ Progress towards agreement on national standards for e-portfolios ▪ Use of common technology standards within VET ▪ Number of training providers accessing and contributing to national VET learning object repositories

7. Funding and managing the Framework

The Australian Government and states and territories have worked together to support more flexible learning across the VET sector since 1993. The unique collaboration, which is funded by the pooling of infrastructure funds with complemented investment by individual states and territories, will continue for this iteration of the Framework.

The 2008–2011 Framework places a strong emphasis on embedding and integrating Framework activities and this will be reflected in management arrangements. As in the past, implementation will be devolved to states and territories on a program basis, within nationally agreed parameters. This arrangement will be supplemented with mechanisms to ensure that a whole-of-Framework perspective is maintained and that knowledge and innovations are integrated across jurisdictions and between activities.

The Framework is managed by the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG), comprised of senior personnel from across Australia who advise the NSOC on national issues for flexible learning in VET. It is currently chaired by the Deputy Secretary of

DEEWR. FLAG also works with and advises the Australian Information and Communication Technologies in Education Committee (AICTEC) on a range of issues in relation to the use of technologies in VET. The FLAG Secretariat supports FLAG's work in relation to the implementation of the Framework and more broadly.

A Business Plan will be developed for the four-year period covered by the Strategy. The Business Plan will identify what is to be achieved, how it will be achieved, the funds allocated to various activities, how achievement will be measured, and who will take the lead accountability.

Attachment A: The history of the Framework

Since 1993, the Australian Government and the states and territories have worked together, in partnership with users of the vocational education and training (VET) system, to support more flexible learning. In 1999 they took a major step forward by developing and investing in a five-year national Strategy known as the Australian Flexible Learning Framework for the National Vocational Education and Training System 2000–2004 (Framework). The expressed aim of the Strategy in early documents was ‘... to support both the accelerated uptake of flexible learning modes and to position Australian vocational education and training (VET) as a world leader in applying new technologies to vocational education products and services’.

The Framework commenced in 2000 following endorsement in August 1999 by the Australian National Training Authority Chief Executive Officers (ANTA CEOs) of a five-year strategic plan prepared by the EdNA VET Advisory Group (EVAG), later to become the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG). FLAG is a group of strategically focused senior VET managers with responsibilities in e-learning development representing each state and territory training authority and the Australian Government (through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations).

A \$15 million allocation of infrastructure funds has been made available annually for Framework projects to support the development of information and communication technologies (ICT) for learning in the training sector. A second iteration of the Framework was endorsed by ANTA CEOs in 2004. This has enabled the continuation of annual funding on a similar basis to 2006. The Framework for 2005–2007 set out to capitalise on the accumulated national experience of researching, designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating flexible learning in VET, taking account of the changing social, economic and policy environment in which it operated.

In building an infrastructure to support new technologies in learning, the aims of the Framework have focused on the areas that could bring benefits to all jurisdictions through collaborative action at national level, including more efficient ways of meeting aggregated need, and work that states and territories are unable to undertake individually. This has meant a concentration on the technological, intellectual and policy infrastructure rather than physical infrastructure, platforms, equipment and hardware.

The initial goals provided a blueprint for an integrated Strategy, addressing critical but intangible areas needed to build capacity in the sector to realise the effective use of ICT for educational purposes. In summary these were: an investment in people through extensive skill development; an investment in online content available to all training providers nationally; the pursuit of supportive infrastructure, especially standards for compatibility between systems; and the development of enabling policies and regulations.

The Framework’s approaches have allowed the challenges of introducing new technologies to learning to be researched and trialled ahead of the mainstream, while involving a continually increasing range of personnel who are collectively becoming

equipped to move in the direction of learning in the future. All parts of the training sector are addressed by the Framework's strategies, including community providers, private registered training organisations (RTOs), and enterprises as well as the higher-profile TAFE Institutes.

The mainstreaming of technology-based learning has been recognised as a long-term objective needing ongoing strategic support, rather than an outcome that could be achieved with a massive injection of funds in a short timespan. The annual funding of \$15 million over 8 years has been a reasonable match for the system's capacity to change.

The effectiveness of the Framework in pursuing its goals was summed up by the report of the 2007 evaluation of the Framework⁶. The evaluation concludes that these strategies have shown that 'by pooling expert knowledge, being aware of different client bases, and sharing ideas and experiences the Framework has accelerated learning on the effective use of ICT across the VET system. By combining and leveraging resources, developing a single flexible solution to meet the needs of all states and territories, and targeting strategic responses, it has delivered returns that multiply over and over again the value of investment by the Australian and all state and territory governments.'

⁶ 2005–2007 Impact Statement – Report to National Senior Officials Committee, Australian Flexible Learning Framework, 2007

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