Manufacturing uncertainty: non-English-speaking-background women and training.

Stephens, Jenny; Bertone, Santina.


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MANUFACTURING UNCERTAINTY
Non-English-speaking-background women and training

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BUREAU OF IMMIGRATION, MULTICULTURAL AND POPULATION RESEARCH

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As Australia, along with other nations, intensifies its drive to become internationally more competitive, changes occur in every branch of economic activity and organisation. Flexibility and adaptability are encouraged—indeed, they are regarded as imperative—and work system reforms have been central in this continual restructuring.

As the authors of this informative study note (p. 1), non-English-speaking-background (NESB) women workers 'have long held a relatively marginal and powerless role in industry, notwithstanding their concentrations in a number of important sectors of manufacturing'. The reasons for this are many, including mass production methods based on the assembly line principles of Henry Ford, which are only gradually giving way to systems which offer fresh opportunities to NESB women, including scope for increased skill acquisition through training and new job experience, as well as greater mobility. However, NESB women currently appear to receive less training than other work force groups. Consequently, Jenny Stephens and Santina Bertone set out in this helpful study to examine various aspects of these lower training participation rates, specifically the causes of the disadvantaged position of NESB women in work-related training.

Employing case studies, the authors have produced several important findings, especially on barriers to training and future work profile projections, which give cause for concern. The importance of English language skills (a continual theme in the literature) is emphasised, but there are also other factors, such as structural barriers, which appear to hold NESB women back in the labour force.

The special contribution of Manufacturing Uncertainty: Non-English-Speaking-Background Women and Training is that, through the extensive case studies reported, those concerned are given the opportunity to have their say and opinions reported. The face-to-face interviews with 436 workers provide an illuminating insight into the issues and aspirations of the people themselves.

This research is a timely incentive to recall the importance of access for all work force groups to training during a period of rapid industrial transformation in Australia as it accommodates to ever greater international competition.

JOHN NIEUWENHUYSSEN
Director, Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research
## Contents

Foreword iii  
List of tables viii  
The authors x  
Acknowledgments xi  
Abbreviations and acronyms xii  
Executive summary xiv

### Chapter 1: Introduction

- **Aims** 1  
- **Method** 4  
- **The case studies** 5  
- **Definitions** 5  
- **Outline** 6

### Chapter 2: Workplace change and training

- **Award restructuring** 8  
- **Enterprise bargaining** 10  
- **Country of birth segmentation** 13  
- **Gender segmentation** 14  
- **Training in the workplace** 16  
- **Language and literacy training** 19  
- **The concept of skill** 20  
- **Summary** 22

### Chapter 3: Literature review

- **Award restructuring and industry training** 23  
- **Women, award restructuring and enterprise bargaining** 24  
- **Immigrants, industry and award restructuring** 25  
- **Immigrants, employment and training issues** 27  
- **Immigrant women and training in the work force** 28  
- **Literacy and numeracy, skills and competencies** 31  
- **Conclusion** 36

### Chapter 4: Research method

- **Selecting the industry** 38  
- **Selecting the industry sectors** 39  
  - **Food industry** 39  
  - **Vehicle manufacturing industry** 40  
  - **Metals and engineering industry** 40  
- **Selecting the companies** 41  
- **Data collection methodology** 44  
  - **Language and literacy** 44
## Contents

Access to workers 46
The questionnaire 47
The study sample 47
Conducting the interviews 50
Study sample 50
Other interviews 52
Research issues 53

### Chapter 5: The vehicle industry 55

The industry 55
Ford (Broadmeadows) 57
Training at Ford 58
Ford VIC Steering Committee 61
Natural work groups 63
The study sample 64
Demographic and social characteristics 64
Education and work history 67
Numeracy and English language 72
Child-care 74
Workplace culture 75
Training and skills 77
The union 91
The future at Ford 92

### Chapter 6: The metals and engineering industry 94

The industry 94
Engineering Production Certificate 96
Preslite Australia Pty Ltd 98
Training at Preslite 99
Preslite Education and Training Committee 100
Work teams 103
The study sample 104
Demographic and social characteristics 104
Education and work history 107
Numeracy and English language 111
Child-care 113
Workplace culture 114
Training and skills 115
The future at Preslite 128

### Chapter 7: The food industry 131

The industry 131
National Certificate in Food Processing 132
The companies 134
Herbert Adams Bakeries 134
List of tables

3.1 Participation of wage or salary earners in Australia in training, by background and gender, 1988–89
4.1 Number of production workers from a NESB at participating companies
4.2 Number of interviews at each participating company
4.3 Background and gender of interviewees
4.4 Place of birth of study sample
5.1 Assembly and production employees at Ford (Broadmeadows)
5.2 Barriers to VIC participation at Ford
5.3 Self-identified country of birth of interviewees
5.4 Production workers interviewed, by background and gender
5.5 Years of residence in Australia, by gender of non-Australia-born interviewees
5.6 Age grouping of interviewees
5.7 Extent of task rotation
5.8 Proportion of workers earning major income for family/household
5.9 NESB workers' views of possible outcomes of speaking better English
5.10 Possibility of doing training out of normal shift time if have children
5.11 Perceptions of treatment of workers
5.12 Reasons for doing training at work
5.13 Type of training undertaken by study sample
5.14 Location of training for those interviewees who had participated in training
5.15 Reasons of NESB women for non-participation in work-related training
5.16 Perceptions about opportunities for training at Ford
5.17 Attitudes to training
5.18 Views on possible reasons why women do less training than men
6.1 Self-identified country of birth of interviewees at Preslite
6.2 Production workers interviewed at Preslite, by background and gender
6.3 Years of residence in Australia by gender, of non-Australia-born interviewees
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Age grouping of interviewees</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Number of years of participation by interviewees in the Australian work force</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Extent of task rotation</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>Self-assessed level of English competency of a selection of NESB workers</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>NESB workers' views of possible outcomes of speaking better English</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>Perceptions of treatment of workers</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>Comparison between percentages of interviewees wanting to do training and those actually doing it</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>Reasons for doing training at work</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.12</td>
<td>Type of training undertaken by study sample</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>Location of training for those interviewees who had participated in training</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>Perceptions about training opportunities at Preslite</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.15</td>
<td>Attitudes to training</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.16</td>
<td>Views on possible reasons why women do less training than men</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Self-identified country of birth of interviewees at Herbert Adams and Lanes</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Production workers interviewed at Herbert Adams and Lanes, by background and gender</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Proportion of interviewees earning the major income for their household</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Self-assessed level of English language competency of a selection of NESB workers</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>NESB workers' views on possible outcomes of speaking better English</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>Perceptions of treatment of workers</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>Comparison between percentages of interviewees wanting to do training and those actually doing it</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>Reasons for doing training at work</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>Attitudes to training</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.10</td>
<td>Views on possible reasons why women do less training than men</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The authors

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**Santina Bertone** is the Executive Director of the Workplace Studies Centre at VUT. She has a BA (Honours) degree from Monash University, a graduate diploma in ergonomics and an MA (Industrial Relations) from the University of Melbourne. Ms Bertone is co-author with Dr Gerry Griffin of *Immigrant Workers and Trade Unions*, also funded by the (then) Bureau of Immigration Research. She has written numerous reports and conference papers on immigrant workers, training and employment, cultural diversity and workplace change. In this text, Ms Bertone wrote chapters 1 and 2.

More recently Ms Bertone and Ms Stephens initiated another project funded by the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research examining the retrenchment experiences of immigrant workers, due to be completed in 1995.
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Abbreviations and acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Australia-born</td>
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<tr>
<td>AB/ESB</td>
<td>Australia-born and English-speaking background</td>
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<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACTU</td>
<td>Australian Council of Trade Unions</td>
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<tr>
<td>AITP</td>
<td>Automotive Industry Training Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMEP</td>
<td>Adult Migration Education Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMEU</td>
<td>Automotive Metals and Engineering Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMEUVD</td>
<td>Automotive Metals and Engineering Union Vehicle Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWIRS</td>
<td>Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIMPR</td>
<td>Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research. Prior to 15 December 1993 known as Bureau of Immigration and Population Research (BIPR) and prior to 27 May 1993 called Bureau of Immigration Research (BIR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEET</td>
<td>Department of Employment, Education and Training</td>
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<td>DIEA</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIR</td>
<td>Department of Industrial Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>EBP</td>
<td>Enterprise Bargaining Principle</td>
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<td>EEO</td>
<td>Equal Employment Opportunity</td>
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<td>EEPAWU</td>
<td>Electrical, Electronic, Plumbing and Allied Workers Union</td>
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<td>EPC</td>
<td>Engineering Production Certificate</td>
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<td>ESB</td>
<td>English-speaking background</td>
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<td>ESTB</td>
<td>Engineering Skills Training Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>FILLIP</td>
<td>Food Industry Language and Literacy Initiative Program</td>
</tr>
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<td>ITP</td>
<td>Industry Training Plan</td>
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<td>JCC</td>
<td>Joint Consultative Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>LHMWU</td>
<td>Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>NACSR</td>
<td>National Advisory Committee on Skills Recognition</td>
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<td>NAITB</td>
<td>National Automotive Industry Training Board</td>
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<td>NCFP</td>
<td>National Certificate in Food Processing</td>
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<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>non-English-speaking background</td>
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<td>NWG</td>
<td>Natural Work Groups</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>RPL</td>
<td>recognition of prior learning</td>
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<td>SEP</td>
<td>Structural Efficiency Program</td>
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<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>TASK</td>
<td>Training and Skills program</td>
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<td>TCF</td>
<td>Textile, Clothing and Footwear</td>
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<tr>
<td>VAITB</td>
<td>Victorian Automotive Industry Training Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>VAITP</td>
<td>Victorian Automotive Industry Training Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>VFITB</td>
<td>Victorian Food Industry Training Board</td>
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<td>VIC</td>
<td>Vehicle Industry Certificate</td>
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<tr>
<td>WBS</td>
<td>Workplace Bargaining Survey</td>
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<td>WELL</td>
<td>Workplace English Language and Literacy</td>
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Executive summary

As a group, women workers with a non-English-speaking background (NESB) have long held a relatively marginal and powerless role in industry, notwithstanding their concentration in a number of important sectors of manufacturing. NESB women are predominantly employed at the bottom of work pyramids, as production or process workers, with little avenue for advancement (Chataway & Sachs 1990). Traditionally the use of scientific management or ‘Fordist’ principles of production, has been a major factor in the relegation of NESB women workers to a secondary role in the workplace. However, more recently the agenda has been set for a restructuring of Australian manufacturing, with a declared intention to shift production away from Fordist methods to more flexible and potentially more democratic forms of work.

These changes to work systems would seem to offer opportunities to NESB women workers not widely available to them in the past: opportunities to receive structured accredited training, upgrade skills, move between jobs and access career paths. But they may also highlight the vulnerabilities of this group, particularly in the areas of skills and capacity to participate in change.

Research conducted by Baker and Wooden (1991) based on a 1989 ABS survey shows that the most common form of work-related training undertaken by NESB women is on-the-job training (63.1 per cent received this form of training), followed by in-house training courses (24.7 per cent), study undertaken for educational qualifications (about 14 per cent) and external training courses (5.4 per cent). In contrast, significantly higher proportions of workers from the main English-speaking countries (including the Australia-born), both male and female, participate in these forms of training. While a 63.1 per cent rate for NESB women in on-the-job training may seem high, the informal and unaccredited nature of such training would suggest that NESB women will be disadvantaged by work reforms which emphasise structured accredited training, such as industry certificates. This report also queries the capacity of on-the-job training to adequately equip NESB women with the skills and knowledge required to work in the restructured workplaces of the future.

Baker and Wooden’s (1991) study raises a number of questions concerning the reasons for the lower participation rates of NESB women in training, particularly structured in-house and external training, some of which are incorporated in the design of this study. Overall the aims of this study were to investigate, at an industry and plant level:

- the specific experience of a sample of NESB women in the manufacturing industry in relation to work-related training;
- the specific factors responsible for the disadvantaged position of these NESB women in relation to work-related training (social, cultural, economic and personal). This would incorporate comparisons with other groups such as NESB men, and ESB men and women;
current trends in the manufacturing industry (such as award restructuring, competency-based training, enterprise bargaining, the Training Guarantee Act) which may affect the future access and participation of NESB women in work-related training;

recent initiatives in the manufacturing industry which have the potential to improve the access and participation of NESB women in work-related training; and

any 'success stories' relating to individuals or groups of NESB women which can be used as a model for future reforms in this area.

The focus on NESB women in the manufacturing industry was for two reasons: this is a significant area of employment for NESB women, employing 92,400 NESB women out of a total manufacturing workforce of 1,200,400 (Foster, Marshall & Williams 1991, p. 52). It is also an area which has undergone, and will continue to undergo, major structural change in Australia.

In this research, a case-study approach was utilised, eliciting a considerable body of qualitative and quantitative data. The main body of data was gathered from structured face-to-face interviews with 436 workers. In addition, the researcher interviewed a total of 36 other personnel, including managers, union officials and members of training committees. Other data were collected from relevant documents and discussions held with staff of the Industry Training Boards and other training organisations.

Four case studies were conducted. The workplaces covered in these case studies spanned three areas of manufacturing: food, metal, and vehicle manufacturing. In the two food manufacturing companies—Herbert Adams and Lanes Biscuits—a total of 232 workers and twenty management and union representatives were interviewed. At Ford Australia in Broadmeadows, a vehicle manufacturer, 115 workers and nine management and union personnel were interviewed; and at Preslite Australia, a vehicle component manufacturer, 89 workers and seven union and management personnel were interviewed. All four workplaces were located in Melbourne, Victoria. Of the 436 workers who were interviewed, approximately 51 per cent (or 221) were NESB women, 14 per cent (63) were Australia-born (AB) and ESB women, 12 per cent (51) were Australia-born and ESB men, and 23 per cent (101) were NESB men. All interviews were based on a comprehensive structured interview schedule and conducted by a researcher who was assisted, where necessary for language reasons, by bilingual workers. The interviews ran for approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

The definition of NESB women used in this report was designed to ensure consistency with ABS categories and the general approach adopted by other researchers. This definition identifies NESB women as those born in a country where English is not the main language used. Conversely, ESB women are those who were born in a main English-speaking country (UK, New Zealand, USA and Canada). The third category is AB workers. In presenting the data, however, we have opted for only two categories: NESB and AB/ESB.
Executive summary

As there was little literature available specifically on NESB women and training, a literature review was undertaken of material dealing more broadly with this topic, such as award restructuring, enterprise bargaining, and training and skills. From this literature review, we concluded that women generally, and NESB women in particular, have not benefited from initiatives undertaken to restructure and reform the industrial arena. Work practices historically have been constructed in a form that generally advantages men over women, and AB/ESB workers over NESB workers. In this way, NESB women are doubly disadvantaged. The literature suggests that recent workplace changes have not made any real impact on this hierarchy of opportunity.

Findings

While the implementation of training differs at the four case study companies, the findings indicate some:

- clear similarities in perceptions and attitudes towards work-related training;
- important indications about barriers to training; and
- projections about future work profiles that raise concerns about the employment prospects of workers with low levels of skills and English language proficiency.

We had been told a number of times at an anecdotal level that NESB women generally were not interested in the idea of training. Our findings indicate otherwise. The responses of the NESB women in our sample to a range of issues related to work and training were consistently positive. High proportions of female interviewees from all four companies indicated that if they were trained to speak better English, there would be real benefits: they would apply for better paid jobs; it would be easier to get a better job; they would enjoy work more; and they would do more training at work.

Far from being uninterested in work-related training, consistently high percentages of NESB women from the four workplaces gave the following reasons for their interest in participating in structured training at work: to get a better paid job; to learn more skills; to make work more interesting; and to learn more about changes in technology. While the proportions of NESB women interested in undertaking training in order to become a supervisor or leading hand were uniformly quite low, in some cases they were higher than for the corresponding AB/ESB women and men, or the NESB men. Some women from a NESB thus indicated that they had job aspirations beyond their current positions, and would be willing to take on additional responsibility. This again was contrary to general perceptions of female NESB workers.

At the two companies in the food industry, training in the workplace was not well established. However, over 85 per cent of the NESB women interviewed at both companies considered that training at work was worth doing, and there was a far greater indication of willingness by these women to participate in training than
there had been opportunities to do so. However, there was also evidence that this
willingness could not extend to participation in training outside work hours. This
was for a variety of reasons, but primarily due to the demands of family and
home.

At Ford, where an integrated English language and Vehicle Industry Certificate
(VIC) training program has been implemented for a number of years, both in and
out of work hours, nearly half of the NESB women in our sample had not
participated in any work-related training (either language or certificate based) in
their time at that company. The proportion of NESB women participants in the
VIC program (41 per cent) was by far the lowest of the four groups of
interviewees. This figure contrasted with over 70 per cent of the NESB men and
the AB/ESB women and men who had undertaken VIC training. There were five
major reasons given by the NESB women for not participating in any structured
training, in the following order: they felt that their English was not good enough to
participate; training was outside normal work hours; it took too long to finish; it
was in unpaid time; and they had child-care difficulties.

A contrasting model of training was provided at Preslite. Both English language
and certificate (EPC) training were available during work hours via the Federal
Government sponsored TASK program. Only 12 per cent of the NESB women
had not done any work-related training at Preslite, compared with 45 per cent at
Ford. Nearly 80 per cent of the Preslite NESB women had participated in English
language training, and 57 per cent in the Engineering Production Certificate
program.

When these data from Ford and Preslite are compared, and combined with the
stated interest in training from the NESB women, it suggests that given accessible
training arrangements and structures, high percentages of the NESB women
interviewed were more than willing to participate in training programs, either
language- or skill-based, or both. However, it appears that if the training is
provided at a time that conflicts with expectations to fulfil family responsibilities
at home (as at Ford), training is not an option for many NESB (and AB/ESB)
women. In making this comparison, the authors recognise that Ford and Preslite
are two different case studies having quite different characteristics, such as size,
industry, work-force composition, industrial and training arrangements and so on.
Nevertheless it is clear that, in spite of these differences, a common element of
responses by women workers in both plants was the perceived difficulty of
undertaking training outside normal working hours.

In relation to the proposition from Baker and Wooden (1991) that a major reason
for the lower participation rate of NESB women in training is difficulty with
English language, our findings support this conclusion, but suggest that wider
reasons must also be sought. For the NESB women at Ford, both language
difficulties and structural barriers were seen to limit the opportunities of many
of them to participate in the English language and VIC training program. In the
case study at Preslite, where those structural barriers were not in existence, the
percentage of NESB women who did not participate in training was quite low (12 per cent).

Reasons put forward for NESB women’s lower rate of participation in training have tended to rely on ‘problems’ with the women themselves, such as ‘lack’ of English language proficiency. A more helpful, and more strategic perspective, would be to locate explanations for this phenomenon in the identification of structural barriers which operate to exclude certain groups from equal access to the provision of training. For example, if language and literacy training was conducted at a time that recognised the broad family responsibilities of many workers (particularly women), access for NESB workers would be facilitated and their English language skills could be enhanced.

There was a range of other issues that impinged on work practice and culture. Sexual harassment was cited as a problem in some workplaces, especially where the culture was strongly marked as masculine. Until these kinds of issues are strongly condemned and appropriate action taken, workplaces continue for many women to be hostile environments.

We found that information provision in an appropriate form about changes at work was of concern to many workers. At all four companies, the proportions of interviewees who recorded that they either had not received or did not understand material about award restructuring, enterprise bargaining, or available training, were much higher for the NESB women and men than for the AB/ESB workers.

One of the underlying principles of award restructuring was the issue of multiskilling. This necessarily involves workers being given opportunities to move to different types of jobs and to perform a variety of tasks. Our findings indicate that for many workers at the two companies with minimal training, this does not happen. This was particularly apparent for the NESB women in the sample, more so than for any other group.

A further finding of considerable importance was the view expressed by some of the managers about the future of their workplaces. Recruitment policies and practices reflect a company’s desire to employ a more skilled work force, capable of considerable change, and willing to move along the pathways delineated by increased training and skill. The implications of this for NESB workers, especially the older women and men, are serious indeed. At one company there was an indication of possible future gender bias in recruitment. This suggests that, for those women without sufficient job skills—many of whom are from a NESB—re-entering the labour market may present a forbidding future of poor job prospects.

This study does not claim to be representative of the three industry sectors. Using a case-study approach, our aim was to reflect a variety of work practices and a range of views that gave a voice to groups of workers in analysing the effects of change. Our findings indicate that while there were different rates and models of training development in the four companies, there were similarities in the views and experiences of shop-floor workers, particularly of many NESB women.
Almost universally, these women demonstrated an interest in the notion of training, and in the potential benefits that training could bring. Consistent across the four workplaces was the view that training outside work hours was not a suitable model for people with family responsibilities, the majority of whom were women, and in particular NESB women.

Unless companies and the manufacturing industry generally are willing to explore this further in their own workplaces, and can exercise some imaginative and creative planning in the provision of work-based training, our data suggest that for many workers—particularly for many NESB women workers—the opportunity to participate in skill enhancement in their workplaces will be nothing more than a mirage.
Chapter 1: Introduction

As a group, non-English-speaking-background (NESB) women workers have long held a relatively marginal and powerless role in industry, notwithstanding their concentrations in a number of important sectors of manufacturing. Whether it be in electronics or food processing, vehicle component manufacture or textiles, clothing and footwear, NESB women play a central role in the production process. Yet they are often denied the power, credibility or skills to participate effectively in workplace decision-making or to access opportunities for job improvement. This is largely due to their position in industrial hierarchies, both at plant level and within union structures. NESB women are predominantly employed at the bottom of work pyramids, as production or process workers, with little avenue for advancement (Chataway & Sachs 1990). The hierarchical nature of Australian industry, traditionally based on scientific management or ‘Fordist’ principles of production, has been a major factor in the relegation of NESB women workers to a secondary role in the workplace. ['Fordism' is the continuous method of mass production introduced by Henry Ford, father of the Model T Ford, in 1913. It is built on Taylorist or ‘scientific management’ production principles which typically result in assembly line jobs that are narrowly defined, rigidly supervised and based on short cycle times (Lewis & Madden 1991, p. 82).]

Other more dominant groups (supervisors, tradespeople, managers, trade unions) have been influential in shaping production systems and industrial relations through the prevailing institutional arrangements (Chataway & Sachs 1990). It is these groups that have more recently initiated the changes required to meet the contemporary demands of recession, tariff reductions and increased market competition. The agenda has been set for a general restructuring of the Australian manufacturing industry, with a declared intention to shift production away from Fordist methods to more flexible and potentially more democratic forms of work (Australian Manufacturing Council 1988; Boxall 1992; Mathews, 1989).

These changes to work systems would seem to offer opportunities to NESB women workers which were not widely available to them in the past: opportunities to receive structured accredited training, upgrade skills, move between jobs and access career paths. But they may also highlight the vulnerabilities of this group, particularly in the area of skills and readiness to participate in change.

Aims

The inspiration for this study came from our knowledge of the impending changes, and concern for the special interests and needs of NESB women workers, whom we regard as a distinct group in the industrial work force. It grew out of our awareness of the increasing emphasis being placed on training (particularly structured training leading to accredited outcomes), as a vehicle for promoting workplace change and international competitiveness in some manufacturing industry sectors where NESB women are employed. It was also predicated on the
compelling fact that NESB women currently receive less training of all kinds than any other group in the workplace.

Research by Baker and Wooden (1991), based on a survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in 1989, shows that the most common form of work-related training undertaken by NESB women is on-the-job training (63.1 per cent received this form of training), followed by in-house training courses (24.7 per cent), study undertaken for educational qualifications (about 14 per cent) and external training courses (5.4 per cent). In contrast, significantly higher proportions of workers from main English-speaking countries (including the Australia-born), both male and female, participate in these forms of training. NESB men have lower participation rates than those from an English-speaking background (ESB), including Australia-born (AB) workers, but still enjoy higher participation in all forms of training than NESB women, with the exception of on-the-job training. While a 63.1 per cent rate for NESB women in on-the-job training may seem high, the informal and unaccredited nature of such training (being shown by others, watching others work, asking questions and teaching oneself) would suggest that NESB women will be disadvantaged by work reforms that emphasise structured accredited training, such as industry certificates. The authors also query the capacity of much of this on-the-job training to adequately equip NESB women with the skills and knowledge required to work in the restructured workplaces of the future.

The ABS data examined by Baker and Wooden (1991) raise a number of questions concerning the reasons for the lower participation rates of NESB women in training, particularly structured in-house and external training. The present study sought to go beyond these statistics, to investigate the actual experiences and perceptions of NESB women in the manufacturing industry, as reported by them. While the ABS data quoted above apply to workers across the range of industries, further analysis by industry suggests that, as the manufacturing industry has low levels of in-house training, particularly for NESB workers, it is pertinent to investigate the barriers to NESB women accessing the training that exists. Similarly, the finding by Baker and Wooden (1991) that the probability of training tends to rise in line with the skill level inherent in the occupation suggests that NESB women, who are overrepresented as plant and machine operators, would receive correspondingly less training in this industry than other groups (Baker & Wooden 1991, p. 30). Further investigation of these issues could shed some light on how well NESB women will be able to access training in future, as and when the level of training provision in the manufacturing industry increases (refer to chapter 2 for more details).

Overall the aims of the study were to investigate, at an industry and plant level:

- the specific experience of NESB women in the manufacturing industry in relation to work-related training;
- the specific factors responsible for the disadvantaged position of NESB women in relation to work-related training (social, cultural, economic and personal).
Introduction

This would incorporate comparisons with other groups such as NESB men, and ESB men and women;

☐ current trends in the manufacturing industry (such as award restructuring, competency-based training, enterprise bargaining, *Training Guarantee Act*) which may affect the future access and participation of NESB women in work-related training;

☐ recent initiatives in the manufacturing industry that have the potential to improve the access and participation of NESB women in work-related training; and

☐ any 'success stories' relating to individuals or groups of NESB women that can be used as a model for future reforms in this area.

The focus on NESB women in the manufacturing industry was for two reasons: this is a significant area of employment for NESB women, employing 92,400 NESB women out of a total workforce of 1,200,400 (Foster, Marshall & Williams 1991, p. 52). It is also an area which has undergone, and will continue to undergo, major structural change in Australia.

The contraction of the local manufacturing industry, due to such factors as the recession, tariff reductions and increased global competition, have had a major impact on workers in this industry. Other changes, such as workplace reform and the associated training arrangements which are being introduced, will continue to impact on manufacturing establishments and the workers in them. This is not to suggest that such changes will not also affect workers in other industries, as they clearly will. NESB women are also employed in significant numbers in other industries, such as services, including community services, cleaning and retail. However, in view of the attention being given by policy-makers to the fortunes of the manufacturing industry, and the significant role played by NESB women in some sectors of that industry, a study of NESB women’s training participation in the manufacturing industry seemed an important area to focus on.

Since NESB women in manufacturing are predominantly employed as plant and machine operators, we were interested in studying those sectors which had introduced, or at least were planning to introduce, structured training programs for such workers. In some cases, training developments of this nature were at a very early stage, and this is reflected in the outcomes of the study. Nevertheless it seemed important to try to capture the experiences of NESB women at this transitional stage, at a time when the manufacturing industry was moving towards a new production ethos and a more highly trained and skilled work force.

Throughout our inquiries we considered both the policy and practical implications of the research, focusing on research questions which might contribute to the development of constructive change strategies for NESB women. It is the authors’ belief that systematic inquiry at the plant and workplace level, eliciting the views and experiences of workers themselves (and those of other relevant groups), is essential if a more complete understanding of such issues is to be gained.
Manufacturing uncertainty

Method

In this research, a case study approach was utilised, eliciting a considerable body of qualitative and quantitative data. The main body of data was gathered from structured face-to-face interviews with 436 workers. In addition, the researcher interviewed a total of thirty-six other personnel, including managers, union officials and members of training committees. Other data were collected in the form of relevant documents, including enterprise bargaining agreements, training policies, affirmative action policies and related documentation where it existed. Supplementing this formal approach to data gathering, the researcher also spent a considerable amount of time at the workplaces, speaking to managers, union officials and others, collecting anecdotal information about issues such as organisational structure, industrial relations, company strategy, market share and economic performance of the companies. Discussions were also held with staff of the relevant Industry Training Boards, and other training organisations.

In targeting a relatively large number of workers for interview, it was hoped that meaningful inferences and comparisons could be made, both within and between different groups of workers in each case study. At no time did the analysis extend across the different case studies, given the unique circumstances of each workplace. However, observations were sometimes made about differences and similarities between the case studies.

Four case studies were conducted. The workplaces covered in these case studies spanned three areas of manufacturing: food, metal and vehicle manufacturing. In the two food manufacturing companies—Herbert Adams and Lanes Biscuits—a total of 232 workers and twenty management and union representatives were interviewed. At Ford Australia, Broadmeadows, a vehicle manufacturer, 115 workers and nine management and union personnel were interviewed; and at Preslite Australia, a vehicle component manufacturer, eighty-nine workers and seven union and management personnel were interviewed. All four workplaces were located in Melbourne, Victoria. For reasons related to training and union coverage arrangements (further elaborated in chapter 6), we have classified Preslite Australia as a metal manufacturing company rather than part of the vehicle industry. Of the 436 workers who were interviewed, approximately 51 per cent (or 221) were NESB women, 14 per cent (63) were AB and ESB women, 12 per cent (51) were AB and ESB men, and 23.2 per cent (101) were NESB men. Further detail on the composition of these samples is provided in chapters 5–7. All interviews were based on a comprehensive structured interview schedule and conducted by a researcher who was assisted, where necessary for language reasons, by bilingual workers. The interviews ran for approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

The authors believe that the case study method employed in this study has a number of advantages. This method, if properly designed to take account of language limitations and social/industrial factors at the workplace, can be particularly useful in illuminating phenomena broadly described by statistical data from such sources as the ABS. Where a significant body of quantitative data
already exists, as in this study, the case study method enables the investigation to proceed to a further level of detail not possible in the larger study. Gathering a body of qualitative data from individuals and groups enables the complexity and interrelationships of relevant variables at the workplace to be explored in depth. This method also has the important advantage of providing a significant voice to the subjects themselves. In this case, it is expected that the voices of the NESB women will help dispel a number of myths and assumptions which have characterised discussion about the role of NESB women in training, and it is hoped that this will stimulate further research aimed at capturing the self-reported experiences and attitudes of NESB women workers.

The case studies

In the case study analysis of the data derived from the four participating companies presented in chapters 5–7, it is not intended to scrutinise the day-to-day practices of participating companies. However, there will be material discussed that will reflect both positively and negatively on the four companies, and also on the unions concerned. It is important to state that the intention has never been to act as judge and jury about these specific organisations. They have been willing to participate in the research project, and to lay open for scrutiny their work practices and procedures. We are grateful for their help with the study, and do not wish to abuse their cooperation. At the same time, we must present the data as accurately as possible, and in a manner that reflects the views and experiences of the interviewees. This properly involves a critical approach to the discussion of the findings. It is in this spirit that the case study chapters are presented.

Definitions

The definition of NESB women used in this report was designed to ensure consistency with ABS categories and the general approach adopted by other researchers. This definition identifies NESB women as being from a non-English-speaking background, or born in a country where English is not the main language used. Conversely, ESB women are those from an English-speaking background or those who were born in a main English-speaking country (UK, New Zealand, USA and Canada). Australian-born (AB) workers are clearly those who were born in Australia. In presenting the data, however, only two categories are used, NESB and AB/ESB. AB and ESB workers have been combined, primarily, because the number of ESB female and male workers in the total group (18) was relatively small, so that to have identified it separately for analysis in each case study would have added nothing to the findings. With respect to the issue of training, national statistics suggest that the differences between ESB and AB women are not great. While adopting the widely used definitions of ESB and NESB, the authors acknowledge the shortcomings associated with these, such as the anomalous
treatment of persons from countries where English is the official second language, and those who arrived in Australia at an early age, participated in the Australian educational and social systems as children, but nevertheless are classified as NESB. We also recognise that the definitions make no allowance for special circumstances facing second-generation immigrants—sons and daughters of the newcomers to Australia who are classified as AB, but often grow up experiencing English as their second language, even beyond school age.

However, for the reasons outlined above we took the view that it was better to continue with the prevailing terms than to adopt a different approach which broke with past practice in the area. The complexities of country of birth background were, nevertheless, borne in mind when it came to analysing some of the individual data collected.

Throughout the report, the findings of the study are related to data collected from or about the defined four groups: NESB women and men, and AB/ESB women and men. While specific country of birth data were collected and reported in some tables, most of the discussion and analysis in this study has been limited to the four main categories.

Generally it was found that any further disaggregation of data would have been neither feasible nor meaningful, given the sample sizes at the workplaces and the numerous countries of birth represented within them. For example, at one workplace a sample of eighty-nine workers reported eighteen different countries of birth. Aggregating such data across workplaces to increase the scope for quantitative comparison was not considered appropriate in light of the case study approach adopted.

Outline

The second chapter provides an overview of the industrial relations changes and related developments in the training field affecting NESB women workers in the manufacturing industry. It also reviews data on the role of NESB workers in the workforce, including issues relating to gender segmentation and country of birth segmentation. Chapter 3 reviews the available literature on NESB women workers, training, workplace change and literacy/numeracy needs. It adopts a broad view of the literature rather than separating research findings in the training area from literature relating to the industrial and social context within which that training takes place. As suggested earlier, much of the recent focus on training in the manufacturing industry would not have occurred without changes in industrial relations (such as award restructuring), government policy and the society at large.

The fourth chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology employed in the present study, the reasons for this approach, and some of the advantages and problems involved. Chapters 5–7 set out the findings of the case studies conducted in the four Melbourne-based manufacturing plants. Chapter 5 covers data collected from Ford (Broadmeadows), chapter 6 reports on the findings of
research conducted at Preslite Australia Pty Ltd, while the two food companies—Herbert Adams and Lanes Biscuits—are covered in chapter 7.

These findings are drawn together in chapter 8, which presents conclusions on the training and employment prospects for NESB women in the manufacturing industry and the problems they face in accessing training and participating in workplace change. The chapter also discusses issues involved in improving access by NESB women to training and career opportunities in the manufacturing industry. Suggestions for further research are then outlined. Throughout the report, the data are presented in prose and tabular form, and unless otherwise noted, are based on the data collected in the case studies.
Chapter 2: Workplace change and training

Award restructuring

In line with international trends, change has been a major feature of the recent experience in many Australian workplaces. This chapter deals with the changes to the industrial relations system and consequential effects on workplace/vocational training arising from such changes. The chapter also discusses the implications of these changes for NESB women in the work force.

Since the trade crisis and depreciation of the Australian dollar in 1985–86, the administration of wages policy in Australia has progressively moved from a centralised system of wage increases to a more decentralised system based on productivity-related wage rises negotiated at industry and enterprise level. The incremental introduction of major industrial relations change has occurred via the Australian Labor Party–Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) Prices and Incomes Accord. This is a joint government/union incomes policy which has passed through numerous iterations since its inception in 1983. While the effect of wage policy change has been little short of a radical transformation of industrial relations in this country—from a highly regulated centralised system based on compulsory arbitration, to a system of decentralised regulation allowing for more direct bargaining between the parties—the process has been relatively gradual and carefully managed, at least at the federal level. (Industrial relations change at the State level has been considerably swifter and less harmonious. In Victoria, for example, the introduction of the Employee Relations Act 1992 was accompanied by widespread industrial action and protest.) Award restructuring emerged as an important stage in the transition from national uniform awards governing employment terms and conditions to the development of certified agreements tailored to specific enterprises or business undertakings.

Award restructuring involves the overhaul of comprehensive employment provisions (or awards) created by industrial tribunals leading to new wage rates, classifications and employment conditions commensurate with the needs of a modern workplace. The emphasis is on providing a framework for the achievement of greater labour flexibility within the federal conciliation and arbitration system, in a functional, numerical and temporal sense (Apius Network 1993). In Australia, the process of award restructuring began with the formulation of the Structural Efficiency Principle in the National Wage Decision of August 1988 (Australian Industrial Relations Commission, Print H4000), followed by phased implementation over several Industrial Relations Commission decisions between 1989 and 1991.

The Principle provided incentive to the parties, by way of wage rises tied to demonstrated achievement of award restructuring objectives, to review existing pay classifications and conditions of employment with the aim of removing outdated job requirements and barriers to improved efficiency and productivity at
Workplace change and training

enterprise level (Peetz, Preston & Docherty 1992, p. 33). The emphasis was on the development of broad employment classifications tied to competency-based skill levels which would enable skill upgrading, elimination of obstacles to multiskilling and the establishment of appropriate minimum wage relativities. In this context, the introduction of structured accredited training for workers at all skill levels was identified as a necessary element of the move towards skill-based awards. There was also opportunity to review other aspects of working arrangements, such as greater flexibility in hours of work, job sharing, part-time work and flexible leave provision, which could then be reflected in certified enterprise or workplace agreements.

These developments were broadly consistent with developments in other OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, such as Germany, Sweden, UK, USA, Canada and New Zealand, which had seen substantial changes in the regulation of employment arrangements to allow for greater regulation at the workplace level. The extent and nature of change, however, has varied markedly between countries depending on their politics, history and original structural characteristics (Peetz, Preston & Docherty 1992).

As with these countries, the major impetus for change in Australia has been largely economic and structural as governments, unions and employers struggle with the problems of low growth, high unemployment and high inflation. The problem of inflation was substantially tackled and growth stimulated in the mid 1980s by the wage moderation delivered by unions under the Prices and Incomes Accord. However, structural imbalances in the country's trade situation and alarming falls in the value of the Australian dollar, forced the Federal Government to undertake a broad program of micro-economic reform from 1986 (Bell 1993, p. 132).

It was clear that Australia's traditional reliance on trade in agricultural and commodity exports, combined with the post-war growth of a tariff-protected manufacturing sector geared predominantly for the domestic market, had led to a crisis in the balance of trade. Global changes in the structure and terms of trade, and increasingly fierce competition on international markets, had seriously diminished Australia's share of overseas trade in traditional commodity markets. By the 1980s Australia was importing more high and low value-added manufactured products than it was able to purchase from the proceeds of rural and commodity exports (Bell 1993, p. 163).

The subsequent decline in Australian manufacturing led to 100,000 jobs being lost in this sector in 1982 alone. Confronted by this dismal prospect, employers and unions in the metals and engineering industry set about negotiating a compact in 1986 to 'change the industrial relations culture of the industry and help make it internationally competitive' (Deery & Plowman 1991, p. 409). This compact later became the model and springboard for award restructuring throughout Australian workplaces, through its incorporation into the principles of restructuring enunciated by the Industrial Relations Commission in 1987 and beyond (Deery & Plowman 1991, p. 417).
Manufacturing uncertainty

The worldwide trend towards the restructuring of production away from traditional Taylorist methods to the development of 'post-Fordist' approaches, with its emphasis on flexible work practices, team-based work, multiskilling and increased worker autonomy and responsibility, posed new challenges for Australian policy-makers. (Post-Fordism is the general term used to refer to new patterns of working, as distinct from traditional Taylorist or Fordist approaches.) The evidence concerning the spread of such practices was mixed, but the implications for future production strategies were unmistakable. Managers and unions would have to revise their traditional assumptions about the conduct of work on the shop floor if niche markets for high quality, non-standard, high value-added goods and services were to be won. At the same time, the manufacturing industry would need to significantly increase its training effort, including training of production workers, since the goals of flexible production required flexibility and skill on the part of all workers. Award restructuring was seen as a formal prelude to the introduction of this major paradigm shift in manufacturing production philosophy.

In its decision of 12 August 1988 the Industrial Relations Commission therefore outlined a broad agenda for award restructuring which included, but was not limited to: overhaul of outdated awards; transformation of classifications, pay rates and skill requirements; redesign of work and jobs; improved career paths; more access to training; reward for skill and incentives for greater productivity (emphases supplied; Department of Industrial Relations, 1991). (The Australian Industrial Relations Commission is an independent industrial tribunal established by the Industrial Relations Act 1988. It should be distinguished from the Department of Industrial Relations which is the Commonwealth department responsible for developing and implementing the Federal Government’s industrial relations policy. Note that the agenda items listed in bold in this quote relate directly to the concerns of their report.) The plans had been laid for a smarter, more flexible and productive work force, led by a more sophisticated management cadre promoting a new production philosophy.

Enterprise bargaining

For many workplaces, enterprise bargaining was the next step in the attainment of productivity improvements offered by the restructured awards developed between 1988 and 1991. The Enterprise Bargaining Principle (EBP) was formally established by the National Wage Case Decision in October 1991. It provided for the extension of the existing Structural Efficiency Principle (SEP) to the workplace via workplace negotiations and agreements (Department of Industrial Relations 1993, p. 1).

Legislative amendments in July 1993 further facilitated this process, by allowing for the certification of agreements under a new Division 3A of the Industrial Relations Act 1988. As indicated above, it was in enterprise or workplace agreements that the new provisions for training, to meet the requirements of
workplace restructuring, would be enunciated. To gauge the impact of these changes on NESB women workers and their training experiences, the pertinent issues are the extent to which NESB women workers are covered by workplace agreements (since their incidence across workplaces is not universal), the nature of such agreements, and any provisions for training within them. There is no direct evidence on the coverage of NESB women workers by agreements, so it is necessary to consider what data are available on NESB and women workers, and particular sectors of industry where NESB women workers are most likely to be found.

With regard to NESB workers, the best available evidence across the work force comes from a survey conducted by the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) in 1989–90 called the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS). The survey collected information on a range of organisational and industrial relations features from 2353 workplaces throughout Australia. As noted by Callus and Knox (1993, p. 3), 'these data allow an examination of the differences between and similarities of workplaces where there was a relatively high proportion of NESB workers (more than 25 per cent, as estimated by managers responding to the survey) and workplaces where NESB workers made up only a small proportion of the work force (less than or equal to 25 per cent of the work force).’ For brevity, the first type of workplace is referred to as a ‘high’ NESB workplace, and the second as a ‘low’ NESB workplace.

The AWIRS data indicate that 61 per cent of low NESB workplaces had engaged in some form of workplace negotiations. In contrast, 75 per cent of high NESB workplaces had done so (DIR 1993, p. 31). More workplaces with high NESB work forces had negotiated collective agreements (46 per cent) than those with low NESB work forces (41 per cent), suggesting that an NESB work force was no barrier to the achievement of workplace negotiations and, in fact, correlated with a higher level of workplace bargaining. Given the generally higher level of union density within these workplaces, this may be more a reflection of the concentration of union resources and activity than any intrinsic characteristics of NESB workers per se.

Evidence of the impact of workplace bargaining on women workers is less positive, based on a further survey by the DIR called the Workplace Bargaining Survey (WBS). The WBS was conducted in December 1992 and involved interviews with managers at 700 workplaces employing twenty or more people. Workplaces included in the WBS were drawn from a sample of 2004 workplaces used in the AWIRS study (DIR 1993, p. 1). Data from the WBS showed that ‘those workplaces with a particularly high percentage of female workers (75 per cent or more) were less likely than average to be covered by an agreement, and in particular, a ratified agreement which has involved negotiations at the workplace’ (DIR 1993, p. 24).

When analysing this evidence against other data on the labour market and employment characteristics of NESB women in Australia, some propositions can be made about the likely effect on this group of workplace bargaining and
associated changes in training provisions. We would expect that NESB women would be subject to two possible scenarios. Where they are concentrated in largely female-dominated enclaves of the manufacturing industry, such as textiles, clothing and footwear, and food manufacturing, they may experience less coverage by agreements than in industry sectors with greater male employment. Indeed evidence from the DIR project (AWIRS) on the first 1000 agreements confirms that, while the manufacturing sector has dominated the process of workplace bargaining, the majority of manufacturing sector agreements are found in metals-related industries, although workplace agreements have now spread to other, non-metal related industries (DIR 1993, p. 6). This suggests that NESB women in metals-related industries are well-covered by workplace agreements, but that NESB women in other areas—textiles, clothing and footwear, and food—are less likely to have been affected by such arrangements.

When looking at how well NESB women are covered by any training provisions in agreements, researchers are hampered by the lack of gender or NESB data relevant to workers covered by those agreements. One proxy variable for NESB female employment is industry sector, since we know the industries in which NESB women are most heavily employed. As noted by Labour Market Alternatives in their report to the Women’s Research and Employment Initiatives Program, out of a total of 1029 workplace agreements examined, 640 (62 per cent) provided for some access to training. However, in just under one half of these agreements the relevant provision provided a commitment to training only, or training which was subject to operational requirements. The Report reveals a concentration of training-related agreements in the male-dominated metals and engineering industry, reflecting the terms of the industry framework agreement between the Metal Trades Federation of Unions and the Metal Trades Industry Association (Labour Market Alternatives 1994).

In the food and beverage industry—an area of high NESB female employment—there were significantly fewer training provisions in agreements (about one-third the number found in the metals and engineering industry), and less of these related to a detailed training plan. No figures are provided for the clothing and footwear industry (another area of high NESB female employment) and the figure for ‘miscellaneous manufacturing’ is one of the lowest, although a high proportion of the training provisions which do exist provide for a detailed training plan.

In summary, the data show that NESB women workers in male-dominated manufacturing areas are more likely to be covered by training provisions in enterprise agreements than those in female-dominated areas of manufacturing. This suggests that the new training arrangements available under enterprise bargaining are less likely to benefit NESB women working in female-dominated areas of manufacturing.

The seemingly few agreements which provide for English language and/or literacy and numeracy training, suggests that NESB women’s disadvantage with respect to training access is likely to be maintained (DIR 1993, p. 53). It also indicates that
the traditional reluctance of workplaces (even those with high NESB work forces) to provide such training is being carried through into workplace agreements. In 1993, Callus and Knox reported that only 14 per cent of workplaces with high NESB representation provided English language and literacy training. Without such training, the ability of NESB women workers to participate in workplace restructuring and obtain a share of the potential benefits, such as skills training, career paths and access to more interesting and satisfying work is likely to be significantly impeded.

**Country of birth segmentation**

No analysis of NESB women and training in the labour market would be complete without an understanding of the general situation of NESB workers within it. Out of a total Australian labour force of 8.4 million people in August 1990, nearly 2.2 million were born outside Australia and 1.2 million were born in countries where English is not the first language (Foster, Marshall & Williams 1991, p. 43).

An overview of the evidence on immigrants’ labour market status by the (then) Bureau of Immigration Research (BIR) in 1991 confirmed the picture provided by a number of writers earlier (e.g. Castles, Morrissey & Pinkstone 1988; Collins 1981, 1984; Turpin 1986) of a segmented labour market based on both gender and country of birth. The data show that immigrant workers from ESBs consistently operate more successfully in the Australian labour market than both the AB and immigrants from NESB, with the latter experiencing the poorest outcomes. This finding is based on examination of various labour force indicators, including labour force status (whether employed or unemployed), industry and occupation concentrations, earnings relativities and labour mobility (Foster, Marshall & Williams 1991, p. 59).

Generally the data show that NESB immigrants ‘consistently experience lower labour force participation rates, higher unemployment rates and lower mean weekly earnings than the Australian-born,’ (Foster, Marshall & Williams 1991). They are also significantly overrepresented as plant and machinery operators, and drivers and labourers, compared with ESB and AB workers (Foster, Marshall & Williams 1991, p. 54). NESB workers (particularly females) are more highly represented in manufacturing than ESB persons, and generally perform the most difficult, dangerous and unpleasant jobs.

The 1992 ABS (Brisbane) survey summarises the situation of NESB workers in the following way:

Immigrant workers (particularly those from NES countries) are concentrated in those industries and occupations generally considered to require comparatively low levels of skill, such as the manufacturing and construction industries, plant and machine operators and drivers, and labourers and related workers... it is clear that NES immigrants are disadvantaged in the Australian labour market. (ABS 1992, pp. 61–3)
Manufacturing uncertainty

The picture is more complex when examining the situation of particular immigrant groups from different source countries, with the most recently arrived groups (Vietnamese, Lebanese and Polish) appearing to suffer the highest level of disadvantage, the exception being professionally qualified immigrants from countries such as Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and India who are generally fluent in English and overrepresented in professional and clerical jobs compared with their total numbers in employment (BIPR 1993, p. 25). In addition there appears to be a greater ease of adjustment to the Australian labour market by Northern Europeans, who have more success in gaining recognition of overseas qualifications and generally perform better (Collins 1984).

In terms of NESB participation in unions, an aspect relevant to the current processes of workplace change and the emerging training agenda, the results are more mixed. Since the training provisions in workplace agreements will require detailed negotiation at the workplace level for their implementation, the participation of workers in union/management forums is relevant. NESB immigrants have higher levels of union membership, possibly due to their concentration in more highly unionised industries and occupations, and their general participation in union affairs is not dissimilar to that of ESB and AB unionists (Bertone & Griffin 1992, p. 38). However, NESB unionists tend to be underrepresented in positions of influence within the union movement, and only a minority of unions offer consistent services targeted to NESB unionists’ needs (such as translated information, availability of interpreters, English language classes). These findings are more pronounced for NESB women (Bertone & Griffin 1992, pp. 55, 111). These observations suggest that NESB workers (including NESB women) will not always be able to adopt an active role in the implementation of training arrangements at their workplaces.

Gender segmentation

NESB women workers face most, if not all, the disadvantages of women workers generally, as well as the particular problems experienced by workers of non-English-speaking background. In analysing the implications of enterprise bargaining for NESB women and training it is therefore relevant to consider the problems faced by women workers generally.

The position of women in the Australian work force has been well documented (DIR 1991; Women’s Employment Branch 1989). Women make up 41.3 per cent of the Australian labour force, but on average receive significantly less pay and benefits than male workers, and remain concentrated in stereotypical ‘women’s’ occupations and industries. They also receive fewer training and career opportunities than men (DIR 1991, p. 11). The majority of women are found in four industries: community services; wholesale/retail trade; finance, property and business services; and manufacturing. NESB women are overrepresented in the manufacturing industry, which accounts for more than twice the proportion of their jobs as for AB women (Alcorso & Harrison 1993, p. 39). Women also
Workplace change and training

dominate the part-time work force, although NESB women are more likely to
work full-time, partly due to the unavailability of part-time work in industries
where they work (ABS Brisbane 1992, p. 70).

The situation of NESB women workers typifies that of unskilled women workers
in production and machining jobs. They are found in manufacturing areas where
outmoded mass production techniques continue to prevail, and the emphasis is on
speed and repetition of work rather than skill and decision-making. This allows
little opportunity or need for NESB women workers to undertake training and
skill development (Chataway & Sachs 1990). Hence they may typically perform
the same narrow routine tasks for years, never receiving any pay upgrading or
chance to do more interesting or challenging work. As observed by the DIR:
‘Many women begin and end their working lives in the same job’ (DIR 1991).

The advent of workplace change, through award restructuring and enterprise
bargaining, does have the potential to improve women’s access to training and
career advancement, through the redesign of work and the introduction of greater
skill and responsibility for production workers. However, in the case of NESB
women workers this potential is conditional on a number of factors peculiar to
their industry and employment circumstances. Since women in manufacturing
occupy the lower strata of that industry’s work force, they typically have little
access to managerial positions, training or career opportunities. The situation of
NESB women is particularly disadvantaged in this regard, due to their
concentration in low paid process work, and generally low English language
proficiency (Chataway & Sachs 1990, p. 2).

In relation to women generally, a 1990 report by the Australian Manufacturing
Council comments that:

Even where women are in the same occupations they are often employed at lower
levels of responsibility, and allocated different tasks to men. They are vulnerable to
structural changes within the industry. Underrepresentation in positions of power
means that they neither participate in nor determine the decision-making processes
that affect their working lives. Moreover, women’s consciousness of themselves as
potential managers is often tentative . . . (Chataway & Sachs 1990, p. 3)

The chances of NESB women in manufacturing being able to benefit from
workplace change and associated training opportunities, depend on a number of
key conditions. First, it is essential that NESB women workers are given assistance
to participate effectively in workplace change, through such mechanisms as the
 provision of information and training, including English language and literacy
training. This requires a recognition by employers of the value of investing in their
NESB female work force rather than resorting to recruitment of younger, ESB
workers who may be regarded as being more adaptable to change. Second, it is
essential that the jobs of NESB women are in fact enhanced by workplace change
rather than downgraded or eliminated, for example by factory closures and/or a
shift to outworking to maintain production at a lower cost. Without such job-
enhancing change, the provision of training to NESB women becomes irrelevant.
Manufacturing uncertainty

Constructive workplace change of this nature will depend on the application of genuine job redesign, enabling more interesting and varied jobs to be created. This in turn should lead to positive outcomes for individual enterprises, helping them to become more competitive on domestic and overseas markets.

Unfortunately the literature in this area indicates that there are a number of dangers for women in the restructuring process, namely: the probability that, due to lower union membership rates and weaker bargaining power, workplace change for women occurs in an unregulated environment in which workers have little democratic input into changes affecting them. While NESB women workers are more highly unionised than most women, their concentration in manufacturing sectors which are vulnerable to recession and tariff reductions leaves them in an adverse bargaining position vis-à-vis employers. Their relative underrepresentation in union bargaining structures and the lack of specific services offered by many unions to meet the needs of NESB women members further add to their disadvantaged position in the change process and related training arrangements. Given the labour intensive nature of many manufacturing areas where NESB women work, workplace change is very likely to lead to job loss and/or cuts to working conditions, rather than enhancement of training and career opportunities.

In common with women generally, NESB women also face the prospect that liberalisation of working time arrangements could lead to a casualisation of work or the introduction of part-time work on terms that conflict with work and family responsibilities. The introduction of twelve-hour shifts would be a potential source of difficulty for NESB women as much as for other women, given the continuing responsibility which women bear for domestic and family work. Indeed, for NESB women who may be separated from family and social support networks by immigration, the situation could be even harder.

Third, the restructuring of work has the potential to entrench the disadvantaged position of women if they are excluded from training opportunities and participation in consultative forums, such as training committees and quality groups. This scenario is even more probable for NESB women, given their traditional exclusion from decision-making forums and relegation to routine, menial jobs in the manufacturing industry.

To conclude, while NESB women exhibit a number of different employment characteristics from women generally, such as their overrepresentation in the manufacturing industry and production/process work, they share many of the disadvantages faced by women workers and experience other problems related to their NESB status. These problems raise significant issues with respect to the capacity of NESB women to access improvements in training and associated career benefits arising from workplace change.

Training in the workplace

As indicated in earlier, the restructuring which has occurred in Australian manufacturing and which proves to be a continuing feature of that environment
has placed a sharp focus on the need for training reform. The changes have also highlighted the need to extend dramatically the provision of training to those who have traditionally been offered little or no structured vocational training, namely, unskilled and semi-skilled workers, many of whom are women and/or NESB immigrants.

There is now widespread recognition that efforts to revitalise and expand Australian manufacturing industry and to increase national export income from high value-added goods will depend, for their success, on the ability to change workplace practices and culture within manufacturing. This in turn will depend on a significant investment in new technology and work redesign, with corresponding investment in training for those workers affected by the new ways of working. The point is made explicitly in a government discussion paper:

A central objective of Government policy over the past few years has been to develop the appropriate environment in which Australian industry can become more competitive internationally. The Government recognises that training by itself will not achieve this goal. Nevertheless it is clear that an increased training effort is central to the task of structural adjustment. (DEET 1988)

Training would need to span both technical skills and interpersonal and attitudinal skills, such as the ability to work in semi-autonomous work groups and participate in workplace consultative forums. It has also been recognised that training is more easily accessed and delivered where it is based on the attainment of specific competencies rather than performance of specified periods of training without regard to existing competencies held by the trainees. Competency has been defined by the National Training Board as: 'the specification of the knowledge and skill and the application of that knowledge and skill within an occupation or industry level to the standard of performance required in employment' (MacDonald 1993, p. 19).

In the manufacturing industry, much of the foundation for these changes in work organisation and training provision has been laid, starting with the establishment of a fourteen-level skill-based award in the metal and engineering industry in 1991. Replacing the old award, which had covered more than 300 separate job classifications, the new Metal Industry Award represents the efforts of the industry parties to set the framework for a major transition in the industry from Taylorist work organisation to more democratic, open and flexible methods of work, incorporating multiskilling and access to defined skill-related career paths.

Other manufacturing sectors have similarly restructured their awards. The vehicle manufacturing industry, which has had enterprise-based awards for some years, undertook major changes to these awards reflecting the broad principles followed in the metal and engineering industry. At the Ford Motor Company, unions and management were successful in pioneering the first structured, TAFE-accredited certificate for production workers, the Vehicle Industry Certificate, which is linked to the new award. Similarly, the Engineering Production Certificate has been developed in the metal and engineering industry, and the food manufacturing
Manufacturing uncertainty

industry has introduced a National Certificate of Food Processing for production workers.

These training arrangements have all been national in scope, structured and accredited within the formal education system. A National Training Board has been established to provide the framework for the development of competency standards, complemented by sector-specific training boards, such as the National Metal and Engineering Training Board and the National Food Industry Training Board. In Victoria, where the present study is located, the national bodies are complemented by nineteen State-based industry training boards.

While the task of restructuring industrial training arrangements has been proceeding for some years in these sectors, it would be inaccurate to describe this process as either complete or pervasive. The tendency has been for some large companies to trial new work and training arrangements, often in consultation with unions, while smaller companies have made marginal changes or struggled on with traditional work practices in the hope of surviving the recession and/or other market pressures which they face.

Attitudes towards the role of production workers and their right to access training and career paths within enterprises are unlikely to change overnight. These attitudes are deeply entrenched. In many cases, there are powerful vested interests maintained by groups who have benefited from past arrangements: men, ESB workers, the trades, supervisors, and management itself, often work against changes which may appear to threaten traditional prerogatives within the workplace.

As indicated in chapter 1, the statistics show that NESB women enjoy less access to vocationally based training than all other groups, including NESB men (Baker & Wooden 1991). In common with other women, much of the training received by NESB women, where it does occur, is ‘in-house, task-oriented, non-accredited and is often non-transferable’ (DIR 1990, p. 52). NESB women face a number of major barriers to participation in training. Most have English language problems and would therefore require English language tuition before they could effectively participate in vocational training. In the manufacturing industry, they face the stigma of stereotypes attached to NESB women’s work and hence the rather negative perceptions of their capacity to participate in skilled work (Labour Research Centre 1991, p. 47). Moreover, if no change is made to their jobs, in the form of job redesign and work reorganisation, which could enhance their skill requirements, there may be no obvious reason to provide training opportunities.

NESB women may also face personal confidence problems arising from their location in the social/industrial hierarchy, impairing their willingness or ability to participate in the new opportunities, even if extended to them, such as consultative forums and training programs (MacDonald 1993, p. 47). In addition, they face long-standing industrial barriers, such as union hierarchies and industrial relations practices that have traditionally excluded them. When considered along with other barriers faced by women generally (discrimination at work, interrupted
career patterns, family and domestic responsibilities, sexual harassment and educational handicaps arising from gender stereotypes about the appropriate education for girls), it can be seen that the combination of factors militating against NESB women's full participation in the reform process are substantial (Labour Research Centre 1991, p. 47).

The likely outcomes for NESB women who face these and additional barriers deriving from their NESB status and difficulties with English language competence can be simply stated. The new training agenda will not offer new opportunities for them unless account is taken of the particular employment situation of NESB women and positive steps are taken to address the problems inherent in this situation.

**Language and literacy training**

There has been much discussion about the potential costs to industry and the community of low proficiency in English language and literacy, with estimates ranging from $3.2 billion to $6.5 billion annually (MacDonald 1993, p. 13). This report is concerned with the consequences for NESB women workers who face language and literacy difficulties in the context of industry restructuring.

Some of the issues involved with literacy and numeracy skills are covered in the general literature review in chapter 3. This section describes some of the specific evidence relating to NESB women and the possible effect of government and industry trends in this area.

Both the anecdotal and survey evidence suggest that the problem for NESB workers generally is substantial. One estimate of the functional illiteracy rate in the food industry was in the range of 50–80 per cent (Hill 1992, p. 43). This industry employs a substantial number of NESB women. The same source reports the results of a survey of NESB workers in a Melbourne automotive components plant, which found that 63 per cent of those surveyed had English reading skills below minimum survival proficiency and 79 per cent had writing skills below minimum survival level. This kind of evidence points to the potential difficulties for NESB women and men, particularly those with low literacy levels in their first language, in undertaking training unless remedial action is taken to improve their English language and literacy skills.

The Federal Government announced the Australian Language and Literacy Policy in September 1991, which introduced specific targeting of eligibility for Commonwealth-funded English language and literacy programs and grants-based funding of training programs (MacDonald 1993, pp. 1, 38). The Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program guidelines arising from this policy signalled the Government's intention to concentrate literacy training resources in certain priority industries: automotive, food, processing, metal, retail, timber, transport (MacDonald 1993). In the 1992–93 budget the Commonwealth Government announced its decision to increase spending on adult 'English as a
second language' and provide improved arrangements for its provision (Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs minute, 13 May 1994).

Notwithstanding the availability of significant government assistance, experience with English language and literacy programs in the past indicates that such training generally has reached only a small proportion of those in need. An article in the Business Review Weekly estimated that existing efforts reach just 3 per cent of the total 2.6 million Australians who are only marginally literate in English (Singh 1989, p. 73). This was based on figures from the Adult Migration Education Program (AMEP) which has traditionally provided training in ‘English as a second language’ to newly arrived immigrants, although in recent years it has extended its services to workplaces. While language and literacy experts agree that the best place for such programs to be run is in the workplace, employers and unions have shown reluctance to take up the issue in any vigorous way.

Bertone and Griffin (1992, p. 34) found that a number of Victorian unions had increased their activity in this area in recent years, with 34 per cent of unions surveyed having lodged a claim for English-language tuition at work (most of these in the late 1980s and early 90s) but that less than a third of these had been successful in their claims. Together with figures showing how few workplaces with high NESB work forces provide English language training (Callus & Knox 1993), this suggests that many employers are still reluctant to invest time and finances in such training. This is in spite of peak employer commitment to English language and literacy training given to national bodies in this area, such as the WELL national committee.

The challenge seems to be to convince the industrial parties that investing in training for language and literacy competence is not only desirable but vital for the successful introduction of workplace reform initiatives in industry. While government and some unions and employers have made a contribution to this through programs and publicity, the available evidence suggests that more needs to be done if the enormity of this problem is to be addressed. While government measures have now addressed the English language training needs of incoming immigrants through the universal provision of 510 hours training under AMEP, more needs to be done for NESB immigrants in the work force who lacked such opportunities in the past. As indicated above, employers have a major responsibility in this area too. The availability of such training should be a focal point of any investigation into NESB women’s access to training in industry generally.

The concept of skill

Access to accredited training is one avenue by which workers can gain access to skills and thereby progress through the skill-related career paths which have been developed. But if relevant skills have already been acquired through years of on-the-job training and/or experience, and the appropriate competencies achieved, such prior learning should be recognised and built upon rather than duplicated.
In the case of NESB women workers, there are two major factors which tend to
discourage the full recognition of their skills: the traditional undervaluing of
women’s skills, particularly those gained on the job, and the tendency to underrate
or overlook skills held by NESB immigrants (Chataway & Sachs 1990; Curthoys
1987; Game & Pringle 1984; National Advisory Committee on Skills Recognition
[NACSR] 1991). The issue of skill recognition for NESB women workers is
covered in chapter 3. This section focuses on the implications of these issues for
NESB women involved in training and workplace change.

An Australian Manufacturing Council report on the role of women in Australian
manufacturing notes that the concept of skill in Australia has largely been defined
as attaching to male occupations, with much of the work traditionally carried out
by women being defined as ‘unskilled’ (Chataway & Sachs 1990, p. 12). The
gender bias in the industrial relations system, from male-dominated unions and
employer associations to male dominance on the benches of arbitration tribunals,
has led to a systematic bias in the evaluation of skill, with many skills and
attributes applied by women in traditionally female jobs being regarded as innate,
rather than learned. Hence, these skills have been dismissed as insignificant or not
worth measuring for purposes of job scales and remuneration. The lesser
bargaining power of women workers—given their lower status in the workplace
and family/domestic responsibilities—has tended to reinforce these stereotypes:

Women’s jobs, and part-time jobs in particular, are systematically classified as
unskilled or semi-skilled even when they involve complex competencies and even
when women doing them have responsibility at work and are central to the labour
process. The designation of women to unskilled categories of labour is often not the
result of their inability to do certain types of jobs, but rather their lack of power
within the workplace and their lack of representation within the union movement.
(Chataway & Sachs 1990, pp. 12–13)

NESB women working under the new award structures in manufacturing therefore
face these entrenched notions of skill when attempting to access career paths and
training. Theoretically the new structures acknowledge the skills of production
workers. For example, in the metal industry award, there are four pay levels
relating to production work where previously there was one, with each level being
defined by the relevant competencies required. In practice individual workers may
have difficulty in gaining recognition by employers and fellow workers for skills
gained on the job.

In times of economic recession and increased product competition through the
lowering of tariff barriers and other market factors, there are also short-term
economic incentives for employers not to recognise and remunerate such skills.
In the longer term, however, the failure to recognise women’s skills may militate
against the very efficiencies employers may be trying to achieve at the workplace.

For NESB immigrants generally, and NESB women in particular, the added
problem is one of disregard for qualifications and skills which may have been
gained overseas, as well as those skills gained on the job in Australia. The
problems faced by immigrants in gaining recognition of overseas skills have been well documented (Iredale, 1988) and government mechanisms have been established to deal with these problems (refer chapter 3). For NESB women, whose skills are often not recorded for purposes of entry into the country, as they are usually not the principal applicant for immigration, the situation is compounded by the combination of both gender and ethnic stereotypes held by many employers, unions and coworkers. Lack of English language competency can further exacerbate such problems by making it difficult for workers to demonstrate and apply their skills.

There is also the tendency to overlook the multilingual and cross-cultural skills held by NESB women workers. Despite English language difficulties such workers are often highly skilled in their own language, and may indeed possess linguistic ability in a number of languages. Their cultural knowledge and knowledge of overseas conditions are also 'competencies' which could be applied to a work situation but are rarely investigated or acknowledged. In view of the increasing reliance being placed on overseas trade with NES countries, particularly those within the Asian region and the emerging economies in the former Soviet bloc, it is ironic that so little regard is given to the cultural/linguistic capital held by NESB immigrant workers in Australia (Office of Multicultural Affairs 1993, p. 9).

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the workplace restructuring currently taking place in Australia and the place of NESB women in these developments. The continuing thread throughout this analysis is the contention that the disadvantaged position of NESB women in the work force is a central feature of their experience with workplace change and associated training arrangements. In the following chapter, the authors seek to expand this analysis by examining the general body of literature in this area, including the empirical evidence from a range of studies. This is then followed by examination of the methodology, and findings of the research.
Chapter 3: Literature review

There is a problem in reviewing the literature on NESB women and training—there simply is not much of it in existence. In a recent literature review of women and training, Knox and Pickersgill make the point that:

The neglect in the literature of women and training can be seen as a specific example of the general neglect of training ... Usually there are a number of key texts which can be supplemented at both theoretical and practical levels by citing a range of supporting or critical argumentation. In the present case this is not possible. (Knox & Pickersgill 1993, pp. 4-5)

The problem identified by Knox and Pickersgill is a serious limitation in examining the issues of women and training, and in particular, NESB women and training. It is the major rationale for the research carried out in this current study, which aims to add to the small amount of existing data on the subject.

For the purposes of this research, a distinction should be made between women’s participation in ‘education’, which carries with it notions of personal understanding, empowerment, and a possible change in career status, and their involvement in ‘training’, a construct which is often employer driven and aims to improve efficiency, performance, and effectiveness. This distinction is made also by Baldock (1990) and Bee (1991). Knox and Pickersgill (1993, p. 2) define the difference further by limiting their literature review of women and training to the process of ‘skill formation activities undertaken by women in relation to their participation in paid employment’. This definition of ‘training’ is used in the current study.

There are several texts concerned with training which contribute material derived from ABS data (e.g. ABS 1990; Baker & Wooden 1991). Others add to the considerable amount of literature on issues related to immigration and workplace change, but their focus is not on training, or on gender analyses of access, participation and equity. A number of texts do examine issues which impinge in different ways on the questions of training, immigrants, and more specifically, women workers. For example, award restructuring initiatives and the implementation of enterprise bargaining were at least partly responsible for the emergence of training as an increasingly important industrial issue, especially for non-trade workers. The relationship between these developments and formal accredited industry training is thus of importance to the discussion of NESB women and training. A brief discussion of a selection of these texts which examine broader issues will set a general context for the detailed case-study examination of NESB women and training presented in this report.

The literature falls within various categories, ranging from those broadly related to the focus of this study, to those more specifically relevant:

- award restructuring and industry training;
- women, award restructuring, and enterprise bargaining;
Manufacturing uncertainty

- immigrants, industry and award restructuring;
- immigrants, employment and training issues;
- immigrant women and training in the work force; and
- literacy and numeracy, skills and competencies.

There is of course considerable overlap between some of these categories, but they are grouped in this way as a matter of convenience for review purposes in order to establish some of the contextual issues surrounding the participation of NESB women in industry training.

Award restructuring and industry training

There are a number of publications in the general area of award restructuring and industry training. Award restructuring has been supplemented by enterprise bargaining, which to a considerable extent was intended to implement the detail of the new work arrangements made possible by the restructured awards. However, there is value in beginning to set the context for the present research by addressing this aspect of workplace change.

In a series of case studies carried out in the manufacturing sector to gauge the effect of award restructuring, Boxall et al. (1992, p. 2) conclude, with some caution, that ‘award restructuring has succeeded to date. However it is still too early to claim final success’. This early assessment appears at the least to have been overly optimistic. The question must be asked, ‘Successful for whom?’

Federal Government support for award restructuring was loud and enthusiastic. A report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (1989, p. xi) forecast in a hopeful tone that award restructuring presented an opportunity ‘to make our whole work force more highly innovative, more highly skilled and more appropriately rewarded . . .’ This document highlights the need for training that is broad based and capable of developing transferable skills, and it also comments on the very gendered segmentation of the labour force.

The rhetoric contained in such government and industry texts (see also Australian Manufacturing Council 1988; DEET 1988; State Training Board and the Manufacturing Council of Victoria 1991) indicates an understanding at an early stage in the award restructuring process of the problems of a gender segmented industry and labour force profile. It is surprising, therefore, to note the lack of prescriptive action by regulating bodies to ensure that action matched this rhetoric. The expenditure of the Training Guarantee Levy (suspended in 1994) is an obvious example. Tight and focused conditions on the ways this levy was to be used could have resulted in appropriate targeting of specific groups of workers, a point also made by Flatau and Hemmings (1991). From anecdotal evidence, this rarely occurred.

In a more practical orientation, the Training Plans of the three sectors of the manufacturing industry relevant to our study provide some positive blueprints for
the future developments of training in each industry sector (Engineering Skills Training Board 1992; Victorian Automotive Industry Training Board Inc. 1993; Victorian Food Industry Training Board Inc. 1992). They all stress the critical importance of training, and identify those groups most in need of access to skill and career paths.

However, there appears to be a lack of any evaluation of the effectiveness of industry training plans. How many companies and organisations refer to these plans when determining their training priorities? How many companies actually read these plans? What influence can the Industry Training Boards exert on the organisations in their sectors? Those companies who contribute to the development of the plans could perhaps be expected to take cognisance of the recommendations outlined, but what of other organisations? Anecdotal information collected in the course of this study suggests that several key companies previously supportive of an industry-wide approach to training have decided to withdraw their support and concentrate on a company-specific plan. This has obvious implications for the notion of transferability of skills—if companies orient their training away from nationally developed frameworks, their workers will be disadvantaged in seeking employment outside their current workplace. This is contrary to all the stated intentions of vocational skills education and training, and inevitably it seems that the workers more adversely affected would be those who are already most peripheral.

Women, award restructuring and enterprise bargaining

In assessing the effects for women of award restructuring, a number of writers have argued that issues such as improved training, career paths and job satisfaction, and an increased capacity for women to have some control over their work practice, need to be addressed if the predominance of women in the low-paid, low-status sectors of the work force was to be in any way challenged (see, for example, Hall 1991; Labour Research Centre 1990; McCreadie 1989; Windsor 1989).

Despite these recommendations, award restructuring appears to have had little positive effect on Australia’s unenviable record of having one of the most gender-segregated labour forces in the OECD. This suggests a lack of success on the part of government and sectors of industry to implement change that could have positive outcomes for workers identified as the most marginalised—including NESB women. As Henry and Franzway (1993, p. 135) comment, the award restructuring strategy ‘has emerged essentially out of the male-dominated metal trades, characterised by many rigid skills classifications. There is no necessary translation of the principles to female-dominated areas of work…’ Or indeed to women working in those areas traditionally dominated by men. Probert and Wilson (1993) point out that it is hardly in the interests of employers to have to acknowledge and reward the skills utilised by women workers when they have been so devalued in the past.
Manufacturing uncertainty

Yeatman (1992, pp. 70-1), discussing the importance for NESB workers of English-language training being incorporated into the new textile, clothing and footwear (TCF) award, points to the need for employers to provide language training during work hours, and the apparent lack of government commitment to provide such training in accessible forms for NESB workers. This is in spite of Commonwealth Government rhetoric recognising the existence of ‘discriminatory work practices which affect women in manufacturing which are also common to other industries and have been experienced, to some extent, by most women during their working lives’ (DIR 1991, p. 4). The Labour Research Centre also sounds alarm bells about the need for further change if the barriers impeding women’s career progress are to be challenged. In a study of career paths of women in the electronics industry, they argue that ‘unless work organisation is changed, there is a danger that women workers will simply be reclassified into the new classification structure without the prospect of a career or further training’ (Labour Research Centre 1991, p. 48).

Meredith Burgmann argues that enterprise bargaining operates against women workers in Australia because ‘women’s capacity to bargain is restricted by their location in the economy as well as by other factors such as socialisation, low status and a lack of English’ (Burgmann 1990, p. 16). The opportunity for women to bargain on issues such as skills and training, either in new awards or at the enterprise level is clearly problematic. Ewer expresses concern that in relation to enterprise bargaining, an unwillingness by industry groups and some unions to participate in a national approach to training and career paths threatens ‘the national standards of training and classification’ which may be ‘jettisoned in the name of “flexibility” at the enterprise’. He further argues in this context that there is a danger that ‘employers are turning to neo-Fordist schemes of work organisation and training where new technology is used... to divide the work force into a highly skilled elite and a mass of poorly trained workers with few prospects of advancement’ (Ewer 1990, p. 15).

In relation to award restructuring, this view is shared by Baldock, who contests the positive benefits proffered by Mathews (1989) and O’Donnell and Hall (1988). Citing empirical studies ‘which illustrate the negative effects of award restructuring on the conditions of women’s work’, Baldock (1990, p. 47) reflects the warning issued by those critics who identify winners and losers in the ‘great restructure race’.

A project conducted by Labour Market Alternatives (1994) into the effects for women of the National Training Reform Agenda and enterprise bargaining, concluded with a number of challenges being issued. If the biases against women inherent in the bargaining process are to be contested, the training agenda will need considerable reform. The Labour Market Alternatives make a number of proposals in this regard of particular benefit to women, including: the refinement and more general application of recognition of prior learning via competency standards; the inclusion of the training needs of part-time and casual workers in bargaining negotiations; and the potential to increase the usage of sex
discrimination and industrial relations legislation to ensure that women’s interests at work are safeguarded (Labour Market Alternatives 1994).

Clearly, there is criticism in the literature of the limitations for women, including those from a NESB, posed by the shifting landscape of industrial change. Enterprise bargaining and restructuring, either of awards or of work practices, appear to have largely failed to challenge women’s marginalised work experience.

**Immigrants, industry and award restructuring**

The theme common to a number of publications in this area is the detrimental effect on immigrants of restructuring sections of industry, particularly since the decline of the manufacturing sector. Castles, Morrissey and Pinkstone (1988, p. 45) argue that certain groups of NESB immigrants have experienced severe difficulties and disadvantage in employment terms, and ‘paradoxically, that the more disadvantaged these groups are in relation to the labour market, the more excluded they are from measures whose ostensible purpose is to reduce labour market disadvantage itself’. They point to the need for increased resources for English language training for these workers, and identify the problem of gaining recognition of overseas qualifications as contributing to existing labour market segmentation.

Among a number of policy options aimed at effecting attitudinal and structural change in the workplace, E. Hill (1990) includes several options focused on training and NESB workers. She too identifies this group of workers as having the worst jobs and conditions, and the least access to skill recognition. She argues the need for a skills database in the motor vehicle and components parts industry ‘which has the potential to identify latent and available qualifications and experience (including those gained overseas and those specific to women) and the establishment of programs which include English language and literacy’ (Hill, E. 1990, p. 110). She also urged this industry to articulate more clearly the potential benefits of award restructuring and the claims being made about the opening up of career structures to those involved at the production level, in order to address concerns about the lack of information received by those most affected by workplace changes.

Yeatman argues that in order to break the nexus between the historical track of immigrants into low skilled, low paid jobs, and their resultant overrepresentation in areas of employment with no skill or career path, a number of interventions should be made on arrival and post-arrival in Australia. These could include labour market and training programs for the first five years in the country, but would:

> depend on a more general social commitment to work against the ways in which the social division of labour is hierarchically structured so as to associate men and women who are marked as of ethnic minority status in the worst and least paid jobs. (Yeatman 1992, p. 74)
Manufacturing uncertainty

Unfortunately, Yeatman does not suggest ways in which such programs could be financed, but arguably both industry and government have clear responsibilities for funding programs that foster employment growth and skill enhancement.

Certainly, the texts cited in this chapter concerning award restructuring efforts and later initiatives in enterprise bargaining, have indicated little appreciable progress in challenging this hierarchy of employment. Suggestions such as Yeatman’s for the implementation of creative interventions must be seriously considered if change is to occur.

This view is echoed by Jamrozik, Boland and Stewart (1991) in a study exploring the effects of industry restructure on NESB immigrants. In a discussion on ‘winners and losers’ in the outcomes of industry restructuring, they locate many NESB immigrants—particularly those who lack proficiency in English—squarely in the losers category: ‘It is some of these people who face the threat of redundancy when industry restructuring takes place. They are the biggest potential or real losers’ (Jamrozik, Boland & Stewart 1991, p. 78). In relation to newly arrived NESB immigrants without occupational qualifications, the employment picture is no less bleak. As Morrissey, Dibden and Mitchell (1992) comment, this group will face great difficulty in finding jobs in those sectors of the manufacturing industry implementing technological and structural change. They too will be excluded from the ‘winners’ group benefiting from industry and award restructuring.

Immigrants, employment and training issues

There is a considerable body of literature in the general area of immigrants and employment. Again, many texts make a distinction in their analyses between immigrants from an ESB or NESB (e.g. Collins 1991; Flatau & Hemmings 1991; Foster, Marshall & Williams 1991; Wooden 1990). Wooden (1990, p. vii) argues that the major influences on labour market status for immigrants are ‘English language problems, education and length of residence’ and that ‘Employment probabilities rise with English language skills, education and length of residence in Australia’. His analysis of 1986 Census data suggests that the probability of unemployment for those people who spoke English poorly or not at all, was 15 per cent higher for men, and 8 per cent higher for women, than an AB control group. (Wooden 1990, p. 30).

Stromback and Preston (1991) suggest that not all NESB immigrant groups are equally affected by lack of proficiency in English. Some groups may be more ‘protected’ in their working environment by being part of a larger group with common language facility. They make the further point that ‘poor language skills may not have a substantial effect on a person’s productivity in a particular job, but make it difficult to acquire further skills to improve that productivity’ (Stromback & Preston 1991, p. 6).

While studies of this quantitative nature, drawing mainly on ABS material, are valuable in presenting a considerable amount of statistical data, there are limits to
Literature review

the conclusions that can be drawn about the inclinations and motivations of the people who are the focus of these texts. This form of analysis can helpfully be supplemented by qualitatively based information, which is able to present a more comprehensive picture of the full set of relations that characterise the lives of NESB immigrant workers.

Useful in this regard are a number of studies that have a more specific focus, such as: Eugenia Hill's (1990) research concerning immigrant workers and award restructuring; Alcorso's (1991) study of the experiences of NESB immigrant women in the work force; Mike Hill's (1992) examination of unionised immigrant workers in the food industry; Bertone and Griffin's (1992) study on trade unions and immigrant workers; and research carried out by Iredale and D'Arcy (1992) describing the labour market experiences of recently arrived refugees. The case study of industrial struggle at Ford (Broadmeadows) undertaken by Lever-Tracy and Quinlan (1988) is a classic descriptive account of largely immigrant-led action within the automotive manufacturing industry. Their research added much needed qualitative data to existing scholarship in the area. It was also compulsory reading in the context of the present study, part of which was carried out at Ford's Broadmeadows plant.

The picture of immigrant workers' participation in the automotive industry is added to further by a study carried out by Levine, McLennan and Pearce (1993). The group of workers they identify as experiencing workplace and industry change least positively are those NESB workers with low levels of English proficiency. The authors point out, using Toyota as an example, that future recruitment in the automotive industry will be driven by the need for skills in English language and literacy. In this scenario, 'there will be fewer opportunities for unskilled immigrants, and most particularly for newly arrived unskilled immigrants ... As the pool of holders of the VIC [vehicle industry certificate] increases, qualified workers will become preferred recruits' (Levine, McLennan & Pearce 1993, p. 44). This has enormous implications for the future of the many unskilled immigrant workers now in employment, as well as those who are currently unemployed. This issue will be further addressed later in this text.

Exploring the extent of occupational mobility of a sample of immigrant workers in Melbourne, Campbell, Fincher and Webber (1991, p. 191) argue that the survey results indicate that the type of jobs taken initially by NESB immigrants on arrival in Australia is 'not merely a phenomenon of transition'. Indeed, of their respondents, 'the vast majority either remained in these and similar jobs or left these jobs only to exit from the labour force'. This suggests that mobility, and hence opportunities for employment diversity, are low among production workers in the manufacturing industry. Linking this with the argument concerning future recruitment profiles, the possibilities for future employment for those workers without broad ranging skills and transferable experience, are emerging as increasingly problematic.
Flatau and Hemmings (1991), in an intergenerational study comparing the labour market position of young first- and second-generation immigrants with those from higher generations, found an overrepresentation of first-generation females and first- and second-generation males in processing and fabrication occupations. After controlling for educational background and other relevant determinants, their analysis suggests that first-generation immigrants who were educated overseas received less formal and on-the-job training than their higher generation counterparts. Flatau and Hemmings argue that there is evidence of disadvantage among first-generation young immigrants, particularly women, and that higher unemployment rates were experienced by first- and second-generation female immigrants.

Further, their analysis also suggests that ‘female second-generation immigrants with both parents born overseas receive significantly less training than would be expected given their non-immigrant status’ (Flatau & Hemmings, pp. 35–6). They recommend that to overcome discrimination faced by NESB women of either generation, targeted provision in affirmative action programs is required.

These findings reflect the difficulty of effecting a shift in employer ideology about the value of spending money on training for production staff. It should be remembered that it was not so long ago that workers on the line were unable to stop for tea or toilet breaks; indeed in some workplaces this is still the case. Given this reluctance of some employers to concede even minimal basic rights for their workers, one has to feel some pessimism—at least in the short term—about the likelihood of any widespread increased expenditure on work-related training for production staff. The bitterness felt by many immigrant workers about the treatment they receive at their workplaces is reflected in the following quote from a worker interviewed in the case study by Lever-Tracy and Quinlan:

They get animals from overseas to work for them. When these begin to understand and to learn to speak, they replace them with new animals. And they get animals to push the animals and keep their own hands clean. Australians never get called ‘bastard’. They get immigrants to do their dirty work and to get sworn at.

(Lever-Tracy & Quinlan 1988, p. 245)

This view may not be felt as strongly by all immigrant workers, and indeed conditions have improved considerably in some workplaces, nevertheless there is evidence both anecdotal and empirical, ‘of discrimination at the general workplace level, involving in particular immigrants from NES countries’, despite legislation outlawing such discrimination (Foster, Marshall & Williams 1991, pp. 110–11). The poor working conditions of many workplaces in the manufacturing and construction industries ‘reflects structural disadvantage in the labour market for immigrant workers’ (Foster, Marshall & Williams 1991, p. 101), many of whom are concentrated in these industry sectors. Far from providing a safe and secure environment for immigrants working in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs, the world of work is often fraught with hostile attitudes, unreasonable conditions and employer demands.
**Literature review**

**Immigrant women and training in the work force**

If women generally in Australia are overrepresented in low paid and low status occupations, women from NESBs are particularly marginalised. As Alcorso comments in a study focused particularly on the work force experiences of newly arrived immigrant women:

> because they lack the 'human capital' of marketable skills or qualifications, because of structural and attitudinal racism and sexism and because of the urgency of their financial needs, NESB women have historically been a cheap, flexible and dispensable source of labour in Australia. (Alcorso 1991, p. 20)

This is not a recent insight. In a study carried out in 1975 exploring work patterns, training, and domestic and other pressures experienced by a selection of female immigrant workers, the recommendations addressed a similar pattern of disadvantage. Specific issues identified in the report of this 1975 study included the need for increases in child-care facilities, literacy and English language classes, retraining programs, and greater attention to be paid by unions to the needs of NESB women workers (Cox, Jobson & Martin 1975). Similar issues were identified in a report from a Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs national conference on immigrant women's issues (DIEA 1986). In the nearly twenty years since the publication of the 1975 report, it appears that the marginal work status of NESB women has not been greatly improved.

Several texts which directly address the labour force characteristics and participation of immigrant and NESB women are helpful in establishing some basic data of relevance to the broader context of our current study. An ABS study concludes, not surprisingly, that in relation to immigrant women, 'Immigration category, birthplace, education, qualifications, proficiency in English and length of residence in Australia have a significant effect on labour force outcomes and the economy of Australia as a whole' (ABS Brisbane, 1992, p. xvi).

Alcorso and Harrison (1993) report that just over 45 per cent of NESB women are in the labour force, and that their overall participation rate is currently lower than that of ESB and AB women. They attribute this to the ageing of the NESB female population, combined with a decline in employment opportunities caused by a shrinking manufacturing industry—a sector which traditionally has employed a high percentage of NESB women. This removal of employment possibilities from NESB women during times of economic downturn causes a 'reserve army of labour' effect which Alcorso and Harrison (1993, p. 26) argue contributes to the numbers of NESB women among the 'hidden unemployed'.

The ABS Brisbane (1992) research cited earlier found that immigrant women, especially those from a NESB, are underrepresented in the receipt of both formal and informal training. They suggest that this is because the work done by a large number of NESB women immigrants is predominantly in the low skill categories within private sector employment, and the authors cite previous research demonstrating that stated private sector expenditure on training is less than that reported in the public sector.
Manufacturing uncertainty

In an analysis of data collected in a 1989 ABS survey (*How Workers Get Their Training*), Baker and Wooden (1991, p. x) explore which workers are likely to undertake training, and examine whether immigrants receive as much training as AB workers. They conclude that AB workers receive more training than immigrant workers, and that 'this difference is primarily confined to immigrants from a non-English-speaking background'. Their analysis is divided into three forms of training: on-the-job, in-house, and external. Table 3.1 summarises this aspect of their data.

Table 3.1: Participation of wage or salary earners in Australia in training, by background and gender, 1988–89

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>On-the-job training (%)</th>
<th>In-house training (%)</th>
<th>External training (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESB</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n = 14,913.

Table 3.1 indicates that most training for all three groups was received on the job, followed by in-house and then external training. Of importance to our research are Baker and Wooden’s findings that NESB women received less in-house and external training than AB and ESB women and men, and NESB men; and less on-the-job training than AB and ESB women and men. While almost two-thirds of the NESB women had undertaken some form of on-the-job training, this may not have always been very instructive as the authors report that for all three birthplace groups, ‘teaching self’ (as distinct from being shown, watching others, and asking questions) was the most common method of training on the job (Baker & Wooden 1991, p. 19).

Using multivariate statistical techniques ‘to disentangle the relative importance of the many variables which may be acting on participation in training’, some of Baker and Wooden’s findings (1991, pp. 24, 30–3) relevant to our study suggest that:

- married women (across all three birthplace groups) were less likely than married men to receive in-house and on-the-job training, but not less likely than single women;
- the presence of dependants was ‘not found to exert any significant impact on the likelihood’ of married women’s participation in job-related training;
- there were relatively low rates of in-house training in manufacturing (among other industry sectors). Baker and Wooden point out that it is not known whether the low rate of training in manufacturing of the NESB group is due to employer discrimination or worker choice;
in relation to the probability of training across occupation groups, one of the
groups with the lowest probability of training was plant and machine
operatives;

‘... even after controlling for such factors as age, education, experience and
occupation, NESB immigrants are still significantly less likely to receive in-
house and on-the-job training compared with both ESB immigrants and the
Australian-born group.’ In relation to external training, NESB immigrants
received significantly less than the ESB group, but not less than the AB cohort.
Unfortunately, the authors did not include these analyses by gender;

although it was not clear for in-house training, ‘education does not have the
same enhancing effect on the probability of NESB immigrants receiving both
external and on-the-job training as it does among ESB immigrants and the
Australian-born workers’; and

the data, when disaggregated by birthplace, indicated ‘no major differences
with respect to country differences within the NESB and ESB immigrant
groups’. This is an interesting finding, and suggests that specific country of
birth is not critical to the understanding of differing rates of participation in
training.

In their conclusion, Baker and Wooden (1991, p. 49) argue that the single most
important factor explaining the lower participation in all forms of training of
NESB immigrants is English language problems. However, while they discuss
some of their findings in relation to gender, they offer no explanation for the
generally lower participation rates in training of NESB women compared with
NESB men.

Baker and Wooden's research provides important data and establishes some
helpful parameters in relation to our study. However, it is the purpose of our
research to explore, via a case-study method, reasons for the disparity in the
amounts of training undertaken; to attribute it primarily to problems of English
language runs the risk of ignoring a range of other possible social and cultural
explanations. What is the importance of gender? Is one reason for the disparity in
levels of training more simply that many of the workplaces which employ numbers
of NESB women workers do not offer their employees any training? Would more
NESB workers participate if training was available? Does the time of day when
training is offered have any impact on participation rates? Are women constrained
more than men in the times when they are able to engage in training? If so, does
this affect NESB women more or less than AB/ESB women? Is childcare a
problem? Or the care of other family members, such as ageing parents? How do
workers feel about training generally? Are they afraid that if they do not
participate in some form of industry training they will lose their jobs? Do men
fear this more than women, and hence do more training? Answers to these types
of questions, gained from a qualitative research approach, should be of importance
to the manufacturing industry which appears now to be recognising that it must
improve its commitment to training.
Literacy and numeracy, skills and competencies

There is a prodigious amount of literature written on these subjects, and a sample of those with direct relevance to the focus of this study will be discussed here in order to give these issues some context in relation to our research.

Estimates vary, but somewhere in excess of a million adults in Australia are unable to read a simple sentence in English, or cope with the kinds of everyday literacy tasks many people take for granted (DEET 1991). Bean (1992, p. 20) warns that companies considering the introduction of workplace training should not assume that all workers ‘can speak, read and write English to the level required by the materials, the instructors or the job’.

This English language difficulty is experienced by both AB/ESB and NESB adults in Australia, according to Wickert’s national survey of adult literacy in English (cited in MacDonald, 1993, p. 9). Over two-thirds of those with literacy problems are from an AB/ESB, and the remainder from a NESB. The national literacy survey has not yet been analysed by gender, and so the extent of female and male literacy problems is not known. As MacDonald (1993, p. 47) comments, ‘Analysis of the data by gender should be given priority’.

In MacDonald’s (1993, p. 47) account of literacy barriers to women’s prospects for employment and promotion, she identifies a relationship between ‘women’s low self-confidence and their low levels of spoken English and literacy ... Participation in ESL [English as a second language] and literacy training increased the women’s self-confidence as they learned new skills and identified the skills which they already possessed’. This has obvious significance for industry training. The positive impact of such increased confidence on women’s own expectations of their work could well have beneficial effects on the ‘increased international competitiveness’ for which employers and government are currently clamouring.

Callus and Knox (1993) provide data derived from the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS), carried out between 1989 and 1990 in 2353 workplaces. They compare the characteristics of workplaces with a high percentage of NESB workers (over 25 per cent of workers with English as a second language), with those where NESB workers comprise 25 per cent or less of the work force. Their analysis indicates that of those workplaces with a high percentage of NESB workers, only 14 per cent provide English classes.

According to Singh (1989), the cost to Australia of low English language skills was estimated in 1989 to be as high as $3.2 billion a year. Singh quotes George Miltenyi as arguing that companies who put resources into improving their employees’ English literacy and numeracy skills would find that their investment would be well repaid. She writes that ‘Miltenyi ... found that for every dollar invested in English in the Workplace Programs, James Hardie received a return of $1.08, Westpac $3.50 and Hilton Hotel $5.20’ (Singh 1989, p. 73).
Why then has the implementation of such programs been so narrowly applied? Most English language teachers consulted prior to this study emphasised the need for ESL and literacy classes to be integrated with more specific training. Language teaching that is provided with additional curriculum material is a more effective learning process than isolating it from a broader context. With so little industry training actually in place, this has serious implications for the amount of joint industry and ESL/literacy training that can occur.

Another major area of concern addressed in the literature is the emphasis placed on skill recognition as a determinant of both job classification and wage determination (see, for example, Burton, Hag & Thomson 1987; Council for Equal Opportunity in Employment 1990; DEET 1992; Pocock 1988). The issue of who defines this notion of ‘skill’, and the ways in which this is applied, has historically discriminated against women. There is often little difference in the degree of difficulty between those jobs typically marked as ‘masculine’ and those designated ‘feminine’. The difference lies of course in the value ascribed to these jobs. This has resulted in the high degree of gender segmentation to be found in Australia’s work force, as well as the unequal pay rates.

The Council for Equal Opportunity in Employment (1990, p. 15) suggests that this imbalance can be addressed in a number of ways; for example, by ‘reviewing job classifications and job requirements to remove gender bias . . . Employers also can ensure that stereotyped assumptions about women’s careers and need for development training, both “hands on” and in-house, do not inhibit opportunities for women’. The challenge for employers clearly is to devise ways to contest these assumptions, but as the literature reveals, recent changes appear to be exacerbating structural inequities rather than resolving them.

In relation to immigrants from a NESB, skill recognition is particularly problematic. In an analysis of data compiled by the Office of Multicultural Affairs documenting the formal skills of NESB immigrants, Chapman and Iredale (1990, p. ii) point out the difficulty for immigrants when skills gained overseas are not recognised in Australia. They found that ‘around 39 per cent of formally skilled immigrants choose to subject their overseas qualifications to local assessment and, of these, 42 per cent were recognised as being equivalent to the Australian’. These figures include immigrants from both ES and NES countries. When these data were disaggregated, Chapman and Iredale found that NESB applicants seeking equivalence were less likely than their ESB counterparts to receive recognition. NESB women in turn had a lower success rate than ESB women, and ESB and NESB men. Chapman and Iredale (1990, p. 24) tentatively attribute this to the concentration of NESB women applicants in paraprofessional and professional areas (for example nursing and teaching) ‘where discriminatory practices have been argued by some’. Despite Chapman and Iredale’s cautious approach to this issue, the results of their data analysis deepen the picture previously developed in this chapter of the difficulties faced by NESB immigrants, and particularly by NESB women. If overseas qualifications are not recognised, qualified immigrants
Manufacturing uncertainty

seeking employment have had little choice but to take jobs where they can find them, usually in areas characterised by low skill recognition and with consequent low pay.

In 1989, DEET established the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition to coordinate the recognition process, and also the National Advisory Committee on Skills Recognition (NACSR) to advise on relevant issues and to promote public discussion and debate. The NACSR (1991, p. 13) estimates that by not recognising and utilising the skills of immigrants, the annual cost to the Australian economy is estimated to be between $100 million and $250 million: 'In the last 20 years Australia has wasted, partly or completely, the skills of an estimated 200 000 skilled migrants'. Even if skills are formally recognised, it does not of course guarantee employment in the appropriate field. However, combined with low job vacancy rates, barriers of both race and gender operate to exclude from employment those immigrants who are suitably qualified, but who do not conform to the required cultural or social stereotype. In an effort to redress some of the effects of these structural barriers to the recognition of skills, particularly those of women, a process of assessing and recognising existing competencies has been developed, both in Australia and overseas. (For an international context to the setting and assessing of competencies, see Brown 1990.) In Australia, this process is known as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). DEET (1992, p. 15) define this as:

the acknowledgment of skills and knowledge gained through formal training (industry and education), work experience and/or life experience. Commonly, these skills could be acquired through work experience or formal training/education.

The main focus of RPL is what has been learnt, not how it has been learnt.

This process would seem to have a number of benefits for all workers who have formally unrecognised qualifications, or skills not judged previously to be those which warranted recognition either for employment classification or exemption from training. For women from a NESB, both these situations clearly apply. However, once again it will only be beneficial if employers are prepared to broaden their perspective on what they consider constitutes legitimate experience within their workplace. It will necessitate a total re-think about the value of skills held by women, many of which have previously been considered secondary to those held by men. This in turn will require a huge challenge to the dominant and gendered power structures which contribute to the hierarchical and unequal nature of the workplace. There is little doubt that it will continue to be a protracted and vexed struggle.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed a range of literature impinging on our research study of NESB women and training in the manufacturing industry. While there is evidence of little research on this specific topic, it is clear that it cannot be considered in isolation from a number of related areas. They interconnect, and are
interdependent. Our study, accordingly, needs to incorporate the issues rising from this relationship into the research process.

In a paper delivered at the 1990 Women, Management and Industrial Relations Conference in Sydney, Heather Carmody proposed that all employees, irrespective of their status, ‘want to be valued, to be paid fairly for what they do, to be treated with respect and fairness, to use their skills and knowledge in a productive way’ (Carmody 1991, p. 18). While this seems an obvious and reasonable expectation, it is not the current reality for many workers. How can this change? What strategies have been or could be implemented to impact positively on people’s work lives in order to satisfy those most basic requirements outlined by Carmody?

The literature presented here reveals a disturbing lack of action which could be viewed as favourable to the interests of women or NESB (female and male) workers in the area of workplace change. Initiatives such as award restructuring and enterprise bargaining appear to have failed to address adequately the dominant paradigms of power and status represented in workplaces. Male Anglo–Celtic hegemonic practices are not lightly conceded, as attested to in numerous texts and articles in the disciplines of sociology, literature, cultural studies and women’s studies. For the production workers in industry, this is their daily reality. It is significant in this context that the recent initiatives in industry training have been made in the name of ‘international competitiveness’, and the realisation that an untrained work force is antithetical to the accumulation of capital. It would be a happy conjoining of interests if the focus of subsequent industry training could be matched with the career and skill enhancement interests of the production work force. History demonstrates that the paths of workers and decision-makers in industry have to date diverged far more often than converged, with clear winners and losers. There is a huge challenge here to industry to attempt to bring these paths closer together, in the hope that the interests of all groups can be addressed. In this way economic goals of increased production and a more highly skilled and literate work force could be met with social goals of increased workplace democracy.
Chapter 4: Research method

Available data show that NESB immigrants are less likely than both AB and ESB workers to participate in all forms of training, and that NESB women receive the least training of all workers (Baker & Wooden 1991). This research aimed to address the paucity of more detailed data in the area by adopting a case-study method of exploring the issue of different training participation rates. It was not intended that the study be statistically representative of the industries involved, but rather focused on the individual and plant level. Four case studies were undertaken across three areas of the manufacturing industry, to explore the specific work experiences of NESB immigrant women working in non-trade jobs in comparison with NESB men and AB/ESB women and men, working in the same non-trade areas.

There were two major methodological issues to be addressed in this research project. The first involved choosing an appropriate industry for the study, and then selecting and gaining access to workplaces that would provide data relevant and useful to the research questions being explored.

The second challenge was to ensure that all interviewees—whether from an ESB or NESB—could understand the questions asked of them, and hence that their answers reflected their views and experiences as reliably as possible. This second issue is of critical importance in any research involving NESB participants, and in the view of the authors, it is one that is not always solved satisfactorily. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

Selecting the industry

The manufacturing industry was chosen for several reasons. It is traditionally a low skill-intensive industry, which is attempting in a number of areas to move into advanced skill-intensive production. Federal Government policy towards the manufacturing industry has changed markedly, to the point where ‘in the last two decades the market has taken over from the state as the main agent determining the structure and prospects of domestic manufacturing’ (Bell 1993, p. 2). This shift from protected status to one of market-driven survival has implications for the skill level of workers in the industry, and for the amount of training companies are prepared to provide for their workers in order to become nationally and internationally competitive. Training appeared therefore to be ‘on the agenda’ for this industry.

The second reason for selecting the manufacturing industry is that it employs a large number of immigrant workers from NESBs. An industry by birthplace breakdown of employment in Australia in 1990 indicates that the manufacturing industry employed the highest number of people per industry from NES countries (293 700), followed by the wholesale and retail trade industry (204 500), and the community services industries (157 100). According to Foster, Marshall and Williams (1991, p. 52) the manufacturing industry employed 92 400 NESB women (compared with the community services industry which employed 101 700 NESB
Research method

women). Taken together, these characteristics of manufacturing indicated that it was an industry that would provide data appropriate and useful to the aims of the study.

Selecting the industry sectors

Three sectors of the manufacturing industry were selected for the research: food manufacturing, metal manufacturing, and vehicle manufacturing.

Food industry

The food industry is the largest sector of Australian and Victorian manufacturing industry, employing around 16 per cent of the total manufacturing industry workforce (Victorian Food Industry Training Board (VFITB) 1992, p. 45). As the VFITB's 1992–95 Industry Training Plan (ITP) points out, the performance of the food industry in international markets has been disappointing, and the need for improvement is apparent in relation to the relatively low value-added nature of much of Australia's exports (VFITB 1992, p. 45). As a consequence, the food industry is being targeted as a potential growth sector for high value-added products (Hill, M. 1992, p. 16). The VFITB argues the need for work-force training within the industry that is more effective and extensive, in order to achieve industry growth and international competitiveness (VFITB 1992).

Only one-third of employees in the food, beverage, tobacco and pharmaceutical industry in Victoria are female, but this proportion varies between specific sub-sectors of the industry. For example, in the meat processing sector in Victoria, females constitute only 12 per cent of the work force, while in Victoria's baking sector they comprise a little over 45 per cent (VFITB 1992, pp. 19–20). Surprisingly, the ITP does not provide figures with workers' country-of-birth details. M. Hill (1992, p. 25) states that Australia-wide, immigrants comprise a third of the workers employed in factories covered by the Food Industry Unions' Federation of Australia, but he does not provide a breakdown by gender. This figure of course applies only to those workplaces with union membership. Foster, Marshall and Williams (1991) estimated that nationally in the food, beverages and tobacco industry in 1990, there was an overrepresentation of overseas-born women in relation to the share of this industry in total employment. The number of immigrant women from NES countries in the industry was more than twice as high as immigrant women from ES countries, but was less than half of the total number of AB women (Foster, Marshall & Williams 1991, p. 52).

This sector of the manufacturing industry is therefore of considerable interest in relation to training for NESB women. It has a work force of production workers whose skill acquisition has largely been through practical experience, with very little formal training. The VFITB's ITP states that, 'the lack of structured training for workers at operator level was the single major problem in the food industry; the entire industry was at a disadvantage, relative to others' (VFITB 1992, p. 37). This sector of manufacturing had the potential to provide data that would contrast
Manufacturing uncertainty

with information from other sectors of the industry in which training is more developed.

**Vehicle manufacturing industry**

The vehicle manufacturing sector of the automotive industry provides part of this contrasting picture. The 1992-95 Strategic Plan of the National Automotive Industry Training Board (NAITB) states that, ‘Training for new employees has increased from an average of 49 hours per employee in 1988 to 96 hours per employee in 1991’ (NAITB 1992, p. 10). Unfortunately, there are no details of the distribution of training across the different sectors of the workforce, or of the type of training undertaken, but nevertheless it is an indication of training activity in this sector of the industry.

The 1993-96 Automotive Industry Training Plan (AITP) of the Victorian Automotive Industry Training Board (VAITB 1993, p. 8) lists one of the high-priority training strategies identified by the Board as being: ‘The development of structured entry-level training with emphasis on reform to trade and non-trade training’. In relation to this study’s focus on non-trade training, the Vehicle Industry Certificate (VIC) is the nationally recognised qualification for non-trade employees in the manufacturing sector of the industry. Assembly and process workers comprise almost 60 per cent of those employed in vehicle manufacturing. They are employed in unskilled and semiskilled jobs, and provide therefore a large number of workers who are, or potentially could be, engaged in VIC training.

The industry employs large numbers of NESB workers; also of interest to this research was the automotive industry’s stated attention to government social justice principles and objectives (VAITB 1993, p. 62). The AITP includes issues of importance to the VAITB such as: the status of women in the industry, people with language and literacy needs, the removal of barriers to participation in training, and recognition of overseas qualifications (VAITB 1993). As these are areas of concern integral to this research, it marked the vehicle manufacturing industry as one which could provide a useful case study of actual activity on these issues, rather than a mere statement of commitment.

**Metals and engineering industry**

The third sector of manufacturing chosen was the metals and engineering industry. As with industry generally, the metals and engineering industry is going through a period of restructuring which, according to the ITP of the Engineering Skills Training Board (ESTB), ‘is resulting in the development of a new culture in the workplace which includes, among other things, a better and broader application of skills’ which has ‘significant implications for the development of training priorities for the industry’ (ESTB 1992, pp. ix–x).

One of the aims of restructuring the Federal Metal Industry Award was to provide a mechanism for the implementation of a skills-based career path, and a nationally consistent training framework for the industry. The ITP identifies an estimated increased demand for training in the next few years as coming from a number of
areas. One of these is formal skills training for production and non-trades employees, for whom the Engineering Production Certificate (EPC) has been developed and, in some areas, implemented. This group of workers comprise approximately 75 per cent of all employees within the industry (ESTB 1992, p. 19).

In relation to access to training, the ESTB considers that projected growth is likely to come from ‘groups of employees who traditionally have not used the training system—including women, mature workers with poor language and literacy skills, and shift workers’ (ESTB 1992, p. xii). The participation of women in the industry is low, and the majority appear to work in specific industry sectors, such as the electrical/electronic areas. The highest level of women’s employment is in the production and process area, where ‘little opportunity to participate in training has existed until recently …’ (ESTB 1992, p. 62). Unfortunately the ITP does not include any analysis of the extent of immigrant employment in the industry, or of the consequent training needs of this group of workers. However, figures produced by Foster, Marshall and Williams (1991, p. 52) indicate that both female and male overseas-born persons, particularly those from NESBs, are significantly overrepresented in metal product manufacturing.

Thus the combination of industry restructure, stated progress in developing training for non-trade workers, and the high level of immigrant employment, led to the metals and engineering industry being selected as the third sector of the manufacturing industry from which to choose a company to participate in the study.

Selecting the companies

Asking any organisation to expose their internal operations to outside scrutiny makes demands on all concerned—workers, unions, and management. Companies who refuse access do so for a number of reasons: lack of time, lack of interest, or perhaps because they feel that their work processes may not appear in a favourable light when examined too closely. Conversely, those companies who accept this challenge presumably feel some confidence in their operations and are willing to have them inspected and publicly discussed. This has obvious implications for conclusions drawn from research that has been undertaken only in those organisations who agree to allow the researcher access. Other factors will similarly affect the orientation of the research outcomes, such as the degree of unionisation in participating companies. It should not be assumed that procedures and processes employed in these companies are universally applicable to the rest of the industry.

However, given these caveats, it is possible to state that the data provide case study profiles of a number of organisations, from which significant issues of policy and practice may be drawn that will undoubtedly have wider application and importance across a number of industry sectors, and in the setting of government agendas.
In selecting the companies to participate in this research study, discussions were held very early in the project with representatives from unions associated with the three sectors of the manufacturing industry. Support for the study came in particular from the Victorian branches of the (then) Pastrycooks, Bakers, Biscuitmakers and Allied Trade Union (which subsequently amalgamated with the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union, Miscellaneous Workers Division, forming the Baking Section); the (then) Automotive, Metals and Engineering Union (AMEU); and the AMEU Vehicle Division (AMEUVD), formerly the Vehicle Builders Union. These unions agreed to assist the project by facilitating access to worksites via company management.

In addition, interest in participating in the study was expressed by representatives of Ford Australia's Broadmeadows plant. With Nissan no longer manufacturing vehicles in Australia, there are only four companies in this area of production. Ford's interest was particularly welcome as they employ a large number of NESB workers at their Broadmeadows site. They have been very active in the training area, and have been implementing the VIC for their assembly and process workers since 1992.

With the agreed cooperation of both management and the union, Ford was selected as the case study for the vehicle manufacturing sector. Negotiations with both the union and management at Ford centred around questions of mutual benefit from involvement in the study. The company was concerned that they have access to some of the data while at the same time ensuring that worker time away from the production line was kept to a negotiated limit; the union was concerned with establishing ways in which its members might benefit from the outcomes of the research; and the researcher was concerned to develop a process that provided reliable and fresh data within the time constraints of the project.

These issues were also central to discussions with the companies from the other two industry sectors, who had expressed an interest in the study. After extensive negotiation with a range of organisations, the following companies agreed to participate: in the metals industry, Preslite Australia, a vehicle component manufacturer employing just under 100 people in the production area; in the food industry, Lanes Biscuits Pty Ltd, employing over 200 permanent production staff; and Herbert Adams Bakeries with more than 350 workers in the production area; and in the vehicle manufacturing sector, Ford (Broadmeadows), employing approximately 3160 production workers in several on-site plants.

Preslite was included in the metals and engineering industry for the purpose of this study, despite being a vehicle component manufacturer. This was because unlike Ford, its work force was predominantly covered by the metals division of the AMEU and consequently the Metal Industry Award. More importantly this meant that the training arrangements for production workers are incorporated in the Engineering Production Certificate, designed for the metal and engineering industry.
A large percentage of the workers in all four companies come from an NESB. Women production workers at Preslite comprise over two-thirds of the work force, while at Lanes Biscuits they comprise approximately 40 per cent. At Herbert Adams Bakeries women make up some 35 per cent of the production workers, and at Ford (Broadmeadows), only 11.5 per cent. Table 4.1 details the number and percentage of NESB workers and NESB women workers at each company.

Table 4.1: Number of production workers from a NESB at participating companies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>NESB workers</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total number of production workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage of total</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage of total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford (Broadmeadows)</td>
<td>2042</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert Adams Bakeries</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lanes Biscuits</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preslite Australia</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>67.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: These figures appear as supplied by each company. During the research process it became apparent that they were not exact. The actual number of production workers from a NESB is estimated to be higher than stated at each company. The figures are produced here with this caveat.

As table 4.1 shows, the percentages of NESB women workers at each company range from only 7 per cent at Ford (Broadmeadows) to 67 per cent at Preslite Australia, with their actual numbers ranging from 65 at Preslite to 229 at Ford. As the size of the organisations differs, so does their proportion of NESB women workers. This provided a range of different work force profiles on which to draw.

While the four companies at the time of the study had similar aims of increased international competitiveness and a more highly trained and skilled work force, they also provided a varying range of training experiences. Ford’s English language and VIC training for production workers (implemented in 1992) takes place both on the job and outside work hours. If VIC units are completed successfully, workers receive payment for half the number of hours spent training out of normal work time. This training arrangement has implications for attendance rates: it competes with possible overtime and with commitments outside work for those employees with family or other responsibilities. For this study, Ford provided a good model to examine in relation to access to training.

In contrast, at the time of this study Preslite Australia had for several years received Training and Skill (TASK) funding from DEET to train production workers in English language and literacy and the EPC. This training is provided during working hours, in half-day sessions. Due to current economic difficulties, Preslite had scaled down production operations to three days per week. The paid training therefore enables participating workers to receive a full week’s pay while engaging in both work and training. In contrast to the arrangement at Ford, there are no conflicting demands on training time, as it is all within normal work hours.
Manufacturing uncertainty

As Preslite relies totally on external funding for the training, this arrangement can continue only as long as funding is available. If this is discontinued, Preslite management and workers will face some difficult decisions about their commitment to, and participation in, further language and industry training.

The remaining two companies provide different examples of provision of training, and reflect the relative lack of progress made in this area in the food industry. Production and packing workers at Lanes Biscuits have had almost no training at all, other than that provided at their work station in their first few days on the job. Herbert Adams Bakeries has in the past provided some English language classes, but at the time of this study, there were none in operation. Other types of training undertaken at this company, as at Lanes, included fork-lift driving, first aid, and occasionally some hygiene courses. These companies were, therefore, in a different position in relation to training than the other two chosen for the study. The four companies together provide examples of training in their respective industries.

Before agreement was given by two of the companies, the question of participation was discussed at meetings of their Training Committee or Consultative Committee. In both instances, the relevant committee endorsed the aims and process of the study. Of the remaining two companies, one had not at that stage set up its Consultative Committee, but did so during the course of this research project. The other company did not feel that it was necessary to consult formally with their committee as both management and the union had strongly agreed to support the study.

Data collection methodology

There were a number of issues considered critical to the success of the study. The first was the decision about the best way to collect the data. It had originally been decided that the method would include both semi-structured interviews with NESB women workers, and a survey approach, involving women and men from NESBs and ESBs. In addition, interviews would be undertaken with plant-managers, training officers, members of training committees, and union officials.

Language and literacy

One of the greatest methodological difficulties in interviewing people whose first language is not English is establishing a data gathering process that can reliably manage the vast range of English language proficiency levels (or the lack of it). Some researchers (for example, Levine, McLennan & Pearce 1993) have their questionnaires translated into the relevant languages, and rely on their interviewees to fill out the survey forms themselves, either at their workplace or at home. The advantage of this method is that it is less time-consuming for the organisation and the researcher than administering the questionnaire face-to-face.
Research method

It assumes, however, a sufficient level of literacy in the interviewees' first language to enable them to read, understand and answer the questions.

Advice given to this project from experienced workplace language and literacy trainers, from the Adult Migrant Education Service, and from the National Automotive Language and Literacy Coordination Unit, was that this assumption is highly problematic. Unless the survey instrument was very short and did not contain questions of any complexity, the level of first language literacy proficiency of some workers was not sufficiently developed to enable independent self-administration. As the information required for this study necessitated a range of question and answer modes, it was the view of our advisers that data drawn from this type of self-administered process were likely to be unreliable, as the method ran the risk of other workers or family members filling out the questionnaire for the respondent, or of answers being ticked at random and thus not reflecting the interviewees' actual views and responses.

Another possible approach was to employ a team of teachers of English-as-a-second-language, who could administer the questionnaire in English. It was suggested that by engaging in face-to-face interviews, the communication expertise of these teachers could overcome the language difficulties. However, this method still did not solve the problem of complex issues being answered with any degree of reliability if the respondent was unable to fully understand the question due to lack of English proficiency.

The researcher finally decided that the best possible method would be for the interviewees to be asked the questions in a face-to-face interview, in their own first language. The language and literacy advisers agreed that this would be the best solution to this difficult methodological problem. Bilingual or multilingual interviewers who had some understanding of the types of workplaces in which the research was to be carried out and of the issues being explored, and who had the skills to elicit the information required, were therefore sought.

Four highly competent women were employed to assist with the implementation of the questionnaires, all of whom had experience as resource workers giving information to production workers about occupational health and safety or women's health. Between them they spoke the seven languages which had been identified as those necessary to represent the major language groups at the four participating workplaces: Croatian, Greek, Italian, Macedonian, Serbian, Turkish, and Vietnamese. Workers speaking a number of other languages were also represented in the four companies, but it was the view of the trainers, shop stewards, and supervisors that enough of these had sufficiently developed English language skills to be interviewed in English. It should be stated that the selection of NESB workers having some English language skills could lead to a bias in the sample, but one which it appeared difficult to avoid. It was impossible for reasons of cost and economies of scale to employ sufficient bilingual workers to cover every single language spoken at the four worksites, especially when there were often only a few workers speaking particular languages.
Manufacturing uncertainty

Access to workers
Access to workers during work time was another critical issue, and one that needed much negotiation with the participating companies. Of concern to management was the amount of time required, and the number of people who would be away from moving lines at any one time. As production procedures have become leaner in the past few years, the number of workers involved in specific work areas has been reduced. The difficulty for the supervisors was to provide workers for interviews without depleting lines to the extent that it caused an unfavourable impact on production levels.

The method selected involved each interviewer conducting simultaneous interviews with two or three respondents who spoke the same language, with the interviewer herself asking the questions and filling out each questionnaire form. In order to minimise participants' possible discomfort for social or cultural reasons, women and men were interviewed separately. The location of the interviews was also important; it should not be too far away from the worksite, and the people being interviewed should feel comfortable with, rather than intimidated by, the surroundings.

With five interviewers available to conduct the interviews, this meant that about ten people could be interviewed at any one time. This was more than production schedules could bear, so a staggered roster of language specific interviews was arranged for particular days, with supervisors selecting as randomly as possible the participants from the particular language groups represented. This method of random selection did introduce an element of bias into the selection process, but the procedure was the only one that companies could accommodate, primarily because of the necessity to maintain production schedules. The representative nature of the country-of-birth of the sample was still maintained. There would usually be no more than three interviewers present at these times, and thus numbers taken away from the production process at one time were kept to a maximum of about six workers.

The logistics of organising this were extremely complicated, and a great challenge both to the researcher and the companies involved. Lanes Biscuits actually employed extra casual staff to cover the vacancies from the line, while Preslite closed a whole line, one after another, so that about six to eight people could be interviewed at the same time by the various interviewers. Herbert Adams Bakeries and Ford somehow managed to release production staff, but often with great difficulty. At Ford, this was a particular problem as it proved to be very awkward for most supervisors to remove workers from moving lines. Some supervisors were reluctant to threaten productivity levels and expressed an unwillingness to cooperate with the study for this reason. Consequently, the sample size had to be reduced. This problem occurred despite the fact that Ford had given one of their shop stewards time away from his regular duties in order to coordinate the numbers required.
The questionnaire
Having decided on the method for best meeting the needs of language diversity, the questionnaire was designed to be capable of eliciting data as detailed and as rich as possible. It was longer than originally envisaged, and contained a greater variety of questions covering an expanded number of areas. As a consequence, the plan to supplement the implementation of the questionnaire with semi-structured interviews of NESB women workers (as had been proposed in the original research design) became unnecessary, as the quality and quantity of the data available from a personal interviewer-interviewee questionnaire process was entirely adequate. The methodology was altered accordingly. The final version of the questionnaire underwent an extensive process of consultation and testing prior to implementation.

The questions were designed to establish at each workplace: the type of training provided, if any; details about the participants including age, gender, country of birth, and English language proficiency; employees' attitudes to training, and why they did or did not participate; and their views and opinions on more general training issues, as well as those specific to their place of work. In this way, we would be able to construct a picture of the issues concerning work-related training which the employees at the four companies had themselves identified as relevant and important. It would also enable an analysis of training level by key demographic characteristics such as background (AB/ESB or NESB) and gender.

The questionnaire was structured into seven sections, containing in total eighty-five questions, many with multiple parts. None of the respondents had to answer all these questions as there were diverging pathways during the questionnaire, but it was still a lengthy process, and took between forty-five minutes and one hour to complete.

The study sample
The study was designed to take a micro-level approach to the issue of NESB women and training. It was not intended that it be statistically representative of the industries involved, but rather a study focused at the level of the individual and the plant. In this way it would provide a case-study perspective currently missing from the available literature. As the aim was to explore the reasons for the low participation of NESB women in industry training, and to contrast the experiences of these women workers with those of NESB men and of men and women from an AB/ESB, the sample numbers were constructed to contain a greater proportion of NESB women.

Even though the number of employees at the four company worksites differed markedly, it was considered that in order to obtain sufficient data for useful comparisons, it was necessary to interview around 100 workers at each workplace. The method thus combined both purposive and convenience sampling techniques: purposive, in that the selected companies employed large numbers of NESB workers, and the sample profile reflected the proportions of workers from the
many different countries of birth; and convenience sampling in that the total numbers of interviewees from each workplace were kept to a limit that each company considered manageable in relation to production schedules, while at the same time generating an amount of data large enough to provide informative material.

In fact, due to some selection problems outlined below, the numbers varied slightly at each company. Preslite's production workforce totalled 97, and with absences such as annual leave and sick leave, the total number of employees available for interview was 89. This compared with 113 interviews completed at Herbert Adams Bakeries, 115 at Ford, and 119 at Lanes Biscuits. In total, 436 interviews were completed at the four participating companies (see Table 4.2). Due to the interview method chosen, the study achieved a 100 per cent response rate; that is, every person who was released from their job to be interviewed, completed a questionnaire. Again, the selection by supervisors of individuals within the prescribed categories should be acknowledged as creating the potential for bias in the selection of the sample, but this method was the only possible way to minimise unacceptable levels of disruption to production schedules which were in all cases affected by the absence of workers during the interview process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ford (Broadmeadows)</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert Adams Bakeries</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lanes Biscuits</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preslite Australia</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>436</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Determining the composition of the sample interviewees had been a difficult process. Rather surprisingly, three of the four companies did not have easily accessible personnel data that listed their production staff by gender and country of birth. Instead, their personnel records listed 'nationality'—a category unrelated to country of birth. If the nationality was listed as 'Australian', it gave no indication as to whether the person was born outside Australia and had had immigration taken Australian citizenship, or was born in Australia.

This distinction was critical to the study, as the importance of English language skills as a key factor in the participation in training (as cited by Baker & Wooden 1991) was an issue for this research. It caused difficulty for the study once the numbers had been decided upon, as the actual country of birth established in the interview was frequently different to that suggested by the interviewees' listed 'first language', or their stated nationality. This in turn affected the selected proportion of participants born in specific countries, so that while the final numbers were still...
Research method

reflective of the work force profile, they were slightly differently constituted than originally planned.

The researcher provided supervisors with details of the required numbers of female and male interviewees from particular countries of birth, previously calculated to reflect the particular work force profile in each operating area of the worksite. The method was prescriptive, in that these categories were to be complied with as closely as possible, and random, in that supervisors would select those workers who could be spared at that particular time and who were within the given sex and country-of-birth category.

Of the 436 face-to-face interviews, 322 respondents were from a NESB and 114 from an AB/ESB (see table 4.3). Of this latter group, only 18 people (16 per cent of the group and 4 per cent of the total sample) were born outside Australia (see table 4.4). The small numbers in this group led to the decision to combine them with the AB interviewees for the purpose of analysis, for reasons outlined in chapter 1. It had been intended originally that the NESB men, and the AB/ESB women and men, would each approximate 25 per cent of the numbers of NESB women. However, as the actual figures demonstrate, fewer male AB/ESB workers and more NESB males were interviewed. This reflected the lower than anticipated number of male AB/ESB workers employed by the participating companies, despite the fact that their personnel records indicated a large percentage of employees citing 'Australian nationality'. At three workplaces, every male production worker from an AB/ESB was interviewed, and still the planned quota of males in this category was not reached.

Table 4.3: Background and gender of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB/ESB</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the sample still managed to reflect the different nationalities and countries of birth of the employees at each workplace. In relation to specific countries of birth, while each company employed people from differing backgrounds, there were some numerically high representations of countries of birth common to at least three of the four workplaces: Greece, Italy, Macedonia, and Viet Nam.

Overall, the people interviewed were born in a total of thirty-six non-English-speaking countries, along with those born in five English-speaking countries. Table 4.4 outlines the self-described country of birth of the total number of interviewees at the four workplaces.

49
Conducting the interviews

Study sample
Ford (Broadmeadows) had agreed to be the initial participant in the study. However, as preparations to commence were underway, workers rejected some of the terms and conditions of the proposed enterprise agreement. Discussions broke down and industrial action followed at the Broadmeadows plant. This resulted in the starting date of the interview process constantly being postponed as negotiations became more protracted. Ironically, central to the dispute and of significance to this study, was the issue of access and equity in relation to the VIC training. At the very least it confirmed the importance and topicality of the research!

With the dispute continuing, it became apparent that the interview process would need to be started at another company. Already over one month of the study’s time had been lost, under the optimistic assurance that settlement of the dispute was imminent. The decision to commence the research at another company was fortunate, as final agreement about the issues involved, and the subsequent signing of the enterprise agreement at Ford was not completed for some further weeks.

Table 4.4: Place of birth of study sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia-Herzegovina</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook Islands</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Timor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Seychelles</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>West Samoa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>238</strong></td>
<td><strong>198</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: n = 436; countries are listed in two columns for ease of presentation only.*
Preslite Australia, the vehicle component manufacturer, agreed to start the interviews at their plant earlier than had been planned. Lanes Biscuits followed, then Herbert Adams Bakeries, and finally some months later, Ford’s Broadmeadows plant. Lanes Biscuits was the only company that ran regular three-shift production schedules, and workers in all three shifts were interviewed in their own shift time in the course of the study.

The interview method proved very effective. By conducting face-to-face interviews, the interviewers were able to make extra notes of comments made by the respondents about particular issues, thus adding some rich qualitative material in addition to the questionnaire responses. Due to the time constraints in taking interviewees away from the moving line, the usual practice was to interview two people at the same time, each having their responses filled out for them on their respective questionnaires.

This method has both advantages and disadvantages, which should be presented here as caveats to the research method:

- There is a potential for one interviewee to influence the other. While this should not be ignored, and is recognised as having a possible effect on the data collected, it was the view of the interviewers that overall, the discussions helped to elicit responses that had been stimulated by dialogue rather than contaminated by it. Interviewees often disagreed with each other, and in the main their particular perspective was reflected in their individual recorded responses. This method also meant that there was frequent discussion between the respondents about particular questions, which produced some illuminating discourse of interest to the study. On one occasion only was there an obvious example of influence, when a husband and wife who worked together asked to be interviewed at the same time. This was contrary to the normal process we employed of interviewing women and men separately, but they seemed anxious to participate together. The interviewer commented later that the responses of the woman were very much controlled by her husband, and that his dominance had appeared to influence her views. This particular circumstance was thus complicated by both gender difference and relationship dynamics. It did not occur again.

- The issue of confidentiality of responses was considered. To try to overcome as much as possible any reluctance to answer personal questions in front of another worker, interviewees were encouraged when they felt it was necessary to indicate their responses to the interviewer in a confidential manner out of the hearing of the other interviewee. While this option was exercised on a number of occasions, overall there were few questions of a sufficiently personal nature that appeared to cause interviewees any constraint about answering openly. They always had the possibility of recording any answer without it being divulged to the other interviewee. While we recognise that there is still possibility of bias, it was the opinion of the interviewers that there was little evidence of interviewee discomfort with the method of interviewing.
Critical to the success of the interview process was the skill of the bi- and multilingual women working on the project. All interviewing requires sensitivity, empathy, and intelligent participation. The capacity to understand clearly each question and translate it into another language demands particular skill. These four women exercised this capacity and demonstrated the necessary qualities in great abundance.

Other interviews
Having completed the interviews of the production staff, the last stage of the data-gathering process involved conducting semi-structured interviews with four union officials, four management representatives, and four company training or consultative committees. The researcher also interviewed the bilingual interviewers in an extensive debriefing session, seeking their impressions and experiences of the interview process at the four company worksites.

Issues covered in the interviews with union officials included: union responses to the amount of consultation between management, unions and workers about training; the level of encouragement given to members about participating in training; the impact of training on women and NESB workers, and its effect generally within the particular industry; the value of industry specific training; the difficulty facing members with overseas qualifications not recognised in Australia; the place of training in enterprise agreement negotiations; the future of the particular industry, and the likely employee profile in five years time; and the future role of unions in these issues.

Management representatives were asked questions with a similar focus, but from a company perspective. Other questions concerned the expenditure of the Training Guarantee Levy, whether the company had written training and affirmative action policies, and, if so, had these policies been reflected in the actual training provided, and whether training goals had been met and ways in which this was evaluated.

The interviews with the training or consultative committees at each participating workplace aimed to gain similar information, and to establish the committee's ideas on issues including: the composition of the committee; the role of the committee in decisions about training policy and practice; the views of the committee on reasons for the different participation rates in the training of women and men, and of workers from different language backgrounds; the process and form of providing information to workers; and the way in which the committee evaluated any developments and changes in training.

These interviews each lasted approximately one hour, and most were taped and then transcribed. They provided a fascinating amount of data complementing that gained from production workers via the more structured questionnaires. The interview session with the bilingual interviewers was also very informative. They were able to comment on the methodology used, and also to contribute some detailed qualitative material from their notes made during the interviews. This material has been incorporated into the relevant chapters.
Research issues

The research issues arising from this study have been detailed above. They may be summarised as follows:

☐ The self-selective nature of participating organisations must be acknowledged as important to the data collected. The responses of the interviewees may have been different if they had worked in companies where conditions were more or less favourable than at the companies included in this study, or if they had been a non-unionised work force. For the purpose of this research, this should not be seen as too problematic as the study does not claim to be a representative sample of the three industries, but rather one which provides data from a case study approach reflecting issues common to the manufacturing industry as a whole.

☐ The optimum method of interviewing people from a NESB, who currently speak little English, needed to be addressed in a manner that would provide reliable and comprehensive material. The use of bilingual interviewers was critical to the success of the study. When interviewing respondents from a NESB whose literacy may be at a low level, reliance on interviewees providing written responses to interview schedules (either translated into relevant languages or in English) is to make assumptions about the quality of the data. The experience of this research is that the majority of the NESB workers who were interviewed by the bilingual workers would not have understood written questions if they had been in English, or even in their own first language. Indeed, many of them commented that they could not understand much of the material put out in English at their workplaces. Clearly, therefore, this is an important issue not just for researchers, but for unions and management in their communication with their members and employees.

☐ The tension between the benefits and concerns of interviewing more than one respondent at one time was a further methodological issue. Possible consequences of using this method of interviewing are that one interviewee may influence the response of another, or that a lack of confidentiality may also affect the responses. However, these are always possibilities in any group interview, and data obtained in this form of interview process are not discounted or devalued because of the method used. Indeed, it was the experience of this study that the dialogue engendered by the question often stimulated rather than hindered responses from the participating interviewees. In addition, interviewees were given the opportunity to impart particular responses in a confidential manner if they felt so inclined.

☐ A further issue common to most research is problems outside the researcher's control that are encountered during the course of the research process, and which then affect time-lines and schedules. This study was no exception. The industrial dispute at Ford (Broadmeadows), described above, caused over a month's delay in the commencement of the data collection. With hindsight, research could have started at another company sooner.
Manufacturing uncertainty

However, the length of time taken to settle the dispute was not anticipated and so the delay ensued. It is these types of circumstances that make research so challenging. Rarely is time allowed in research design for the unexpected or the totally unplanned—perhaps it should be.

The quality of personal data collected by organisations about their employees is often critically important to the researcher. It must have similar importance for employers in determining appropriate policy for their multicultural workforce. A key issue that emerged from this research is the amount of employee data needed to inform research and relevant policy development. How much is necessary to collect? When does the amount of data held become intrusive, and how much control do employees have over the material that is held in their name? These are important questions to ask, and companies would do well to address this issue in consultation with their employees.

The difficulties which arise from interviewing in work time when supervisors have production targets to meet was a further research problem. The researcher felt on the one hand a sense of appreciation to the companies for agreeing to participate and for allowing access to their employees, while at the same time expecting that this negotiated access would therefore be facilitated. In reality, it was often difficult to have workers released from moving lines, and in some instances supervisors were openly hostile. This resulted in many delays, and created a consequent problem for time-lines and the project budget. It appears that there can be a communication gap between management and supervisors, particularly in the larger companies where layers of management can obscure cooperation rather than enhance it.

In conclusion, there are always questions of method and practice which emerge from topical research. This study has been no exception, and has addressed some complex methodological issues which hopefully will add to wider research debates.
Chapter 5: The vehicle industry

This chapter will outline the findings of the research carried out at Ford's manufacturing plant at Broadmeadows in Victoria, having first briefly discussed the broader context of the vehicle manufacturing sector of the automotive industry.

The industry

The current plan by the Federal Government to reduce import tariffs from 35 per cent to 15 per cent by the year 2000 is having a major impact on the vehicle manufacturing industry. To remain internationally competitive, and to retain a share of the local market, the industry must become more efficient in its production processes if it is to survive into the next century. This is particularly pertinent in Victoria, where more than half of Australia's locally made cars are produced.

This increased competition has provided an impetus to the car industry to improve substantially the quality of its products, and at the same time dramatically reduce the time taken to build each car. A combination of increased automation, new assembly techniques, and changing management and worker relationships has resulted in the industry closing the gap between Australian production results and those of their hitherto more efficient international competitors. (For a more detailed account of the effects of the Federal Government's Button Plan and subsequent developments in the automotive industry since 1984, see Levine, McLennan & Pearce 1993.) McKenzie (1993, p. 16) cites figures that indicate that 'Australia is now 10 to 15 per cent off world car-manufacturing pace, but is catching up fast'. The same writer reports that Ford Australia has reduced the time taken to build a Falcon car from 40 hours to 25 hours. This is still a slower process than at its American counterpart plant, but taking into account different production arrangements, it is not far away from positively comparable figures.

Along with this performance improvement has come a decrease in employment in the vehicle manufacturing industry. Levine, McLennan and Pearce (1993, p. 27) estimate that in Victoria, 'the assembly and production line workforce . . . reduced by between 20 and 25 per cent between late 1990 and early 1992'. However, more recent estimates from industry sources put the reduction in jobs Australia-wide closer to 30 per cent, including those caused by the closure of the Nissan assembly plant in 1992. In human terms, this presents a disturbing picture of over 6000 people having lost their jobs in this period. Levine, McLennan and Pearce (1993) argue that there is no evidence to suggest that in this process immigrants experienced redundancy to a greater extent, or were treated any differently, than Australian-born workers. However, the source of this claim is rather unclear and this issue surely needs further exploration to establish more definitively the gender, country-of-birth, and age details of retrenchees.
Manufacturing uncertainty

The case study carried out at Ford (Broadmeadows) is thus located in the context of a rapidly changing work environment, one in which the Victorian Automotive Industry Training Plan (VAITP) claims that emphasis is on 'workplace reorganisation, maximising vocational and education skills of the current workforce, career advancement, multi-skilling and total quality control' (VAITB 1993, p. 34). The VAITP identifies competency-based training as critical to the success of reforms in the vehicle industry. A two-stream approach to training developed by the Business Council of Australia in response to the Carmichael Report (Employment and Skills Formation Council 1992) proposes that companies develop training models which would be either industry specific or enterprise specific. The enterprise specific stream would involve individual enterprises designing, providing and certifying their own entry level training, but within a broad national policy framework. This then raises the question of portability of credentials, and the extent to which workers can be seen as gaining transferable skills to enhance future employment possibilities outside their current place of work. This will be increasingly important to determine as the extent of industry training increases. There is a danger that the interests of workers will be subsumed in employers' pursuit of enterprise specific goals.

The VAITP identifies major social justice issues which it states are currently being addressed by the industry (VAITB 1993, p. 62). As listed in the plan, these issues include:

- removing barriers to participation in training;
- work-based education;
- status of women in the industry; and
- recognition of overseas qualifications.

As well, the plan states: 'Access to quality training by people from a diverse range of cultural and educational backgrounds is the major factor which will influence the provision of training in the Automotive Industry'. These social justice objectives are of great relevance to the parameters of this study, and set an interesting context to the case study at Ford. They are also of importance to the wider vehicle industry itself, in which NESB immigrants comprise 60 per cent of the assembly and process workers, and women constitute only 19 per cent of employees (excluding clerical staff).

The Vehicle Industry Certificate (VIC) was developed to provide non-trade employees in the vehicle manufacturing sector with a nationally recognised qualification under the restructured Vehicle Industry Awards (Manufacturing). The following extract from the VAITP outlines the details of this certificate course:

In order to gain the ... VIC an employee must accumulate 40 VIC units (comprising knowledge and skill) over defined stages of employment/work experience. Each stage of employment/work experience corresponds to defined pay points under the new awards. Competency testing occurs on completion of each
The vehicle industry

VIC unit and at each defined stage of work experience. The delivery includes structured on-the-job training and work experience in the acquisition of skills as well as off-the-job training particularly relating to knowledge. Employees are able to undertake elective studies after completing the core requirements of the VIC. (VAITB 1993, p. 87)

As well as listing fourteen elective units available for employees to undertake, the VATTP identifies as important: ‘The integration of literacy and English language skills training based on learner needs with a focus on the integration and assessment of key competencies as identified by the Finn/Mayer Report ...’ (VAITB 1993, p. 103).

Other issues seen as critical to the successful delivery of the VIC are recognition of prior learning (RPL), and the increased participation of women and NESB workers in VIC training. All of these factors were considered to be of great importance to explore in the case study carried out at Ford, and the way the research methodology was developed aimed to examine whether these issues were indeed being addressed at this company within the vehicle industry.

In the interest of brevity, for the remainder of this chapter (unless otherwise stated) when the name ‘Ford’ is used, it will refer to the Ford Motor Company’s plant at Broadmeadows, and ‘the union’ will refer to the AMEUVd.

Primary data presented in this case study come from a variety of sources. Material is quoted from semi-structured interviews held with representatives of the AMEUVD and Ford management (conducted separately), and with members of the Ford VIC Steering Committee. The remainder of the primary data was collected from the production and assembly workers at Ford who comprised the sample for this industry sector.

Ford (Broadmeadows)

At its Broadmeadows plant, Ford employs over 3000 payroll workers engaged in a variety of assembly and production processes in car and truck assembly and plastics plants, and in the National Parts Depot. The breakdown of the employee data provided by the company into country-of-birth and gender categories proved to be somewhat inaccurate (see chapter 3 for more detail on this issue), but table 5.1 gives some indication of the gender and NESB and AB/ESB figures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB/ESB</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>987</td>
<td>1121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>1813</td>
<td>2042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>2800</td>
<td>3163</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: These figures are based on company records and proved to be approximate only.
Ford is a very male dominated workplace, with NESB males comprising over half of the assembly and production workforce. NESB women workers strongly outnumber AB/ESB women, even though in total women account for only 11.5 per cent of the workforce. The real figures may be even more skewed towards increased NESB representation, as Ford’s personnel records register ‘nationality’ rather than ‘country of birth’. Those NESB employees who have taken Australian citizenship may therefore be included in the company data in the same category as AB workers, rather than in their original country of birth category.

In relation to the low numbers of women employed at Ford, a management representative indicated that Ford has difficulty in recruiting women to work in the production/assembly areas:

We have done three lots of recruiting in the last nine months, and we have targeted a proportion of women in that recruitment, well above the current 10 or 11 per cent. We have looked for around 30 per cent, and we can’t get them. So it’s one of those things that we have got to continuously work at ... but it’s pretty tough ... Women are just clearly underrepresented, and being underrepresented means that we are not accessing the talent that is there in the community.

At the time of this study, workers at Ford came from over 40 countries, including those countries in which English is spoken as the first language. Numerically, the dominant countries-of-birth were Australia, Greece, Italy, Turkey, Viet Nam, and the former Yugoslav Republics. (Country of birth data collected from the records of all four companies in this study still reflected this now differently constituted category of ‘Yugoslavia’. This is a further data issue which all organisations will need to address in their personnel information.)

Training at Ford
Ford provides both VIC training (implemented in 1992) and English language and literacy training for its production and assembly employees. Participants do 400 hours of training, which leads to the achievement of 95 per cent of base trade level. They do their 200 hours of ‘knowledge’ units training out of normal work hours, and receive payment for half of these hours on successful completion of a specified number of units. This has implications for participation rates. Workers with home responsibilities—many of whom are women—find it difficult to attend classes after work. Similarly, those workers who depend financially on the limited amount of overtime available have to place a priority on this rather than on attending training. These issues are discussed in greater detail in a later section of this chapter.

Ford management representatives estimated that about 66 per cent of their workers have participated or were currently participating in the VIC. Of this 66 per cent, approximately 11 per cent were either doing or had done integrated VIC and English language and literacy training. This is a considerably higher percentage of workers undertaking in-house training than the national average.
However, particular groups of women workers do less than others. Many NESB women at Ford work in areas such as 'manufacturing trim' rather than on a moving assembly line. These workers are at the lower end of the classification scale, and hence earn less than their workmates on the moving lines. They also participate less in the VIC training. The design of their jobs presents them with more difficulty than other workers in complying with the prescriptive process of job rotation necessary to fulfil requirements for the VIC skills units.

The low rate of participation of NESB women in training, and the structural difficulties they experience, both in relation to attending training and gaining the appropriate range of work experience, is an important issue. At the time of interview, these matters were receiving attention from union officials and shop stewards from the AMEUVD, and also from management at Ford.

In consequence, the question of training became central to the negotiation of the 1993 enterprise agreement. In particular, worker demands about the issue of access to training for women—especially NESB women—were partly responsible for a protracted delay in finalising the Agreement. In the 1993 summary agreement, there is a general section in which it is proposed that an EEO Committee be established, and that an anti-sexual harassment campaign be implemented. The section concerning the VIC in this 1993 summary agreement addresses a number of issues such as the contentious RPL mechanism, and ways in which to assess skill levels. The text relating to the VIC in the summary 1993 agreement document also states: 'A joint study will be conducted to understand the issues affecting access to VIC for employees. Particular emphasis will be on plans to improve female employees' participation in the VIC' (Ford Australia Enterprise Agreement 1993, Summary Document, p. 13).

These matters were clearly emerging as significant industrial issues. The 'joint study' referred to in the agreement was carried out in April and May 1993, just prior to our research commencing at Ford, and in fact was the reason for the delay in this study being granted access to the worksite. While the focus of this Ford joint union/company pilot study was (purposefully) much narrower in scope than our study, and the number of interviewees considerably smaller and more specifically targeted, several areas of concern to the Ford pilot study were similar to those being explored for our research. While recognising that the Ford study was only a pilot, the findings are useful to examine in this context. The following extracts are from the Report of the Ford Pilot Study:

In the course of the 1993 Enterprise Bargaining Negotiations the Union and the Company agreed to jointly examine various aspects of the VIC and identify changes that need to be made to improve participation.

The Parties recognise that:

- there was a body of evidence (statistical and anecdotal) that significant numbers of employees were not participating in the VIC and were unlikely to do so under current arrangements;
Manufacturing uncertainty

- women workers in the old ‘F’ and ‘G’ classification [the two lowest classifications of the award] and workers from non-English-speaking backgrounds appeared to account for a high proportion of non-participants;
- the Ford Affirmative Action/EEO Plan and the Structural Efficiency Agreements had confirmed the importance of EEO as a support mechanism for structural change and also recognised the need to take positive action to achieve equity in VIC processes in particular. (Ford Broadmeadows 1993, p. 1)

In the course of the Ford Pilot Study, seventy-six people were interviewed—twelve men and sixty-four women. The higher number of women is due to their overrepresentation in the lower pay levels. The pilot study aimed to establish reasons for non-participation in the VIC, and the results are presented here as they are clearly relevant to several aspects of our research. Table 5.2 summarises the stated reasons for non-participation by workers in training.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English [language]</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can't do in own time</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility [of VIC]</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family [responsibilities]</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Lack of] skills recognition</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-care</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't understand [the VIC]</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes too long</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injury</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too old</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Multiple responses were allowed so percentages do not total 100. \( n = 76 \).

It is evident from these data that English language problems were considered by both men and women who did not participate in training for the VIC to be a significant barrier to participation in training. For many women, a further problem was the requirement to undertake the training out of normal work hours. Combined with family responsibilities, and a feeling that the VIC lacked credibility, the data from this sample of workers indicate some of the difficulties posed by the requirements of VIC participation.

The Pilot Study Team made a number of recommendations designed to address the barriers identified by non-VIC participating employees. They are somewhat technical and therefore will not be detailed here, but the principles generally driving the recommendations were: to orient the learning processes more to the needs of non-English-speakers, including training to be given in languages other than English; to alter the structure of the skills units to become competency based rather than prescriptively time based, and in this way lessen wherever possible the
amount of time spent on each rotated task; and to incorporate as much as possible of the knowledge competencies (the material taught in those units taken out of work hours) into the skill units which are learnt on the job. In this way the amount of time compulsorily spent training out of work hours would diminish, and those workers who stated that they could not do training in their own time would have greater access to at least some VIC training. There was no recommendation that training be done entirely in work time, despite the high percentage of women workers who identified this as a barrier to participation in the VIC.

As at December 1993, six months after the completion of the joint report, the view of the union was that there had been very little progress made in the implementation of the seventeen recommendations made by the study team. Certainly, the proposed solutions to some of the barriers identified by workers concerning their participation in the VIC had not at the time of our study been acted upon at company level. The union officials consulted for our research stated that they felt that the company:

> has really sort of backed away from . . . the commitments to do with the VIC and the EBA [enterprise bargaining agreement]. They are going through this process internally of consolidating their approach.

While Ford management has had representation on the VAITB, a union official expressed concern that Ford is moving away from an industry approach to training, toward an enterprise specific approach. While this is in line with the two stream model proposed by the BCA, it brings with it inherent concerns for the union about the issue of members' portability of credentials. How closely will the content of enterprise specific training conform to the broad national policy framework? How will this conformity be evaluated, and by whom?

The VAITB clearly has a role here, but this organisation can only be effective if it has some credibility and influence in the industry. If the larger and more powerful companies move away from both membership and support of the VAITB and its training plans, the potential for fragmentation of an overall industry training framework is exacerbated. This would seem to be antithetical to the development of a coordinated approach to the training and skill acquisition of workers. A more prescriptive role by the Federal Government in the implementation of national standards could obviate the dangers of idiosyncratic and disorderly training approaches.

**Ford VIC Steering Committee**

As the work-force profile suggests, the culture at Ford is strongly male. Male supervisors and shop stewards are the norm, and sexual harassment has been identified by the union as a key issue of concern for women, along with occupational health and safety, and career opportunities. In such a male dominated environment, it was perhaps not surprising, but nevertheless disturbing, that the Ford VIC Steering Committee members at the time of interview were all
Manufacturing uncertainty

men. This Committee is a subgroup of the Joint [union and company] Training Committee, developed out of the recently negotiated enterprise agreement specifically to consider the VIC. As such, it would seem to play an important role in determining a number of key issues to do with access, participation, and equity matters in relation to VIC training.

Despite concerns expressed by both the union and the company about the low participation rate of women in the VIC, and particularly those women from a NESB, there was a distinct lack of female representation on this committee. This was despite strategies such as a women’s committee, a women’s conference, and women workplace representatives implemented by the AMEUVD to encourage its women members to become more active in their workplaces. The union did make claim to a woman committee member from its Geelong plant and to the membership of a senior female union official, but it was unclear how often either of them attended the meetings. This appeared, however, to provide sufficient female presence (albeit sporadic) for one union committee member to claim on the union’s behalf, ‘so we’re not gender biased!’

There were no female management representatives. When asked why this was the case, one of the male management representatives said:

It probably has not occurred to me ... There are no women in positions who could be seen as being representative. By that I mean that from ... both sides we decided to keep the numbers fairly small, and there is a senior union person and a senior company person on it ... From the company’s point of view we put the two people that head up the VIC in both locations [Broadmeadows and Geelong], who are both blokes at the moment.

When asked to reflect on the fact that this training committee looked among other things at issues about women’s participation in training but had no women members, this same management representative said:

That doesn’t concern me all that greatly. It would if I felt that the group was not listening, but now we’ve got much more sophisticated measurement, surveying internally, and a much more responsive way of running our business ... It doesn’t necessarily have to have somebody from all groups. I agree it helps, but it’s not essential to have it. I can see a committee being well representative of the population and of the customers and not making any changes, because they don’t have the access to the power to make those changes ... In terms of the priorities of setting that committee up, the point of negotiating having female representatives on it wasn’t high on the priority list, albeit that one of its responsibilities was to look at access [to training] ... If I had to sacrifice representation as opposed to ability to make decisions, I’d sacrifice representation because I’m much happier, much more comfortable these days ... with our measurement systems and our feedback mechanism than I have been hitherto.

The point should be made that if women have no chance to participate in these decision-making forums, if they are not seen to be capable of engaging in the negotiating processes, and if they have no legitimised capacity to be spokeswomen
for other female workers, history demonstrates that their voices will almost certainly remain muted.

**Natural work groups**

Ford has begun the process of implementing a more team oriented approach in some areas of its operations. Opinion on the usefulness of this form of work organisation, called ‘Natural Work Groups’ (NWGs) at Ford, varies between the company and the union. The capacity of NWGs to operate as a mechanism to benefit women’s training and leadership possibilities is uncertain.

Management representatives appeared reasonably sanguine about participation in the NWGs:

> The survey material tells us that [employees] see them [NWGs] as being a very positive innovation . . . The results vary. The people that are participating in the training and actively participating in the work groups are very positive. Those who haven’t participated, which is actively, I think, at least half of the population, are very, very cautious about them.

Conversely, a union official stated:

> I would be surprised if those natural work groups are actually meeting. I think what they are is the supervisor pulling everybody together and just telling them what to do.

On the question of their impact on women, the view of one of the management representatives was:

> It’s not happening at the major plants, but in smaller plants we have natural work groups that are more advanced. I can think of several cases where women have come through to be group leaders and have moved on to other things . . . From what I’ve seen here, women are more likely to emerge through that system than they are through the traditional forms of working.

The senior shop steward had a less positive view:

> Yes, but the number of females will not have increased . . . In some groups you have got fifteen people. You have got pretty smart females and all that in there, but one—maximum two—out of thirty-five group members. So they are not coming in to the group . . .

This shop steward spoke of the difficulty for women of getting elected to group leader positions in this environment. Even in areas where women predominated, women rarely won elected positions: ‘you elect a shop steward and you’ve got 90 per cent females electing, and you always elect a male. It creates a trend’.

Asked whether the company intended to put any affirmative action processes in place to give more support to women on this issue, the management response was: ‘We don’t have a specific plan on that’.

Once again, history demonstrates (see, for example, Eisenstein 1991; Sawer 1990) that unless there is a concerted effort at the most senior level to support women’s participation in new initiatives, the existing entrenched structural barriers operate
to exclude women from benefiting to the same degree as male workers. In the case of NWGs, the challenge for both Ford and the union is to make this process of change one which impacts positively on women.

To conclude this section, Ford at the time of this study appeared to have increased its production output in line with an overall aim of comparing more favourably with international competitors. Leaner production techniques and the implementation of English-language and VIC training programs for production and assembly workers have combined to facilitate the achievement of this goal. However, paying heed to issues of access and equity seemed to have slipped down the company agenda, and the participation in training of women—especially groups of NESB women—emerged as an industrial issue involving both the company and the union. New work practices have been implemented, but again early indications suggest that women are not participating in them or benefiting from them to the same extent as the male workers.

The study sample

Demographic and social characteristics:

Country of birth

A total of 115 workers were interviewed at the Ford Broadmeadows plant. The self-identified countries of birth ranged across 28 countries, as outlined in Table 5.3. Of those interviewees not born in Australia, four (three females and one male) were from an ESB (Ireland, New Zealand, and Scotland), and 83 from a NESB. The numerically dominant countries of birth at Ford—Greece, Italy, Turkey, Viet Nam, and the Republics of former Yugoslavia—are also those numerically dominant in our sample.

Table 5.3: Self-identified country of birth of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of birth</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Country of birth</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia-Herzegovina</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Timor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Western Samoa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gender
The AB/ESB and NESB split and gender composition of the sample is outlined in table 5.4, with almost two-thirds of the sample being female.

Table 5.4: Production workers interviewed, by background and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage of total</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB/ESB</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>50.4%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Period of residence in Australia
The years of residence for those participants not born in Australia (both from an ESB and a NESB) ranged from 4 to 44 years. Table 5.5 details the number of years of residence in Australia, by gender, of the non-Australia-born interviewees at Ford. None of the overseas-born participants in our study had lived in Australia for less than three years. Over half of the NESB women and nearly two-thirds of the NESB men had, at the time of interview, lived in Australia for eleven or more years. Almost half of the NESB men recorded 21 or more years in Australia. Nearly a third of the NESB women and men had lived in Australia for 6–10 years, reflecting perhaps the wave of immigration which occurred during the 1980s.

Table 5.5: Years of residence in Australia, by gender of non-Australia-born interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of residence in Australia (%)</th>
<th>ESB</th>
<th>NESB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–10</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–15</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–20</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21+</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n = 87.

Languages spoken
The number of languages spoken by individuals ranged from one to five. Nine women and eight men from a NESB spoke three languages each, and one woman...
Manufacturing uncertainty

from a NESB spoke five languages. This would seem to be a rich resource on which to draw, but at the time of interview, no participants reported that their language skills were being utilised in any systematic way.

**Age**
The ages of the interviewees ranged from 18 to 59 years. The distribution in age groupings is shown in Table 5.6; 66.7 per cent of the AB/ESB female interviewees are clustered in the younger age-groups (16–30 years), while 69 per cent of the NESB females are clustered in the 31–50 years range. Of the AB/ESB males, 82.4 per cent are in the 21–40 years range, and the NESB males are spread fairly evenly in the 21–60 years range. At an anecdotal level, this appears to approximate the actual age distribution of the Ford workforce at Broadmeadows; it was not possible to obtain greater accuracy about the Ford employee age profile. If our sample is indeed reflective of the wider Ford workforce, it would be interesting to know why there is such a cluster of AB/ESB women in the 21–30 years age-group. This profile may reflect the result of Ford’s stated intention to recruit more English-speaking workers of a younger age than previously employed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age groupings (years)</th>
<th>16–20 (%)</th>
<th>21–30 (%)</th>
<th>31–40 (%)</th>
<th>41–50 (%)</th>
<th>51–60 (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB/ESB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Marital and parental status**
The marital status profile of the AB/ESB females was markedly different to that of the AB/ESB and NESB males, and the NESB females. Only a third of the AB/ESB females were married and a small number living in a de facto relationship, contrasting with 70 per cent of the AB/ESB males and over 80 per cent of the NESB females and males being married. When combined with the younger age profile of the AB/ESB women, this is perhaps not surprising. It does, however, have implications for potential access to training; those women who do not have a multitude of domestic and relationship responsibilities could be expected to experience fewer barriers to attending training outside work hours. This is clearly of importance to companies when considering their recruitment policies, and of concern to those married/de facto women with family responsibilities who are seeking employment.
The data collected give this issue more depth, as 81 per cent of the NESB women in the sample had children living at home, compared with 47 per cent of the AB/ESB women. In light of the considerable literature and evidence demonstrating that women generally do the bulk of household work, this 'second shift' of housework for both these groups of women must be seen as an obstacle to participation in training out of work hours. As the percentage of NESB women in our sample with children at home is so high, it is not unreasonable to expect that this group of women would find the prospect of out of hours training difficult to accommodate, thus affecting their training participation rate, particularly in relation to the other three groups. This hypothesis will be examined in more detail later in this chapter.

Education and work history

**Education**

All of the AB/ESB women and men in the sample had spent 8–13 years at school. Nearly a third of the NESB women and men had received 3–7 years of schooling, and around 60 per cent of these two groups had been at school for periods of 8–13 years. A greater proportion of the AB/ESB workers had thus received more formal school education than the two NESB groups.

**Qualifications gained in Australia**

In relation to qualifications gained in Australia, 58 per cent of AB/ESB males had some form of qualification (predominantly a TAFE certificate relating to their work, such as the VIC), 44 per cent of NESB males similarly had a TAFE certificate, 40 per cent of AB/ESB women had either a work-related TAFE certificate or in a few instances a trade certificate, and 22 per cent of NESB women had a work-related TAFE certificate. The TAFE qualification was nearly always the completed VIC certificate, and it was often overlooked when the question was asked about any such qualifications. When prompted about the VIC, many interviewees expressed surprise that this amounted to a legitimate credential. It seems that the worth of this training course has not impressed itself on many of the participants, and its potential value as a portable qualification may need further elaboration. A management representative expressed surprise at this:

> We thought, in fact our survey work that we have done tells us that one of the things that attracts people to the program is the fact that it is a nationally recognised credential.

However, a 26-year-old Australia-born male reflected the opinion, which was frequently expressed, that: 'The VIC—don't see it as a qualification because it is only recognised in the vehicle industry. If you go into another industry it is worthless'.

Opinions on the usefulness and reception of the VIC were varied. Among the union shop stewards, views differed. According to one:
Workers don’t know if it’s useful outside of Ford because that issue of portability hasn’t been put to the test ... As for self-satisfaction, a lot of [workers] take great pride to have actually achieved something, given that probably before you could be in the same job for twenty or thirty years and not actually move around and be recognised for learning any more ... You can wander around the plant and some of them have got their qualifications in their workplace, and that’s a signal to the others, ‘Hey, I’m achieving that’. It’s improving their self esteem.

A 24-year-old AB woman stated succinctly that: ‘Ninety-nine per cent of the people here think that the VIC is crap!’ However, an Italy-born man commented:

Before, you were not motivated to do things, to fix things. Now it is different, they are asking for ideas. Before, my supervisor said, ‘You are not here to think, just to do as you are told’. Now it is different.

**Overseas qualifications**

While many of the interviewees who were not born in Australia had no formal qualifications gained in this country, some had gained qualifications or credentials prior to arrival in Australia. In this regard, 17 per cent of the NESB women and 12 per cent of the NESB men had trade certificates and around 13 per cent of NESB women and men had a diploma. Several of the NESB women had university degrees. None of the interviewees born overseas from an ESB had any qualifications gained outside Australia.

Of the twenty-six people born overseas who had some form of credential prior to arrival in Australia, only six of the women and one man had attempted to have their qualification accepted in Australia. None had been successful. Five women and one man reported that their qualification was in some way related to the work in which they were currently engaged, but the company had made no effort to formally or informally recognise or utilise their certified skills or expertise. A management representative stated that the question of overseas qualifications:

... is not much of an issue now because we very rarely are recruiting people who have got those ... Generally there is no sort of direct credit. What we do have in a couple of our programs is an RPL mechanism ... We have had some people who have been given credit for training they have received overseas.

This difficulty in having skills or credentials recognised may not be very encouraging for the workers involved. Participation in more training—especially if proficiency was already held in some areas—may seem repetitive and unattractive if appropriate credit was not given. Thus opportunities to be given more responsible jobs would be lost despite the individual having relevant knowledge and experience.

**Work force participation**

For NESB and AB/ESB women and NESB men, the highest proportions were clustered in the category of having worked for 6–10 years in Australia (35 per cent for the NESB women, 47 per cent for the AB/ESB women, and 44 per cent for the
A greater percentage of NESB men (24 per cent) than the other three groups had worked in Australia for more than twenty years, followed by NESB women (17 per cent).

Over half of the NESB women and almost three-quarters of the AB/ESB women had worked at Ford for five years or less. This could be interpreted in a number of ways. In relation to the greater percentage of AB/ESB women, it could reflect the recent recruitment policies of employing more English-speaking workers rather than those people who would need English language training. This would be of concern to current and future job aspirants who have low English proficiency.

Less than 1 per cent of the AB/ESB women in our sample had worked at Ford for longer than 10 years, contrasting with 20 per cent of the sample of NESB women who had stayed at Ford for 16–20 years. This seems to demonstrate the changing female work profile, and also reflects the higher proportion of younger women in this group. Of the NESB and AB/ESB male workers, the time spent at Ford was fairly evenly distributed across the period of 3–10 years.

While a small number of AB/ESB males and NESB males and females had worked in the same job at Ford for more than 11 years (and indeed some for more than 16 years), just over 40 per cent of the AB/ESB and NESB women had been doing their current job for 1 year or less. Around a third of both the AB/ESB and NESB males indicated that they had been in their current job for 4–5 years, with another third of the AB/ESB males reporting a period of 2–3 years. The remaining NESB males had spent varying periods of between 1 year and more than 30 years in their current job, fairly evenly distributed. In our sample at least, it appears to be the NESB men who had experienced longer periods of time in the same type of job. However, within the prescribed job, there appeared to be opportunities for some workers to experience different types of tasks.

**Task rotation**

Table 5.7 shows the extent to which the interviewees felt that they had been moved around to different types of tasks. This indicates that for over half of the AB/ESB women and two-thirds of the NESB women, there was perceived to be at least some variation in job experience. The AB/ESB males appear to have had the least exposure to a range of different tasks within their jobs. However, for all four groups, quite high percentages of workers in each category perceived that they have had no variation in tasks at all. One young AB woman complained that: 'In two years in Plant Two, no rotation at all for two years, despite the principle of rotation'. Another AB woman, aged 26, expressed her disillusion about possibilities for job rotation:

> I have applied for stacks of jobs, but now I have given up. Because I know all the jobs in my area, they won’t move me out of here. It’s just no good. If you are a conscientious worker, you don’t mind where you go, but you can’t because they won’t let you go.

A 29-year-old New Zealand-born male was more specific in locating his difficulty about lack of job rotation:
Manufacturing uncertainty

Table 5.7: Extent of task rotation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent of task rotation (%)</th>
<th>A lot</th>
<th>A few</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AB/ESB</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NESB</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I’ve had trouble from the supervisor, in that he doesn’t like moving people around. He just doesn’t want people other than his mates to learn the job, so he moves them all around first.

One of the consequences of not being able to move around to different jobs was the impact on pay levels. A 47-year-old Mauritius-born male expressed with some bitterness: ‘No one will take me into their section, so I can’t move around and therefore can’t get the VIC. They are keeping therefore $25 a week from me’.

The effect of these problems with the rotation of jobs would seem to be antithetical to the spirit of multi-skilling and a more broadly experienced workforce. It also limits the amount of skill recognition that could be claimed in order to gain exemptions from the VIC.

Role in supervision

In relation to leadership positions, few men in our sample and almost no women had moved beyond the categories of machine operator or production/assembly worker. Despite the much larger numbers of NESB women interviewed than the other three groups, only one was a leading hand. While one AB/ESB woman interviewee was a group leader, there were no female NESB group leaders in our sample. This certainly reflects the lack of female workers at Ford who have any form of leadership position. A 27-year-old Malta-born woman commented:

You don’t see many women in higher jobs such as leading hand or supervisor. Talking to a woman is what you want sometimes. Talking to a man—the way they talk to me, I am not used to it. They think just because I am young they can say whatever they want. It makes me feel very uncomfortable.

This issue thus has two aspects. The first is about women being appropriately represented within leadership positions as a matter of equity, and the second concerns the need expressed in the quote above. Some women want other women as supervisors to talk to without the feeling of discomfort they may experience when dealing with a male. If companies like Ford wish to recruit more female employees, as stated earlier by a management representative, then they surely need to provide a more supportive environment for women to work within. This includes the provision of more career opportunities for women to proceed to supervisory levels.
The union also needs to give consideration to this issue. One female NESB shop steward was interviewed, but her position was unusual as the majority of shop stewards were male. Again, there is a need for increased female representation in leadership positions if women are to gain a higher profile on the shop floor, and also to enable them to increase their potential for more responsibility and increased pay.

**Income levels**

Unfortunately, data on salary levels were unreliable. Almost none of the interviewees could remember what their gross levels of pay were, and the net amount that they quoted was after a variety of deductions that differed from person to person. Relative pay levels therefore could not be calculated. In relation to relative incomes within the household however, the data showed a marked difference for NESB women when compared with the other three groups. Table 5.8 gives the proportion of interviewees for whom their pay was the major income within the family.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB/ESB</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>76.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responding to this question may have caused some men to feel disinclined in front of another worker to divulge that they were not the primary income earner. However, given this caveat, the higher proportion of AB/ESB than NESB women as major income earners may also reflect their characteristics of being of a younger age and with fewer in a married/de facto situation than the NESB women, thus supporting themselves rather than being in a joint household. Certainly the figures support the commonly held view that men earn more than their female partners, particularly for the men from a NESB. The remaining 60 per cent of NESB women indicated that their pay was needed to add to the household income, rather than being the major source. This is interesting in the context of Ford, as many of the NESB women interviewed had male partners who worked in the same company, many of whom were presumably earning more than the women.

**Overtime**

There was a large difference between the men and the women in the amount of voluntary overtime usually worked: over 40 per cent of both NESB and AB/ESB women recorded that they usually worked 3–8 hours overtime each week, whereas only around 25 per cent of both AB/ESB and NESB men indicated that they usually worked this amount (or less) overtime.
Manufacturing uncertainty

Transport
Of the NESB women, 38 per cent (compared with only 13 per cent of the AB/ESB women) were driven to and from work by their husband or partner, thus limiting the independence of their time schedules. The large majority of both AB/ESB and NESB males drove themselves to work, and almost none of the interviewees used public transport. The reason for this was not clear; perhaps Ford is difficult to access via public transport.

Summary
The picture emerging from our sample at Ford is that about half of the women worked more overtime than three-quarters of the two male groups, and earned on average less than their male partners. For the NESB women in particular, when this is combined with the fact that 81 per cent of them had children living at home and therefore had consequent family expectations and duties, there would appear to be little time or space in their lives for additional work-related activities out of work hours. This is exacerbated for some by a reliance on other people for transport to and from work, making it difficult to undertake independent travel arrangements in the event of working out of hours for training.

Numeracy and English language

Numeracy
Over half of the NESB women, and a third of the AB/ESB women, said that they were either not at all confident or not very confident about using numbers, graphs, and charts at work. Nearly 50 per cent of the NESB males felt that they were not very confident in this area, contrasting with only 19 per cent of AB/ESB males who expressed a lack of confidence. There is a clear difference in this area between the responses of NESB and AB/ESB workers, with more of the former expressing an unease with their capacity to use numbers and graphs and charts at work. This could possibly provide a disincentive for the NESB workers to engage in training where they would have to apply these techniques.

Language and literacy
One AB/ESB male could not read English as well as he could speak it. The remainder of the AB/ESB males, and all of the AB/ESB females, felt that they could. Around a third each of the NESB males and females felt that they could not read English as well as they could speak it, while over 40 per cent in each category felt that they could. The remainder responded ‘more or less’.

Over half of the NESB females and males felt that they could not write English as well as they could speak it, and thus expressed less confidence in this skill than in their ability to speak English. These are quite high proportions, and are interesting in relation to the VIC training offered at Ford. As English language and literacy training is an integrated part of VIC training for those who need this support, these figures indicate real need for this type of literacy training. While over 80 per cent of the AB/ESB females and males responded that they could read English as
well as they could speak it, there were still around 15 per cent in each AB/ESB
group who expressed difficulty with written English. This is consistent with the
literature (see, for example, MacDonald 1993), which indicates that literacy
difficulties in the workplace are not limited to people whose first language is not
English.

The data concerning English language presented in the remainder of this language
and literacy section include only the responses of those interviewees who were
born outside Australia, and for whom English was not the main language learnt as
a child. The data therefore represent the views and experiences of 68 NESB
workers for whom English was at best their second language, ranging through to
negligible English language proficiency at the time of interview.

Of this group, 84 per cent of the women and over 60 per cent of the men recorded
that they spoke no English at all when they arrived in Australia. Almost all of the
remaining people in each group indicated that they had spoken English 'not very
well' on arrival. When asked to describe the English they currently spoke at work,
26 per cent of the women and 6 per cent of the men rated it as 'poor'; 50 per cent
of the women and 61 per cent of the men as 'fair'; and 22 per cent of the women
and 33 per cent of the men classified their English capacity as 'good' or 'very
good'.

Less than half of this group of NESB women and just over a third of these NESB
men had attended any English language classes. Given that so many of this group
of interviewees spoke no English on arrival in Australia, this is a low percentage.
Of those who had participated in English language classes, almost half of both
women and men had done these classes outside of their workplaces, in places such
as migrant hostels, language centres, TAFE colleges, or via the Adult Migrant
Education Service. The remainder had attended classes at work in a mix of paid
and unpaid time. There is an interesting distinction between the type of English
language classes undertaken by women and by men. Only 25 per cent of the
women compared with 57 per cent of the men had attended classes where the
English language learning was integrated with other work-related training. Thus
three-quarters of the NESB women had learnt English in a mode not
textualised with other training—not the model that the ESL experts consulted
in the course of this study recommended for an optimum learning experience.
Their preferred system is to see language as part of the process of broader training
as opposed to a precondition for such training.

Three-quarters of both the women and the men thought that it was either
important or very important to be able to speak English in their work area, even
though the majority of both groups had not attended any English language
training. Table 5.9 describes these NESB workers' multiple responses to a range of
possible outcomes if they spoke better English.

Only 6 per cent of the females, and no males, thought that it would make no
difference to their jobs if they spoke better English. These figures strongly indicate
that most of this group of workers felt increased English language skills would improve their job chances, increase their participation in work-related training, and improve their opportunities to apply for better jobs. They would also enjoy their work more. Only about a third of the NESB women considered that speaking better English would affect their involvement with their union, while half of the men thought that this could be a possible outcome. Clearly, increased English language skills were perceived by a large percentage of these workers to have potential benefits for an improved work life.

**Child-care**

Child-care is central to the issue of out-of-work-hours training. Many workers juggle their working lives in conjunction with their partners in order to provide suitable care for their children. This often involves parents working different shifts, with one parent having to hurry home at the end of a shift so that the other parent can get to his or her shift on time. Under this arrangement the difficulty of accommodating training out of the normal shift time can be too onerous to manage. Responses about the degree of ease or difficulty in participating in such training are given in table 5.10. For those workers in our sample with children, training out of normal shift time would be either impossible or difficult for all of the AB/ESB women, for 80 per cent of the AB/ESB men, for 73 per cent of the NESB women, and for 67 per cent of the NESB men. Two-thirds of the NESB males thought work-based child-care would be the best arrangement to facilitate out-of-work hours training, while only 9 per cent of the NESB women and almost none of the AB/ESB women and men saw this as an acceptable option.

Almost none of the respondents had their children placed in the community managed child-care centre located at Ford, as most indicated that their children were currently at school, or being cared for by either their spouse or another family member. There were a number of complaints about the difficulty of using the child-care centre at Ford to enable parents to participate in training after work. The comment of a 23-year-old Italy-born male was typical of these: ‘The child-care centre closes at 6.00 pm. If you are doing the VIC this is no good, as [the classes] finish at 6.45. This is no help at all to do training.’ This is a seemingly unnecessary impediment to the use of the child-care centre for VIC participating

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### Table 5.9: NESB workers’ views of possible outcomes of speaking better English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible outcomes</th>
<th>Females (%)</th>
<th>Males (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easier to get a better job</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would apply for better jobs</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>94.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would enjoy work more</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would do more training at work</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>88.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would be more involved with a union</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: n = 68.*
parents. It appears to be such an obvious obstacle to remove, thus allowing parents who use the child-care centre at least to have the choice of involvement in training if they so wish.

A further child-care difficulty was identified by the same worker: 'Also the child-care centre is closed during January for one week when we get back to work, so one of us (my wife or I) have to take an extra week's holiday'. Again, this would seem to be a matter that could be addressed if it meant that more workers would see the centre as a viable option for their children, and in turn this facilitated greater participation in the VIC training.

Workplace culture

As stated earlier, the culture of the shop floor at Ford is strongly male, with NESB males comprising over half of the production workers. Table 5.11 details the responses of the workers in the sample to questions concerning the relative treatment of immigrant and Australian-born workers, and of women and men.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Propositions agreed to or strongly agreed to</th>
<th>NESB (%)</th>
<th>AB/ESB (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB workers are treated better than other workers</td>
<td>60.4 60.0</td>
<td>0.0 23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant workers are treated better than AB workers</td>
<td>3.5 4.0</td>
<td>60.0 35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some immigrant workers are treated better than others</td>
<td>67.3 68.0</td>
<td>73.4 100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All workers are treated the same</td>
<td>19.0 16.0</td>
<td>26.7 0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are treated better than men</td>
<td>24.2 56.0</td>
<td>6.7 23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men are treated better than women</td>
<td>37.9 12.0</td>
<td>73.3 11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men and women are treated equally</td>
<td>37.9 32.0</td>
<td>20.0 64.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the numerical dominance at Ford of NESB workers (predominantly males), over half of the NESB women and men in our sample thought that AB were treated better than other workers at Ford. All of the AB/ESB women and
76 per cent of the AB/ESB males disagreed with this view, and indeed 60 per cent of the AB/ESB females considered that immigrants were treated better than AB workers.

While over half of the NESB men thought that women were treated better than men, over three-quarters of the AB/ESB men and the NESB women disagreed with this view, as did over 90 per cent of the AB/ESB women. Instead, nearly three-quarters of AB/ESB women considered that men were treated better than women, while over 60 per cent of the NESB women and 88 per cent of the NESB and AB/ESB males disagreed. Over half of the AB/ESB males agreed that men and women were treated equally, but the large majority of the other three groups disagreed with this proposition.

A picture emerges from our sample of a work force holding divergent views about the relative treatment of immigrants and AB workers, and of women and men. The AB/ESB women in our sample appear to have much stronger views than the AB/ESB men about the extent of most of these differences, while a large proportion of the NESB men think that the women get treated in a better way.

**Sexual harassment**

The problem of sexual harassment at Ford was apparent. Many women told us of harassment that they had experienced, and of the difficulty of getting anything done to address this unacceptable behaviour. According to a 22-year-old Malta-born woman:

> Sexual harassment is common. I have to put up with it every day ... If you complain, the [harasser] will spread the story that you are complaining and then no-one will help you ... I go to the foreman first to complain, rather than to the sexual harassment officer. I would rather go to the foreman, to sort it out before it got too complicated. But my foreman won't do anything. It's like they have never seen a woman before. It's becoming an issue, and women are complaining—but only very specific complaints for touching and pinching. But it is always put back on the females, 'cos you have a lot of men who are old-fashioned, and its always the female's fault.

Another Malta-born woman had seen some improvement: ‘Things are better now with the sexual harassment policy. In the enterprise bargaining agreement, there is a whole section on it.’ However, a 32-year-old AB/ESB woman who worked in a predominantly male area had not noticed any change, and had experienced unacceptable behaviour with sexual harassment, as well as difficulty with her job:

> I have a really hard time with sexual harassment and the work. With the sexual harassment, I just tell them where to get off, but I get really tired of this. Their hands wander all over the place. I've been working with most of them for about two to three years, but it still doesn't sink in that I have difficulty in keeping up with the work that the men do. The work is heavy, that's the main reason. I taught myself because it was a challenge, but now the load's getting a bit heavy. I've talked to the union about the harassment, and the people involved just got a slap on the wrist.
Their behaviour changed for a while, then they started doing it again. It’s a continuous process of me going off my head at them, them settling down for a while, and then it all starts again.

If the management at Ford really do want to increase the numbers of female employees in their production areas, as previously stated by a management representative, then clearly they need to take swift and effective action about the problem of sexual harassment. It is not surprising that recruitment of women is difficult if the culture is intimidating and predatory. The anti-sexual harassment campaign proposed in the 1993 enterprise agreement is most timely. Unless steps are put in place soon to change the unwelcome manifestations of this very male culture, the behaviour that these women and others have experienced may deter future female job-seekers.

**Training and skills**

This section encompasses many issues. Questions asked of interviewees covered a range of areas, including knowledge about any changes at the workplace and availability of training, about award restructuring and enterprise bargaining, levels of participation in training, and views on reasons for doing or not doing training.

**Knowledge of workplace issues**

A high proportion of all the workers in the Ford sample (88 per cent or over for all four groups) thought that their company’s ideas about training at work had changed in the past few years. A high proportion also felt that they had been given information about these changes, almost all of which had been provided by the company. Half or less of the NESB men and the AB/ESB women and men, and only 30 per cent of the NESB women, felt that information in this area had been provided by the union. This is perhaps surprising given the union’s stated involvement in workplace change and training at Ford.

Only 30 per cent of the NESB women thought that this information had been translated into languages other than English, while the percentages for the other three groups were nearer 50 per cent. When asked how much information was understood, over half of the NESB women and 41 per cent of the NESB men felt that they had understood ‘nothing’ or ‘some of it’. This contrasts with the two AB/ESB groups, over 85 per cent of whom had understood ‘most’ or ‘all’ of the information. So while large numbers of the workers are receiving information, far fewer NESB workers (in particular the women) have understood it than their AB/ESB workmates. This is an important issue if workers are to be given a clear idea about changes in the workplace so that they can make informed decisions about their participation in the change process. An increased amount of translated material, or a reassessment of the communication strategy, would clearly be beneficial in this regard.

Knowledge about award restructuring also varied. This variability is partly consistent with the findings of Bertone and Griffin (1992), who reported that the AB/ESB union members in their study were significantly better informed about
award restructuring than the NESB members, 88 per cent of whom knew either 'nothing' or 'a little bit' about this issue. Their data were not disaggregated by gender, so the relative percentages for females and males are not known. In our study sample, far fewer NESB women (48 per cent) had heard of award restructuring than the other three groups (each over 80 per cent). Of those who had, many more stated that they had been given information by the company than by the union. In this area, more men and women from a NESB than from an AB/ESB thought that the information had been translated into languages other than English, although still only around half of these groups thought that this was the case. A 27-year-old Lebanon-born woman commented that: 'Multilingual tapes were made available about award restructuring, but they were a long time coming'. While three-quarters of the AB/ESB females understood most or all of the information about award restructuring, three-quarters of the NESB women understood only some or nothing of it. There is a clear difference here, again perhaps relating to the amount of material translated into the relevant languages. Once again, provision of information appears to need increased attention.

There was a marked difference in degrees of knowledge about enterprise bargaining. While all of the AB/ESB women and 94 per cent of the AB/ESB men in our sample had heard of it, a smaller percentage of the NESB men (64 per cent) and only 47 per cent of the NESB women had heard of this issue. As there had been industrial action about the determination of training issues in the enterprise agreement at the Broadmeadows plant just prior to these interviews, it is surprising that such a large percentage of the NESB women (54 per cent) had not at least heard about enterprise bargaining in the context of the negotiation of the agreement. A 47-year-old Germany-born woman complained:

> Mass meetings about enterprise bargaining were very disorganised—thousands of people—couldn't hear, so there was no point in going. Many people missed out on what was being said. It's better to have a smaller meeting, so those people who don't understand can get more information.

This had unfortunate consequences for some workers. Several NESB women told us that they had turned up for work on the days of the strike, and were confused and uncertain about what to do when they found the plant closed. A 34-year-old China-born woman said:

> When the strike was on, we did not know what it was all about. We arrived for work, and they said 'go home'. For two times it was like that. We did not know why.

Similarly, a 34-year-old Timor-born woman complained: 'We were given no information about the strike. We just follow, we just follow'. This is obviously a most disempowering experience, and is reflected in the percentage of the NESB women (57 per cent) who responded that they had not received any information about enterprise bargaining from either the company or the union, compared with 36 per cent of the NESB men, 13 per cent of the AB/ESB women, and 6 per cent of the AB/ESB men who responded that they had received no information. Why
are the NESB workers not receiving this material? Or if they are, it is clearly not in a form appropriate for their understanding. According to a 41-year-old AB woman, it is inappropriate for people from any background: 'The enterprise bargaining book at Ford sounds like it was written by a politician. It is difficult to understand, and makes six words into twelve words!' This would seem a matter for the company and the union to pursue, in relation both to the accessibility of the language, and to its translation.

In relation to training, 100 per cent of the AB/ESB women and men, and over 85 per cent of the NESB women and men knew about the work-related training that they were able to do at Ford. About the same number had been given information about this training. Of these, between 85 and 100 per cent thought that this had been provided by the company. A low 7 per cent of the AB/ESB women, and only around a third of the AB/ESB men and the NESB women and men, thought that the union had given them information about training at work. This is rather surprising given the communication strategy implemented by the union. Once again, however, the form of the information provided about training warrants attention. Over 40 per cent of the AB/ESB men, and the NESB women and men, felt that they understood some or nothing of the material. This contrasts with nearly three-quarters of the AB/ESB women who understood most or all of it. Some exploration by the information providers into the reasons for this difference might prove useful in future development of informative material in a form that is capable of being understood by many more workers than is currently the case.

**Participation in work-related training**

The connection between the need for training, and the potential this has for other consequential benefits such as extra money or job promotion, does not appear to have been drawn to the attention of most of the NESB workers and over half of the AB/ESB workers in our sample. Less than half of the AB/ESB women and men, and only 16 per cent and 31 per cent respectively of the NESB men and women, reported that anyone from the company had ever talked to them about how they might get a better paid job at Ford. For over 80 per cent of all four groups, no one had talked to them about how they might get a job that they liked better than the one they had now. Even if there was an expressed desire for a better job, one 32-year-old New Zealand-born woman complained that no notice was taken:

I've asked for transfers to quite a lot of positions, but it's always been denied ... I wanted to transfer to a better job ... but it was always denied. They don't want to lose me out of the area because I know all the jobs in the whole area. I was told that I work too hard, and so it was my fault.

With the exception of the NESB women, there were a number of workers in the other three groups who were actually participating in training while expressing that they did not want to do it. Thus 47 per cent of the AB/ESB men, 20 per cent of the AB/ESB women, and 12 per cent of the NESB men, were or had been engaged in work-related training even though they expressed their reluctance to participate.
Interestingly, a constant 54 per cent of the NESB women recorded that they both wanted to do training and had actually done so. The remaining 46 per cent of the NESB women appear to be less constrained about not doing something that they do not really want to do.

In relation to these ideas about wanting to do training, the views expressed in table 5.12 are interesting. The interviewees were asked to think about reasons for doing training at work. Table 5.12 indicates that high percentages of all four groups thought that a reason for doing training was to get a better job. This contrasts strongly with the desire to do training in order to become a team leader/leading hand, or to become a supervisor. While the percentages for three of the four groups are very low, almost three times more NESB women than AB/ESB women, and almost twice as many of the NESB men as the AB/ESB men, were interested in becoming a team leader/leading hand. More NESB women than AB/ESB women would do training to become a supervisor, and the percentages in this category for both groups of women were higher than for either group of men.

While the percentages were again high for all of the four groups, the AB/ESB women showed the greatest interest in doing training to learn more skills. Learning more about changes in technology scored quite highly, particularly for the AB/ESB males, as did doing training to make work more interesting. Being afraid of losing one’s job if training was not undertaken was clearly of much more concern to the NESB workers, although over half of these two groups did not record this as a reason for doing training. More of the NESB males said that losing pay if they did not do training would be a reason for participation, but again, this was not a concern for the majority of all four groups.

At an anecdotal level, a number of people at the commencement of the study expressed their view that one reason for the lower participation rate of NESB women in training was that generally this group of workers was less interested in having increased responsibility than were AB/ESB workers. In our sample, at least, this would not appear to be the case; while the percentages of the NESB women who would be interested in doing training to take on more leadership roles were quite low, they were still higher than either of the two AB/ESB groups. Overall,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for doing training</th>
<th>NESB (%)</th>
<th>AB/ESB (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get a better paid job</td>
<td>87.9</td>
<td>88.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn more skills</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>76.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn more about changes in technology</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>76.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make work more interesting</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afraid of losing job if don’t do training</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To become a team leader/leading hand</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>56.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To become a supervisor</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will lose pay if don’t do training</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The vehicle industry

however, the desire to train for more responsibility was not highly visible. A 34-year-old Fiji-born woman said: 'Women don’t want more responsibility—they have enough at home'.

The possibility of training enabling workers from the production line to move into supervisory positions was felt by a number of interviewees to be unlikely. In the view of a 34-year-old AB male, 'To progress to supervisors position you need to be a tradesperson or a graduate. This is common knowledge. The days of the supervisor are numbered anyway—they are a dinosaur'.

When asked if there were good opportunities at Ford for promotion, three-quarters each of the AB/ESB women and the NESB women and men disagreed or strongly disagreed, while of the AB/ESB males, 94 per cent also answered in these negative categories. Clearly, perceptions are strong that possibilities for promotion at Ford are not good. The implications of this for participation in training are expressed by a 24-year-old AB woman:

There are no promotion opportunities. Even if you finished the VIC, everyone will be on the same level—you can’t all be leading hands. So no way would I do more training to become a leading hand for only an extra $15 a week.

This must create a tension with the emerging requirement that applicants for internal jobs have VIC training. According to a management representative:

I think there seems to be a growing trend around the company with the internal jobs that people are applying for on the shop floor, that the VIC is starting to be used as a prerequisite qualification for a lot of internal jobs. As that becomes institutionalised, so will the worth of the certificate.

The nexus here between perceived lack of promotion opportunities and prescriptive job prerequisites may need to be addressed if workers are to feel encouraged to participate in training.

The amount of participation of the respondents in work-related training is detailed in table 5.13. It shows that, in our sample at Ford, NESB women have participated least in nearly all forms of training, other than English language and literacy. This is consistent with broader data (see Baker & Wooden 1991) which

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of training</th>
<th>NESB (%)</th>
<th>AB/ESB (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certificate course (VIC)</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>86.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (e.g. fork-lift, first aid)</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and safety representative</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop steward</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

81
identifies this group of workers as having the lowest rate of participation in all forms of industry training. The Ford sample differs in that AB/ESB females have the highest participation rate in a work-related certificate course, which for all of them was the VIC. This may again reflect the younger age composition of the AB/ESB females, and the fact that far fewer of them than the NESB women had either children living at home, or were married or in a de facto relationship. They may not have had the amount of domestic responsibilities experienced by the NESB women, and therefore did not face the difficulties inherent in participating in a training program that involved out-of-work-hours classes. The AB/ESB males had done more certificate training than the NESB males, and indeed had done more training in each category other than English language and literacy. Very few had undertaken either shop steward or elected health and safety representative training, and the group to have done most ‘other’ training (such as fork lift, or first aid) was the AB/ESB males.

The percentage of NESB women workers who had not participated in any work-related training was substantially higher than for the other three groups. The reasons given for not doing training are detailed later in this chapter. First, however, the experiences and views of those who had participated in training at Ford will be explored.

Table 5.14 shows the location of the training undertaken by those of our sample who had participated in some form of work-related training while at Ford. These data cannot be directly compared with Baker and Wooden’s (1991) analysis of location of training, as their figures encompassed all of the respondents of their survey—those who had done training, and those who had not done any training.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>NESP (%)</th>
<th>AB/ESB (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-the-job</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>86.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-house</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n = 81.

Our data refer only to those who, at the time of interview, had participated in some work-related training. Given this caveat, some of the data are clearly differently distributed than in table 3.1 (which is derived from Baker & Wooden 1991). In the Ford sample, 100 per cent of the NESB women who had done any training had done so in-house, while 75 per cent of them had also done training on-the-job, at their workstation. For the AB/ESB females and males, the ratios were reversed. These high figures contrast markedly with the very low percentages
of all four groups who had participated in external training, particularly NESB women. This is consistent with Baker and Wooden's data, in which NESB women also comprise the group who have undertaken the least amount of external training.

Between a third and a half of all the workers in our sample, who at the time of interview were participating in the VIC, had finished the amount of certificate training currently available. Almost no workers identified any difficulty in gaining permission from their supervisor to participate in training, although the comments recorded earlier concerning the problems with rotation need to be considered in relation to access to the variety of tasks required for successful completion of the skills units.

**Views about the training programs**

Over 80 per cent each of the NESB males, and AB/ESB females and males, described the training that they had done as 'easy' or 'very easy'. In contrast, NESB women had the most difficulty with the training, with 31 per cent considering that it was either 'hard' or 'very hard'. A further 25 per cent of this group placed the training half-way between 'hard' and 'easy'. This disparity of responses between the NESB women and the other groups must be of concern to trainers, and perhaps the training could be examined to see why NESB women in particular found it more difficult than those in the other three groups.

Consistent with the perceived degree of difficulty of the training is the divergence between NESB women and the other three groups in relation to the amount of training actually understood. Of the NESB women, 34 per cent recorded that they had understood either 'none' or only 'some' of it. This contrasts with 100 per cent of the AB/ESB females and males, and 87 per cent of the NESB males, who felt that they had understood 'most' or 'all' of the training. If over a third of the NESB female training participants have understood at best only 'some' of the material, questions must be asked about the efficacy of the training materials and methods. If participants are not gaining a clear idea of the content and focus of their training, they are unlikely to feel inclined to persevere with training in the future. The difficulty for some of these women to add training to their existing double shift of work at Ford and work at home is encapsulated in the pithy comment of a 47-year-old Macedonia-born woman: 'Learn here few things, go home and start washing dishes, forget everything you learnt!' If NESB women are reporting this difficulty to other NESB female workers, these others may feel little inclination or confidence about participating in a training program that they too may understand only minimally.

This sense of dislocation about training continued in another way for some of the NESB women, as over a third felt that none of the training that they had done was related to the work in which they were currently engaged, and a further 22 per cent felt that only 'some' of it was related. For the other three groups, over half of each felt that 'most' or 'all' of the training could be related to the work they were doing at the time of interview. This leaves just under half of these three groups
feeling that none or only some of their training was currently related to their work. When combined with the NESB women, this seems a large group of people who are engaging in training for which they can see no immediate relevance. A number of workers commented that different areas of work require distinct training content. A Sri Lanka-born male commented in this context:

The VIC is broad and general. It was not specific to different areas. Because my work was not on the line, much of it was not related to the work I do now.

While over 85 per cent of the NESB men felt that it was either ‘easy’ or ‘very easy’ to understand the English used in the training programs, 31 per cent of the NESB women thought that it was ‘very hard’ or ‘hard’, with a further 16 per cent indicating that while it was not exactly ‘hard’, they still had some difficulty in understanding the English. Again, this may act as a deterrent to further participation, although it is clearly not the only problem identified in relation to training by the NESB women in our sample.

**Assessment**

Of the total sample, 98 per cent of the NESB women (as well as 60 per cent of the NESB males and 77 per cent of the AB/ESB males) stated that they would prefer the assessment of the VIC units to be tests in which they could speak the answers, rather than write them. The object of the VIC assessment presumably should be to test competency, rather than literacy. Oral assessment seems to be available within the VIC, but it was not clear whether Ford chose to exercise it. If participants were having difficulty with understanding spoken English in their classes, they were probably also having trouble writing in English too. Another method would be to have the test material translated into the relevant languages. According to a 24-year-old AB woman: ‘They should have tests in languages other than English. This stops people doing the training or passing it’.

Of the AB/ESB women, 80 per cent recorded that they would prefer written tests, indicating perhaps a greater degree of comfort with the written word than a large number of the AB/ESB males.

**Reasons for ceasing or not participating in training**

Eighteen of the interviewees who had undertaken training stopped this training for explicit reasons. The AB/ESB women comprised the largest group (39 per cent), followed by the NESB males (23 per cent), NESB females (19 per cent), and the AB/ESB males (14 per cent). The reason given by the highest proportion of participants in all four groups for discontinuing training was that they found it difficult to do training at work as well as having family duties at home. Half of the NESB women who had discontinued their training recorded that they had found it too hard to understand the training, a sentiment supporting the data discussed earlier. Perhaps attention could be paid to our findings about assessment of training. This could well serve as a disincentive to continuing with the training sessions, particularly the knowledge units with their more formally structured approach.
Among the four groups of interviewees, percentages ranging from 40 to 50 per cent of those who had discontinued the training indicated that they had done so because they thought it was boring. Half of the NESB women in this category stated that they were too tired to keep doing the training, with 40 per cent each of AB/ESB females and NESB males citing this as a cause for discontinuing. (Interestingly, none of the AB/ESB males gave this as a reason.)

As demonstrated in table 5.13, the percentage of NESB women who had not participated in any training (44.8) was very much higher than the percentages of the other three groups. The actual numbers in the other three groups who had not participated in training are too low for meaningful statistical comparison, so only the percentages given by the NESB women of reasons for not doing any training are detailed in table 5.15. English language difficulties, training out of work hours, and the length of time required to complete the training emerge as the major reasons given by this group of NESB women for not doing work-related training. Of these 26 NESB women, 85 per cent had children still living at home. It was not only these family responsibilities that made training out of work hours difficult, it was also a matter of money. As one woman who was a single parent observed: 'I can't do the VIC because I need to do overtime for the money, and so I can't do the classes'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important or very important reason for not doing training</th>
<th>Percentage response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English not good enough</td>
<td>87.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training is outside hours of normal shift</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training takes too long to finish</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training is in unpaid time</td>
<td>65.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-care difficulties</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would not receive enough recognition for prior learning</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n = 26.

**Attitudes to training**

Perceptions about opportunities and encouragement to do training varied. Table 5.16 details responses to a range of questions on this issue. Many AB/ESB and NESB women held a less than sanguine view about the amount of help in training available to women in relation to men, with about half of the women contending that men are helped more than women to do training. While over 60 per cent of the NESB women felt that encouragement to do training was given to those workers who did not speak very good English, there remained 40 per cent who did not think that this was the case. A 47-year-old Germany-born woman complained: 'If you want to learn a new job, nobody has the time to train you'.

As the NESB females comprise the group of workers with the lowest rate of training, this perceived lack of encouragement could be important in deterring
Manufacturing uncertainty

Table 5.16: Perceptions about opportunities for training at Ford

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Propositions agreed to or strongly agreed to</th>
<th>NESB (%)</th>
<th>AB/ESB (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are helped as much as men to do work-related training</td>
<td>53.5 88.0</td>
<td>46.7 82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who do not speak very good English are encouraged to do training</td>
<td>60.4 92.0</td>
<td>73.4 64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone has the same opportunities for training, no matter what country they were born in</td>
<td>77.6 92.0</td>
<td>100.0 88.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This company provides enough training to improve your skills</td>
<td>75.9 68.0</td>
<td>86.6 76.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

participation. A 46-year-old AB woman said: 'It's about confidence, about taking that first step. Women who have been at home don't necessarily have the confidence...'. If workers do not feel they will receive support, their confidence about their ability to undertake training successfully may well be dented, and they could question the whole value of training in relation to their working lives.

In an attempt to try to understand more about broader attitudes to training, the views of the interviewees were sought about the reasons why people generally choose to do work-related training—not just at Ford, but in the wider community. Table 5.17 details responses to these questions. Nearly all the NESB women (91 per cent) thought that training at work was worth doing, despite the fact that only 41 per cent of them have done any VIC training at Ford. High percentages (80 per cent and above) of the other three groups agreed with this statement. When this was explored further, nearly three-quarters or more of all four groups considered that people do training because it makes them feel more confident and useful.

Table 5.17: Attitudes to training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Propositions agreed to or strongly agreed to</th>
<th>NESB (%)</th>
<th>AB/ESB (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training at work is worth doing</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>88.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People do training because it makes them feel more useful and confident workers</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>92.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People do training at work because they are afraid of losing their jobs</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>52.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a person can learn good work skills, they feel they are more likely to be respected in their family and community</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>84.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents feel that it is important to get better skills at work so they can be of more help to their children</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>88.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training gives opportunities for men to move into positions as leaders at work</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>52.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training gives opportunities for women to move into positions as leaders at work</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While 60 per cent of the AB/ESB women disagreed with the notion that people do training at work because they are afraid of losing their jobs, 70 per cent of the AB/ESB men and over half of the NESB women and men agreed with this statement. This is an interesting response in relation to data reported in table 5.12, in which less than 30 per cent of the AB/ESB women and men stated that a reason for doing training would be because they were afraid of losing their job if they did not participate. Presumably, they (particularly the males) feel their jobs at Ford are less insecure than for many others in the wider community. More than 40 per cent of NESB women agreed from a personal (see table 5.12) as well as a broader perspective (table 5.17) that the fear of losing jobs was a reason for doing work-related training.

Two-thirds of the AB/ESB women disagreed with the proposition that people feel they are more likely to be respected in their family and community if they can learn good work skills. Just slightly less than 66 per cent of AB/ESB males and NESB females agreed with this statement, as did a much larger percentage (84 per cent) of the NESB men. Even fewer AB/ESB women agreed that parents feel that it is important to get better skills at work so they can be of more help to their children. This contrasts with the much higher percentages of the other three groups who agreed with this statement. The responses of the AB/ESB women may be because so many more of them in our sample were childless and unmarried, and had less personal experience in this area on which to draw.

While over two-thirds of the AB/ESB and NESB women considered that training can generally give opportunities for men to move into positions as leaders at work, both groups felt much less confident that the same would apply to women. In this context, a 47-year-old Germany-born woman expressed her bitterness:

'You can't do that job—you're a woman, that's hard for you!' This kind of thing gets said all the time. I did complain once, but no-one is listening, no-one cares.

Feelings of discouragement about better job opportunities do not seem conducive to fostering the desire to participate in training sessions, especially if those sessions require a real effort to attend.

In order to probe further the views of the interviewees about the reasons why in general in the manufacturing industry women do less training than men, some provocative statements were posed and respondents' reactions sought. Their responses are detailed in table 5.18. This is an intriguing set of results. Responses to the first statement, which proposes that men should be the major income earners in the family and so should do more training than women, are quite surprising. Somewhat unexpectedly, the group with the highest percentage of disagreement (70 per cent) are the AB/ESB males. Over half of the NESB women also disagreed with this statement. Nearly two-thirds of the NESB men agreed with it, as did a rather surprising 53 per cent of the AB/ESB women. As around two-thirds of the AB/ESB women at the time of interview were aged between 21 and 30 years, were unmarried, and were the major income earners for their...
household, it may be that these 53 per cent have aspirations for a husband/partner who will adequately support them in a manner stereotypically portrayed by popular culture. The reality for many women is clearly very different, and it could be rather unfortunate for this group of women if they did indeed harbour these romantic but unrealistic expectations, especially in light of the responses of the AB/ESB males.

The next statement proposes that another reason for the lower participation rate of women in training is that their husbands/boyfriends do not think that it is important for women to get more skills. While 60 per cent of the AB/ESB women and 40 per cent of the NESB women agreed with this statement, less than 30 per cent of the AB/ESB and NESB males thought that this was a valid reason. Many women commented that in their view, this opinion was held by many men in their own workplace, so are these men in the sample presenting a more modern face than is actually perceived by their female co-workers? Are this group of men less traditional than the husbands/partners of the women interviewees? The responses of the men in the sample are puzzling in this regard, and may perhaps result from some male interviewees giving responses that they considered the (female) interviewers wanted to hear.

In response to the next proposed reason for women’s lesser participation in training—that men can better understand the training provided—a very low 6 per cent of the AB/ESB males agreed with the statement. This contrasts with the views of the NESB males, 32 per cent of whom agreed that men can understand the type of training done at work better than women can, and hence women were less likely to do training. More than three-quarters of the AB/ESB and NESB women disagreed with this proposition.

There was a marked difference between the AB/ESB and NESB women to the next statement (that women would be more likely to do training at work if there
were women-only classes), with 40 per cent of the NESB women, but only 13 per cent of the AB/ESB women, agreeing. Perhaps more surprising are the responses of the two male groups. Over half of the AB/ESB males, and 40 per cent of the NESB males agreed with this proposition. Does this indicate a sensitivity, by these AB/ESB males in particular, to women’s learning needs (even if the majority of the women interviewees did not share this view), or does this disparity suggest that some of the men would prefer women to undertake training separately from men?

There is no doubt about the responses to the next statement, that women would do more training at work if they thought it would give them a real chance to move into a job with more responsibility. Two-thirds of the AB/ESB women, and over 80 per cent of the other three groups agreed with this proposal. Interestingly, more of the NESB women agreed than any of the other groups. When this is considered along with the fact that the percentage of NESB women indicating that they would do training in order to become a supervisor (see table 5.12) was also higher than for the other groups, it suggests that for some NESB women at least, the prospect of additional responsibility is attractive.

Summary
To conclude this training and skills section, a picture has emerged of a workplace in which, despite high levels of training, the needs of a diverse group of workers are not being met in a manner which would facilitate ease of access to work-related training for all groups of workers. We were fortunate in gaining Ford’s agreement to participate in this study, as they have often been cited as one of the leading companies in regard to work-based training. They clearly have invested considerable resources—both Government-sponsored and their own—into enterprise training materials and processes. The question that must be asked therefore is to what degree these resources have met the training needs of the workers at Ford.

According to the AMEUVD, this need has not been met, across a number of areas. One area of concern to the union is what they see as a move away from industry-specific training content to a more enterprise-based approach. This issue was discussed earlier in the chapter, and the point was made there that it is much more difficult to evaluate the relevance and portability of the training if it is developed at the enterprise rather than at the industry level.

Another area of concern to the union, and one which is central to this research, is the issue of access to training. We have suggested that a major barrier to participation in training for NESB women at Ford is the timing of the knowledge units of the VIC—currently out of normal shift hours. Throughout the manufacturing industry, companies argue that it costs too much in time and money to conduct these classes during work hours. However, as the union points out, other companies in the vehicle industry such as Toyota manage to accommodate training within regular working hours, as do many of the component suppliers. A union representative rejected the notion that it is easier
Manufacturing uncertainty

to do this in organisations where production is not dictated by a moving line. He argued that many warehouses, for example, are run on lean production lines, often involving conveyer belts which are also constantly moving. In the view of this union official, the provision of training within work hours has more to do with good management than anything else. The answer to the question of women’s participation in training appears quite simple to this official:

One of the problems at Ford ... is that the company use the moving line as a basis for not wanting to provide for all sorts of arrangements. Like they use production as a basis for not providing paid training, which is really the bottom line ultimate solution for women’s participation ... If you provided women with training as part of their normal shift, then women would more readily pick up the training. That is ultimately what it is all about.

The data indicate that there is a group of NESB women at Ford who view work-related training positively, but who face structural, organisational, and language barriers to participation in this training. These barriers include:

- the difficulty of attending training sessions out of work hours for a combination of reasons, such as child-care, wider family responsibilities, or the need to work overtime;
- the perception that the training takes too long to finish;
- a feeling that their English language and literacy capacities are insufficient to understand the training, especially the more structured knowledge units;
- a training program that appears to many workers to lack clear relationships with their everyday work, and is thus often boring and seemingly irrelevant; and
- a lack of relevant information provided in appropriate forms and languages, resulting in a group of people who are sometimes confused and thus unable to make informed decisions about their working life—including their training.

The low levels of participation of NESB women in training at Ford need to be considered alongside the high percentages of stated interest both in the value of training, and in undertaking training to learn new skills and about changes in technology. Many of the NESB women believe this training could assist in the pursuit of better paid and more skilled jobs, which could also help them to be of more benefit to their children. Added to this should be the potential benefit to the company of the existing language abilities of many of the NESB workers, including the women. These are assets which do not appear to have been used.

Difficulty with English language is most certainly a strong reason for the fact that NESB women participate in work-related training to a lesser degree than NESB men or AB/ESB women and men. But for this sample at Ford at least, it is only one reason among a range of others that will need to be addressed if the participation rate of NESB women, and indeed of many AB/ESB women, is to increase to their proportionate rate.
The vehicle industry

The union

In their case study of industrial struggle at Ford, Lever-Tracy and Quinlan (1988) describe in detail the feelings of the workers about their union (then the Victorian branch of the Vehicle Builders' Employees Federation), and of the often poor regard in which the union was held by its members. Since that time, the union (now the AMEUVD) has improved membership support, and, as Bertone and Griffin (1992) report, it has increased its efforts to address the needs of its diverse membership. Indeed, the union was the driving force behind the pilot study discussed earlier in this chapter. This study, which emanated from the enterprise bargaining negotiations, sought to throw some light on the issues affecting employee access to the VIC. While union officials have been active in a range of areas, especially in relation to the development of and support for VIC and language and literacy training, perceptions about their effectiveness as a union were not always favourable. According to a 41-year-old AB woman: 'The union belongs more to the company than to the workers... They would prefer to save their shoes than yours.' A 22-year-old China-born woman said: 'The unions stand back when you need help and don’t help you. They can’t answer the questions.'

Part of the problem appeared to be that many members felt that they were not informed of important proposals and changes, despite the fact that the union produces information sheets for its members. A union official described the difficulty faced by the shop stewards in a company the size of Ford:

... I reckon the size has got a lot to do with it ... At Ford, you have got fifty-nine [AMEUVD] shop stewards, and management do not consult with fifty-nine shop stewards. Management will consult with one or two stewards, and those one or two stewards are generally tied up to such a degree that consultation is a real struggle for them to get to those other shop stewards. Particularly if it is something the company wants, because they will do it rapidly.

If most of the shop stewards have difficulty in obtaining information, then certainly so will the majority of the members. This is a constant problem in the often relentless cut and thrust of industrial relations. However, if the union wants to ensure that its members—particularly those from a NESB who are often least informed—are in a position to understand a changing work environment, they will need to provide material in a range of formats that meet the needs of a diverse range of workers.

In our sample, most workers seemed to have gleaned their information about changes at the workplace not from material supplied by the union, but rather from resources provided by the company. Perhaps the union's communication strategy may need reviewing in order to gauge more specifically the type of format in which information is most accessible. Audiotapes have been used in the past, and at an anecdotal level of information from the workers, this was quite successful. Only if greater attention is paid to this issue, it seems, will there be any impact made on the quite confronting data presented earlier in this chapter, predominantly concerning NESB workers. The data indicate that these people had
either received or understood very little information about major changes in their workplace. This, of course, is the responsibility of both management and the union, and indeed Ford has made more effort than many other companies by providing information on audiocassettes with material about award restructuring translated into the relevant languages. Despite these initiatives, among our sample at least, there are still many employees who feel they do not know what is happening at their workplace. This was particularly the case for the NESB women, more so than the other groups.

The future at Ford

The concept and practice of work is undergoing fundamental and far-reaching change, and Ford is no exception to this process. These changes will alter the nature of the product, and the way in which it is produced. Inevitably therefore, workers will be affected, as will the requirements expected of them in order to achieve and maintain the ‘international competitiveness’ for which the industry is striving. So who will be working at Ford in five years time? According to a management representative, the workers will be:

White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, and much better educated . . . There clearly won’t be first generation migrants. The people that are coming in now, that we’re recruiting now, are all people who’ve got much higher education standards than they’ve had previously . . . [and] they’re literate and numerate.

So what will happen to the people currently employed, those from a NESB who do not have the skills outlined above? Where will they be? A union shop steward stated hopefully: ‘They’ll still be here . . .’ But the answer from the management representative was baldly put: ‘In trouble!’ In the context of this gloomy scenario, the response of the shop steward appeared overly hopeful: ‘There are policies on discrimination, affirmative action and equal opportunity. I don’t believe that anyone will be discriminated against.’

In the post-modern future portrayed by these Ford managers, and in light of recent changes in Victoria affecting equitable access to equal opportunity processes, these policies may not exist. Another management representative was more expansive on the process:

As the demand of the workplace changes, the demand of the industry changes. For us to be internationally competitive and viable, there is going to be almost a natural selection process. A lot of people are going to make decisions themselves: ‘Hey, this is not the workplace that I used to work at. I don’t like it any more, so I make a conscious decision to get out.’

And what is the future for women? Will they be part of this new construction of ‘acceptable’ worker? According to management, there would still be women working at Ford: ‘More than now, but I still think they will be underrepresented’.

Other union officials did not seem overly concerned by this vision of the future. According to one official, the work force at Ford in five years time would not look
The vehicle industry

very different to its current profile: ‘Not much different, I don’t think’. On the issue of Ford employing only those who are literate, young, and English-speakers, this union official argued: ‘I don’t think they’re in a position to do it. I don’t think they can keep young people, and the aspirations of young people, working there’. This would be a compelling process to monitor over the next few years. Already, Ford’s recruitment practices are reflecting the profile of the ‘new worker’ as outlined by Ford management. During the course of this study, Ford recruited about fifty workers, and were about to employ a further fifty, all of whom according to a management representative were, or would be: ‘Essentially about a Year 11 standard of language and literacy, aged between 18 and 24 at the Geelong [plant], and under 30 here [Broadmeadows]’.

The implications of this are serious for NESB workers who do not have high language and literacy competency. This is particularly the case for NESB women, who have the lowest levels of participation in training, and for whom this drive towards a trained work force has been especially problematic. The structural barriers described earlier operate to exclude this group more than any other group of workers. According to a union official, the key issue in terms of salary and career opportunities—and presumably future employment at Ford—is the VIC. If women, and in particular NESB women, are locked out of this process because the structure and timing of the training course does not accommodate their needs, it appears that they are indeed ‘in trouble’. The words of a 22-year-old Filipino woman appear to be prophetic: ‘I heard that in the last round of employing people, they were saying that if you don’t speak English, then you don’t get the job’. If this future scenario at Ford is any indication, it appears that for many NESB job aspirants, particularly NESB women, changing times could involve a radical redefinition of the notion of work, and indeed, a growing familiarity with unemployment.
Chapter 6: The metals and engineering industry

In this chapter, the research findings will be presented of the case study carried out at Preslite Australia, a division of James N. Kirby Pty Ltd. However, before the data from Preslite are explored in detail, the broader context of the metals and engineering industry will briefly be detailed.

The industry

As with other areas of Australian manufacturing, the metals and engineering industry has been affected by Federal Government policy on tariff reduction. Combined with the implementation of industry restructuring designed to increase international competitiveness, employment levels in the industry have decreased and skill levels depleted along with them. The effect of this, according to the 1993–95 Industry Training Plan (ITP) of the Engineering Skills Training Board (ESTB), is that although there will be a skill shortage, ‘new work methods, changes in technology and new workplace agreements will enable capacity to increase without the same level of employment growth occurring’ (ESTB 1992, p. 6).

What will be necessary in order to achieve the desired competitive edge are increased levels of training and skill enhancement, combined with accreditation that is internationally recognised. In addition to training for all workers in the industry, there will be a need for process and production workers to access new workplace training programs and methods designed specifically for them. The difficulty of providing this type of training has been expressed by many organisations who are facing economic difficulties in the recession-affected 1990s.

The ITP identifies two groups of people for whom training will be increasingly important. The first consists of those who may enter the industry in the future, including school-leavers. The second group, and of more direct relevance to this study, are those currently employed within the industry. Training needs include skill upgrading, retraining, skill recognition, and training for those who wish to take advantage of the classifications within the restructured Federal Metal Industry Award. The National Metals and Engineering Curriculum provides a framework for training which is formally recognised throughout the industry, and that has the capacity to facilitate career progression through the metals and engineering industry (ESTB 1992, p. x).

Since 1991, 20 per cent of jobs in the industry have been shed and further reductions are likely. Despite this job loss, however, demand is expected to increase for types of training that will be distinct from that provided previously. Apprenticeship training will continue but is not expected to expand, whereas other forms of training are expected to increase. These include training for what the ITP describes as the ‘middle career level’ of the industry’s job profile, involving the accreditation of skills not formally recognised in the past, as well as ‘formal skills training for production and non-trades employees—a group with limited access to accredited training prior to the implementation of the EPC [Engineering
The metals and engineering industry

Production Certificate] (ESTB 1992, p. xi). It is training for this category of workers with which the current research is concerned.

The ITP makes the point that an understanding of the training reform agenda is not widespread among employers, employees, trainers and teachers in the industry. This is of particular concern in relation to access to training. As with the vehicle industry, those groups of workers who traditionally have not had access or have not used the training system include ‘women, mature workers with poor language and literacy skills, and shift workers’ (ESTB 1992, p. xii). If these groups of workers are to be able to participate in training to a greater extent than in the past, awareness of the training agenda will need to be much more widespread. The ITP identifies the access of women to formal training as a priority area for future research.

According to the ITP, around 90 per cent of Victoria’s metals and engineering companies are located in metropolitan Melbourne and employ over 90 per cent of the industry’s work force of 128 000 (ESTB 1992, p. 13). Almost half of these workers are employed in the category of unskilled labour, and the industry is endeavouring, via training programs such as the EPC, to enhance the skill levels of its workers.

Of the ten industry sectors within the metals and engineering industry identified by the ESTB, our case study was carried out in the electrical/electronic sector, which is characterised generally by a mix of large establishments (employing over 500 people) and those of small to medium size, engaged in the production of specialised machinery and equipment. Companies in this sector have a high proportion of female process workers, generally around 50 per cent—considerably higher than in the rest of the industry where women comprise only a small section of the workforce. As will be outlined later in this chapter, the company in our case study—Preslite Australia—has a higher percentage of women in its production area (around 69 per cent) than the average for the sector. Only a very small percentage of women generally in the industry are classified as professionals (around 6 per cent), and an even smaller number as tradespeople (around 1 per cent) (ESTB 1992, p. 28).

Of particular interest to this study, the ITP cites the following future trends in the metals and engineering industry:

- overall employment in the ... industry is expected to fall slightly, thus reducing its percentage share of the overall Victorian labour force from 18.5 per cent in 1991 to 16.1 per cent in 2001 ... The industry sector most affected by this will be the light fabrication/repetitive manufacturing sector. The heavy engineering and electrical/electronic sectors on the other hand are anticipated to show relatively strong growth from an extremely low base. (ESTB 1992)

However, in relation to employees,

- production and process employees are projected to have virtually zero or negative growth for the balance of this decade; potential entrants to these occupations will significantly exceed demand for the remainder of the decade. (ESTB 1992, p. 30)
Manufacturing uncertainty

When this is considered in relation to the predictions outlined in chapter 5 on the vehicle industry, the forecasts appear to be very similar. They paint a gloomy picture for those people wishing to gain employment in the low-skill end of the job market. This has important consequences for people who are currently unemployed, and who will thus not be able to avail themselves of the training or retraining opportunities in which at least some of those people who still have jobs will be able to participate.

A number of issues are considered central to the training debate. These include the support of the metal and engineering industry for a nationally agreed set of competencies to be introduced into compulsory schooling prior to entry into the labour market. The major areas of concern for the industry are listed in the ITP as mathematics, language and communication, and scientific and technological understanding (ESTB 1992, p. 35). Training in these competency areas has also been identified by the companies participating in our study as necessary for existing production and assembly staff, combined with the more experience-based areas of training which industry members cite as more appropriately left to industry to develop. These include skills such as working in teams, planning, organising and problem-solving (ESTB 1992). Other areas of importance to discussions in the training area include the difficult issue of integration of on-the-job and off-the-job training, as well as a method of competency-based training that can address the recognition of prior learning and work experience. All these matters are critical to the determination of a training agenda that reflects both the needs of industry and the employment aspirations of workers, as well as to the development of curricula that are both relevant and contemporary in focus.

A further issue of importance is that of language and literacy within the industry. As the ITP notes, this issue has generally been addressed by companies in one of a number of ways, including either the usage of existing programs; the delivery of in-house programs specially designed for that enterprise; or the integration of language and literacy programs into work-related training programs (ESTB 1992, p. 58). As discussed in the previous chapter, the view of language and literacy experts consulted for this project was that the latter model is by far the most effective and desirable in terms of learning process and outcomes. Greater debate and discussion within industry on this issue appears necessary to determine the optimum teaching and learning method needed to facilitate the aims of both industry and workers. This is particularly important in the manufacturing industry where large numbers of employees are from a NESB (see Foster, Marshall & Williams 1991, p. 52).

Engineering Production Certificate
The EPC was developed in 1990 following award restructuring in order to provide training for production and process workers in the metals and engineering industry. It is a three-level nationally accredited program, designed to allow for a wide range of delivery options and differing enterprise needs. Each level requires
the completion of eight modules, involving the participant at each level in 320 hours of training. Articulation is possible into other engineering courses, and trade or technical level training is possible when the three levels of the EPC have been undertaken.

According to a preliminary study carried out by the ESTB during 1993, there were at that time 62 companies with some link to a TAFE college participating in the EPC program, as well as a range of companies involved with private providers. These companies tended to range in size from 100 to over 1000 employees. Although smaller enterprises did participate in the EPC, training was generally regarded as problematic for these organisations for a number of reasons:

- the difficulty of carrying training costs in a small company;
- releasing people from their jobs for training where there were few workers to cover for those participating in a training session;
- small businesses were less likely to have a long-term training or strategic plan than larger companies, and training may not have been considered a necessary option; and
- smaller businesses tended to be less influenced by the change process involved in award restructuring and industry reform, in which training was seen to be critical to future growth and competitiveness (ESTB 1994).

The ESTB estimate that 'at least one quarter of all module places delivered to Metal and Engineering establishments in 1993 were taken up by females' (ESTB 1994, p. 16). While the report points out that this proportion is greater than the average proportion of female production/process workers in the industry, it also suggests that this would be explained by the fact that it is the larger companies who have the greatest participation rate in EPC training, and it is in these organisations that higher proportions of women workers are employed. The fact remains that there is a low participation rate of women in training in the industry, and there are few women who move beyond the lower skilled positions into middle level occupations (ESTB 1994).

This overview of the issues identified by the ESTB as being of concern to the industry sets the context for the examination of the research findings from the case study carried out at Preslite Australia. For the purposes of this study, the researcher was unable to obtain the perspective of the relevant union (the AMEU) representing members at Preslite. Although the union official assisted in identifying and liaising with companies that had a potential interest in participating in the study, there was no response to numerous requests by the researcher to conduct an interview. This omission is regretted, as union views and opinions, like those of management, add a critical dimension to the issues germane to this study. However, Preslite shop stewards from this union were interviewed in the course of the research process, providing views specific to the workplace. It is unfortunate that the broader union perspective could not be covered.
Manufacturing uncertainty

Primary data presented in this case study come from a variety of sources. Material is quoted from separate semi-structured interviews held with a representative of Preslite management, and with members of the Preslite Education and Training Committee. The remainder of the primary data was collected from the production and assembly workers at Preslite who comprised the sample for this industry sector.

Preslite Australia Pty Ltd

Preslite Australia (referred to for brevity in the following text as ‘Preslite’) is located in Reservoir, an outer northern suburb of Melbourne. Preslite manufactures components for the automobile industry, such as cigarette lighters, and 12 volt electric motors used in the operation of windscreen wipers and electric windows in cars.

The company has had to reduce its work force since around 1990 from over 300 to around 150 employees at the time of interview in 1993. Of these, 97 people worked in the production area, and here women outnumbered men by more than two to one. Preslite did not have personnel data detailing specific country of birth by gender, although data collected prior to our study in a language and literacy audit carried out for the company by Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE was very helpful in this regard. Even this, however, proved to be somewhat inaccurate when compared with the information collected at the interviews. Every production employee available in the period of the study was interviewed. Of an estimated 97 workers, 89 (92 per cent) were interviewed. The remainder (eight people) were either on holiday or sick leave at the time.

Eighteen different countries of birth were represented in the production work force at the time of the study. The numerically dominant groups were from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Australia, and Greece, with much smaller representation from Italy and China. The company reports a fairly harmonious working history, with no incidences of industrial disputation. While there have been few difficulties among the workers, some tensions have arisen periodically between people whose countries of birth have traditionally experienced less than harmonious relations. The view of management at the time of interview was that this was currently not much of a problem.

Employees at Preslite were discernibly more reluctant than the Ford interviewees to offer comments on their working conditions, their employer, and their union. This resulted in the acquisition of less detailed descriptions and views about training, employment and working conditions than were obtained from the Ford interviewees. The bilingual interviewers and the researcher felt that there were two main reasons for this reluctance to proffer opinions. The first appeared to be a general anxiety felt by the employees about the company’s financial difficulties and the uncertain future of their jobs, which seemed to lead many people to take a cautious approach to speaking out. The second was more complex, as it appeared
to the interviewers that there was a lack of introspection among many of the employees at Preslite about their working lives and conditions. The attitude prevalent among many interviewees was that 'work was work', and one should not expect too much from it. Many of the NESB men in particular evidenced little interest in thinking about the broader context of their lives at Preslite, and saw their time there as something that had to be 'got through' with minimal fuss. This was in sharp contrast to the interviewees at Ford, many of whom were keen to offer opinions and indeed welcomed the opportunity to 'have a say'. It would be interesting to explore further the particular workplace cultures and social demography that may contribute to such apparent distinctions in attitude between employees at different workplaces.

Training at Preslite

Preslite is implementing training programs in English language and literacy and the EPC. The impetus to initiate a training program came from the effects of economic downturn. A management representative explained:

Initially it started to satisfy an economic circumstance. We had been in a situation where we had gone through three rounds of retrenchments, and we had been working four-day weeks pretty close to two years. I initially looked at the TASK program [Training and Skill—a DEET funded program] about eighteen months ago . . . But we felt that business was going to improve, and then in February [1992] it became apparent that business was not going to get any better . . . So at that stage we felt . . . because the people had been working four-day weeks for so long, and we had gone through three rounds of retrenchments, there was a better way to do it. So I went back and looked at the TASK program.

Gaining Federal Government TASK funding enabled two positive outcomes for both the company and the workers. First, as employees were paid for time spent training it offered an increased income for participating employees who had been on a reduced working week. Second, it provided funding for skills training for as many of the work force as were interested in taking up the opportunity. Preslite had commissioned a skills assessment a year previously, and were aware that they had a very high literacy problem in the work force. They also needed to improve their existing production systems, and reduce wastage in their operations. The TASK program enabled them to satisfy a number of existing needs in the training area, and the program commenced in September 1992. Up to July 1993, participating workers had undertaken up to 189 hours of training—over half the number required to complete the first of the three levels of the EPC.

Different areas of training were offered according to need. Some workers were assessed as having pre-vocational needs, while others were able to commence the EPC training. Those needing literacy and numeracy programs varied in the amount of support training necessary; some required 40 hours, others 60 hours, and others 100 hours. Having completed these hours, individuals would progress to the EPC program. According to a management representative, it was in this
transfer category that the highest withdrawal rate occurred. The highest attendance rate was in the English in the Workplace Program, where there was a 97 per cent average attendance rate. The management representative reported:

we have gone from 65 per cent of the work force requiring English as a second language, or literacy or numeracy support to a level where it is only around 10–12 per cent. So I think that is a big improvement for the company. We can see that in their participation out in the shop floor now.

This indicates considerable progress in the development of English language and skills within the work force, the majority of whom are immigrant women from a NESB.

In relation to the EPC training, the same spokesperson described the initial process, and the reaction of workers to the program:

The program ran for nine months. In the EPC program we had poor attendance in some cases, because they felt the program was not relevant to their requirements. So we had a real big education program there to sell them. The first four modules are the core modules and you have to do them before you can move on to any other modules. They had no concept of what training was, outside of secondary school. This was a modular-based training program, you built on skill to skill, so we had to make them aware of that, and that is why they had to do those first four modules to start with. Once you got over that hurdle, there was no great problem with that particular group.

Preslite has applied for and been granted continued TASK funding for a further year. The question that both workers and management will have to face if and when this funding ceases concerns the future of training within the company. If EPC and support training is to continue, will it be done in or outside work hours? Will workers be paid for the training? Is this within the company’s economic capacity? TASK funding has clearly provided a valuable training opportunity in a difficult economic climate, enabling all production workers to receive training in normal shift hours while receiving pay for it. The tensions surrounding the provision of training outside work hours encountered in the case study at Ford obviously do not apply here yet, and thus a major impediment to attending training is removed. However, it is an issue that may need to be addressed in the future at Preslite, and will doubtless incur the kind of problems identified at Ford. As women from a NESB comprise over half of the work force at Preslite, this could have serious implications for their participation in training.

**Preslite Education and Training Committee**

Preslite has an Education and Training Committee comprising two management and six employee representatives. One of the management representatives expressed the view that this imbalance between management and the shop floor was not an issue:

I have got no fears about having an imbalanced training committee. In a lot of companies you will find it’s equal representation. I’ve got no fears about that. We
The metals and engineering industry

have got fairly good relationships with our employees, we’ve never had a strike in twelve years. So it’s not a case of us against them, and it never has been.

Both management representatives are male, while there are three male and three female employee representatives, making a committee of five men and three women. As women production workers are 69 per cent of the production work force, they are underrepresented on the committee relative to their proportion within the work force. Of the five employee representatives on the committee, three were shop stewards, and one of the remaining two members had a specific mandate to represent the ‘lesser English-speaking’ group of workers. Elections had not been held, but rather a system of people volunteering to join the shop stewards on the committee. Each member is supposed to report back to their particular group about any changes or progress made by the committee.

Views about the usefulness of training varied among the committee members from the shop floor. According to an AB female shop steward:

I found the training in my particular area ... I’d be able to use it outside work as well as inside work. Now a lot of the stuff that you have learned, you can’t use it immediately. You can see perhaps when things change a little, you are going to use more of it as it goes along. But a lot of what we have learned so far has not been immediately useful, although things like communications ... that is always useful. A lot of it you can see uses in the future for it as the firm progresses into all sorts of different things.

Other committee members agreed with this view. An AB male shop steward felt that:

At the moment, where I work, I don’t think it’s really useful ... I’d say it has helped the non-English-speaking workers ... At the moment, it hasn’t been applied ... I can see a future, but at the present it’s not there.

The view (and hope) of management was that this perception of the training would alter once they moved to more enterprise-specific modules in the next section of the training program. Prerequisite core skill modules such as communications and industrial relations, and occupational health and safety had to be completed before the more obviously task-related modules could be taken. One effect of training, at least for the committee members, was apparent to a management representative who described the change in the dynamics of the committee process:

The interesting thing was, the [union] organiser came out the other day, and ... they gave her a hard time. So, I think that it is quite significant for them to do that. Before, they would have been led like sheep, but now that they are thinking that they can contribute a lot better than they have in the past, say a year back. I put it down to the English courses they have done, and the training the other people have done.

Committee members appeared uncertain of the extent to which workers understood that the EPC would on completion provide a credential that was transportable and transferable. A male shop steward from a NESB said:
Manufacturing uncertainty

We had a meeting... We told them that if anyone wants to get another job, or things like that, the best—the only way in the future—is to have good certificates, or how are you going to get a look in?

Another female shop steward expressed her doubts on this issue, particularly as no one in the company had at that time finished even the first level of the EPC training program:

Whether they believe it or not is another thing. Some of them almost have a 'Oh yes, I understand that but I don't believe it's real' attitude, because nobody has seen the piece of paper [the certificate] or anything like that. Some of them don't believe it's real.

In relation to the future of training in the company, an AB member of the committee stated:

I would hope that we will continue and actually be able to apply what we are learning. If we can apply the things that we are learning, and if we can give the management a bit more education too—that's at the lower levels—I can see where eventually it's all going to mesh in together and we're all going to get a lot of benefit from it. Whether that happens or not, only time will tell.

Elaborating on the need for middle management, and not just shop-floor workers, to be able to respond to the changes in the workplace, this woman continued:

We came back [from the training] with a lot of really beaut ideas, and some of [the managers] shunned them because ... well, you're talking about guys that have been doing the same thing for maybe twenty years, and they've got their set little ideas. Well, of course if we change them, change directions, then it's a bit of a shock to their systems.

This is a valid point in the rush to restructure and retrain. Workers are often targeted as the group resistant to change, but as this woman points out, management and supervisors may feel very threatened by the pace of change, and not be able to respond to creative suggestions from the shop floor. Training for management should also be provided. At Preslite this had occurred, with all managers having undertaken a training program on leadership skills. But as one management representative said:

Some people find it very difficult. Some people never come to grips with it ... When you are asking someone to change the way he [sic] has managed a group of people for the last ten or twenty years ... we're talking about virtually doing a U-turn midstream.

The committee did not have an evaluation strategy in place, and had not considered how such a process might work. Their views about the success or otherwise of the training program relied on anecdotal information:

informal discussions with other people ... and getting the feel of how it has been going ... About the only thing we've quantified so far really is the English language in that people have a better comprehension of what is going on.
If this is any indication of the level of evaluation of training programs being carried out in industry, there must be cause for concern. Evaluation is most effective when it is incorporated into the training process at the very outset, rather than tacked on at the end. The industry training boards and the TAFE college providers could have a more prescriptive role here in helping to ensure that evaluation is taken seriously and considered at the beginning of the training program. How will the effectiveness of industry training be evaluated otherwise?

Preslite and the AMEU finalised the company’s first enterprise agreement in late 1993. Training is referred to in an appendix to the main document, in the context of productivity issues, and again in an attachment in relation to the change within the company to ‘high performance work teams’. There is no separate clause on the development of training, nor of any prescriptive details of company provision of, or employee involvement in, either EPC or language and literacy training. Thus training is not singled out as an important issue, but rather perceived as an adjunct to other developments within the term of the agreement (it remains in force until 30 June 1995). This is rather surprising given the time and energy Preslite has put into the pursuit of funding for training, and the development of its program.

**Work teams**

The enterprise agreement refers to ‘work teams’ and this reflects the future focus which the company was beginning to adopt. A management representative explained this further:

> We’ve been in actual cell groups since 1984 in our work force, where there are small work groups of four or five people. So we were one of the early companies that went to that sort of thing. But we never took it to the next level where they actually had certain obligations in the performance of their work. Most of their work and the requirements were directed for them. So the training they have done now is giving us the opportunity to progress to the next level, and that’s why we are looking at high performance work teams... The employees will have far greater control over the actual day-to-day activities, they will decide what they will produce, although that’s within confines... they still have to satisfy a schedule. There is training space on experiential learning concepts where they will be given a particular concept in the training module, they will have to go out and practise that and bring back their results to the training session next week.

The amount of training for this move to team-based work had been scheduled at 60 hours, in four-hourly sessions. Given this level of commitment to the issue, it would seem an opportunity to evaluate carefully the impact of both the training and the changing work practice on the production staff. It would be interesting to determine whether women and men responded similarly or differently, whether women achieved leadership roles in greater numbers than in the past, and if so, in what way the training and/or the different style of working contributed to this.

While members of the Preslite Education and Training Committee felt fairly sanguine about the idea of work teams, there was no mention of proper evaluation
strategies being built into the change process. This seems a wasted opportunity, both for the company and for the workers.

In concluding this section, Preslite appeared to have responded to the problem of economic difficulties and lack of employee training in a creative manner. The longer term issues will be how to continue with the training when government funding is no longer available, and who will participate if the company decides to go down the road of training outside work hours. In the meantime, training is available to all production employees within normal shift hours, and in a variety of forms to accommodate the differing language and literacy levels of the workforce. While the shop-floor members of the Education and Training Committee seemed doubtful of the relevance of the EPC training undertaken to date, both management and the workers on the committee appeared hopeful that modules about to be undertaken would be more clearly related to tasks undertaken at Preslite.

The study sample

Demographic and social characteristics

Country of birth

Eighteen countries of birth were represented in this proportionately large sample (92 per cent) of workers interviewed at Preslite. Table 6.1 details the self-identified countries of birth of the 89 Preslite interviewees, and shows that the numerically dominant countries of birth in the Preslite sample were the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Australia, and Greece. Italy and China had slightly higher representation than the other countries of birth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of birth</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Country of birth</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia–Herzegovina</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook Islands</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender

The background and gender composition of the interviewees at Preslite is detailed in table 6.2. As every available production worker was interviewed, the distribution of female and male, and NESB and AB/ESB, was obviously
determined by the composition of the work force, and as table 6.2 demonstrates in this profile of 92 per cent of the work force at Preslite, women comprise 69 per cent of the total, and men less than a third. There are five times more NESB women than AB/ESB women, and three times as many NESB women as NESB men. The percentage of AB/ESB women and AB/ESB men are similar (11 per cent and 12 per cent respectively), while the percentage of NESB men (19 per cent) is higher than that of AB/ESB men (12 per cent). There are over three times as many NESB workers in total as AB/ESB workers. The numerical dominance of women is higher than the average of 50 per cent in the electrical/electronic sector of the metals and engineering industry.

**Period of residence in Australia**

The number of years lived in Australia by those interviewees born overseas ranged from 3 to 42 years. Table 6.3 details the years of residence in Australia by gender, of NESB and ESB interviewees at Preslite. None of the overseas-born participants in the study had lived in Australia for less than three years. The few interviewees from an ESB (two women and one man) had all lived in Australia for longer than 21 years, as had two-thirds of the NESB women and over 40 per cent of the NESB males. Over a third of the NESB men had lived in Australia for between three and five years, while only 8 per cent of the NESB women were in this category.

**Table 6.2: Production workers interviewed at Preslite, by background and gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB/ESB</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6.3: Years of residence in Australia by gender, of non-Australia-born interviewees**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of residence in Australia</th>
<th>ESB</th>
<th>NESB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>3—5 (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n = 71.
Manufacturing uncertainty

Languages spoken
At Preslite, the number of languages spoken by individuals ranged from one to four. One NESB male spoke four languages, while six NESB women and three NESB men each spoke three languages. Over 30 per cent of the AB/ESB women and men, and over 70 per cent of the NESB women and men spoke two languages. As with Ford, this is a rich resource of language acquisition on which the company could draw, but no participants reported that their language skills were being used in a formalised way.

Age
The ages of the interviewees ranged from 20 years to 63 years. The distribution of age groupings is shown in table 6.4. Half of the AB/ESB women are clustered in the 21–40 years age-groups, with the other half in the 41–60 years age-groups. The AB/ESB males are differently clustered, with 45 per cent in the 21–30 years age-groups. Almost three-quarters of the NESB females are clustered in the 31–50 years age-groups, while nearly 60 per cent of the NESB males are within the 41–60+ years age-groups. The age profile of the NESB workers thus reveals more workers in the older age categories than in the AB/ESB groups, where more males than females cluster in the 21–30 years age-groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.4: Age grouping of interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age groupings (years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–20 (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB/ESB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marital and parental status
While only 2 per cent of the NESB women were single, 30 per cent of the NESB men, 40 per cent of the AB/ESB women, and 46 per cent of the AB/ESB men recorded single status. About 30 per cent of the AB/ESB women were married, and another 30 per cent separated or divorced; this contrasts sharply with the figures for the other three groups: only 2 per cent of the NESB women, 6 per cent of the NESB men, and 9 per cent of the AB/ESB men were separated or divorced. Over 90 per cent of the NESB women were married, as were 65 per cent of the NESB men, and 46 per cent of the AB/ESB men.

The majority of three of the groups recorded having children: nearly 90 per cent of the NESB women (of whom 73 per cent had children still at home); 65 per cent
of the NESB men (of whom 59 per cent had children still at home); 60 per cent of the AB/ESB women (all of whom had children still at home); and 46 per cent of the AB/ESB men (of whom 27 per cent had children still at home).

Summary
So a picture emerges of many of the NESB women being clustered in the older age-groups, of most being married and having children, and nearly two-thirds having children who were still living at home with them. The characteristics of the AB/ESB women were somewhat different: they were more evenly spread across the 21–60 years age-groups; they reflected a more diverse single/marital status; and while fewer AB/ESB than NESB women reported having children, all AB/ESB women in this category had children still living with them. Of the men, more of those from an AB/ESB were single and childless, and they were generally younger than the NESB men.

Education and work history

Education
Two NESB women and one NESB man reported that they had not received any formal schooling. A further 26 per cent of the NESB women had received 3–5 years of schooling, while 50 per cent had spent 6–8 years at school. Eighteen per cent of the NESB women had received 9–13 years of education, compared with 47 per cent of the NESB men, 64 per cent of the AB/ESB men, and 90 per cent of the AB/ESB women. Clearly, the AB/ESB women had overall spent much longer at school than the NESB women, the majority of whom had not proceeded past a primary level of schooling.

Qualifications gained in Australia
High percentages of all four groups reported that they had no formal qualifications gained in Australia: 60 per cent of the AB/ESB women, 64 per cent of the AB/ESB men, 82 per cent of the NESB men, and 92 per cent of the NESB women. None of the interviewees held a diploma or degree from an Australian institution. Only two AB/ESB men, one ESB woman, and one NESB man held a licence or ticket related to work; one NESB woman, and two AB/ESB women and two AB/ESB men had a work-related TAFE certificate. One person from each of the four groups held a trade certificate. The education profile at Preselite thus reflected a work force with disparate school attendance, and few formal qualifications gained in Australia.

Overseas qualifications
In relation to qualifications gained prior to arrival in Australia, the picture was not very different. None of the ESB immigrants had any previous formal qualifications, nor did 90 per cent of the NESB women and 77 per cent of the NESB men. Of those NESB immigrants with a qualification gained outside Australia, two women and two men had a trade certificate, two women and one man had a diploma, and one woman and one man had a degree. Of these nine
Manufacturing uncertainty

people, only one woman and one man had tried to have their qualifications recognised in Australia, both without success; and only one man reported that his qualification was related to the work in which he was currently engaged at Preslile. A management representative expressed the difficulty in dealing with both existing skills and unrecognised qualifications:

Some people are not aware that they can get their tradesmen rights. Also, recognition of prior learning—some of them are doing the EPC and say, 'I have done this in my trade', so it has enabled them to move along at a faster rate in the program as well.

However, to deal with RPL, those applying must produce documentation to prove their claim. The manager continued: ‘We have to make application to TAFE... Applicants have to be able to substantiate everything, and then if there is still a query, there is a challenge test as well.’

Faced with such a rigorous process merely to have prior learning recognised, many applicants must feel discouraged, especially if their English language skills are not high. A 45-year-old Indian-born man complained about the process he had to go through in order to have his qualification from India as a fitter and turner recognised in Australia:

It was not recognised until I stayed in the same job (not necessarily to do with the qualification) for four and a half years... My friend who had done the same tests in England had his certificate recognised straight away. My papers had been sent from India to England for marking, so they had been through the same process as my friend’s, but they were treated here as different. I made this clear to the Department of Labour and Industry, but I still had to wait the four and a half years!

It seems that bureaucratic procedures have been constructed in ways that are likely to deter applicants, rather than encourage them to demonstrate and receive credit for their skill levels.

Work force participation

Duration of work force participation varied among the four groups. Table 6.5 details the number of years interviewees at Preslile had participated in the work force in Australia. It indicates that 80 per cent of the AB/ESB females had worked in Australia for more than 21 years. The distribution of the AB/ESB males was more even, with just over half having worked for 3–15 years, thus reflecting the younger age characteristics of this group. Nearly three-quarters of the NESB women had worked in Australia for periods of 16–30+ years, with the single largest group (41 per cent) in the 21–30 year category. The largest group of NESB males (35 per cent) had worked in Australia for 3–5 years, and over 50 per cent for 3–15 years. While this figure resembles that of the AB/ESB males, it does not reflect the same younger age dominance, rather the relatively recent arrival in Australia of 35 per cent of the NESB male study population.
None of the interviewees had worked at Preslite for less than 3 years. While around a third of both the AB/ESB and NESB women had been employed there for 3–5 years, 46 per cent and 53 per cent respectively of the AB/ESB and NESB males had worked there for this period. A third of the NESB women, nearly a quarter of the NESB men, and 20 per cent of the AB/ESB women had been employed at Preslite for 16–30 years, compared with only 9 per cent of the AB/ESB males, over half of whom had worked there for 10 years or less.

**Task rotation**

While 80 per cent of the AB/ESB females and nearly three-quarters of the AB/ESB males had been in their current jobs for 5 years or less, and none of either group for more than 15 years, 10 per cent of the NESB women and nearly a quarter of the NESB men reported that they had been doing the same job for 16 or more years. These seem to be quite high percentages of the NESB workers in a climate where the notion of multiskilling and job rotation is considered important. However, when this is explored further in Table 6.6, the extent of rotation of actual tasks, even within the same job, becomes more apparent. There is considerable difference in the estimation of task rotation. While 60 per cent of the AB/ESB women report a lot of rotation around different tasks, only 45 per cent of the NESB women, 36 per cent of the AB/ESB men, and 29 per cent of the NESB men report the same frequency of rotation. Some workers in all four groups—including

### Table 6.5: Number of years of participation by interviewees in the Australian work force

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years worked in Australia (%)</th>
<th>3–5</th>
<th>6–10</th>
<th>11–15</th>
<th>16–20</th>
<th>21–30</th>
<th>30+</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AB/ESB</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NESB</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6.6: Extent of task rotation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent of task rotation (%)</th>
<th>A lot</th>
<th>A few</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AB/ESB</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NESB</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Manufacturing uncertainty

over a third of the NESB males—estimate that they are never rotated on to different tasks. For these workers, multiskilling would appear to be negligible. Interestingly, the percentage of NESB females in this category is the lowest of all four groups.

Role in supervision
The type of work engaged in by most shop-floor employees at Preslite is production and machine operation. Of the 89 interviewees, the job of leading hand was held by two NESB females, one NESB male, and one AB/ESB female and one AB/ESB male. In the move toward team operations, one AB/ESB male, one NESB female, and two NESB males had become team leaders. In these more responsible positions, women overall did not have the proportionate representation according to their numbers in the work force. There were no women supervisors, but there was a female union shop steward. As Preslite develops a more team-oriented approach, it would be interesting to evaluate whether this different style of working enables more women to assume leadership positions.

Income levels
As with Ford, almost none of the interviewees at Preslite could remember the actual amount of gross salary that they received, and the figures given were therefore unreliable. As a consequence, relative pay levels could not be calculated. Data on relative incomes within the household, however, were useful. There is a marked difference in the percentages of AB/ESB and NESB women for whom their own pay was the major household income (70 per cent vs 28 per cent). This seems to reflect the much higher proportion of AB/ESB women (around two-thirds) who were either single or divorced or separated at the time of interview, and for whom their own pay was perhaps the only household income. Almost all of the NESB women were currently married, and 70 per cent of them earned less than their husbands. As with the case study at Ford, this supports the view that many men, particularly from a NESB, earn more than their female partners (Preslite: AB/ESB men 64 per cent, NESB men 82 per cent), thus contributing to the uneven earning distribution found more generally between women and men.

The capacity for women to supplement their weekly wage by working overtime was evidently not possible at Preslite at the time of interview. All workers reported that there was little overtime currently available, but even this small amount was at that time undertaken only by men, and predominantly those AB or from an ESB. As there was only one shift in operation, there was no extra money to be made from shift allowances.

Transport
The issue of transport is important as an indication of the degree of independent mobility available to workers. While this is currently not significant at Preslite, as all training is held during normal shift hours, it would become an issue if training were to be considered outside work time. As over half of the NESB women
reported that they relied either on their husbands or a workmate to get to and from work, the degree of independence of the travel arrangements of these workers would seem to be limited. This would have to be considered in decisions about whether or not to participate in any out-of-hours activity at work. Of the AB/ESB women, 50 per cent reported that they drove themselves to work and 30 per cent relied on others for transport. For these women also, the issue of independent mobility may be a consideration in participating in any future work-related training out of their normal work hours. While 36 per cent of the AB/ESB males, 16 per cent of the NESB females, and 12 per cent of the NESB males used public transport, none of the AB/ESB females reported using this form of transport to work.

**Numeracy and English language**

As Preslite offered numeracy and literacy support in their training programs, the following data are interesting, especially in relation to NESB women. Despite the company informing us that it had reduced the percentage of the work force requiring literacy or numeracy support from 65 per cent to 12 per cent, the data reveal that the workers’ self-assessment about competency in these areas is less assured.

**Numeracy**

While 80 per cent of the AB/ESB women and 82 per cent of both the AB/ESB and NESB men indicated feeling either confident or very confident about using numbers and graphs and charts at work, less than a third of the NESB women responded similarly. This lack of numeracy confidence expressed by many of the NESB women is further reflected in their feelings about ‘everyday’ maths: over two-thirds of this group said they felt either not at all or not very confident about simple maths. This contrasts with 80 per cent of the AB/ESB women and 82 per cent of both the NESB and AB/ESB men who expressed feeling either confident or very confident about the same level of maths. This difference must be of concern, especially when the actual numbers of NESB women working at Preslite are so much higher than those of the other three groups. It means that nearly 40 per cent of the total work force do not feel confident about using simple maths in their work. In the move toward greater team autonomy in all areas of the production process, this may prove to be a difficulty that Preslite will need to focus on more strongly.

**Language and literacy**

Confidence levels in English language may also be of concern. Over 45 per cent of the NESB women felt that they could not read English as well as they could speak it (compared with 24 per cent of the NESB men). Seventy-three per cent of the NESB women (compared with 35 per cent of the NESB men) felt they could not write English as well as they could speak it. These seem to be figures large enough to warrant increased attention. Only one AB/ESB man and none of the AB/ESB women expressed difficulty in reading and writing English. For the English-speakers at least, literacy was not recorded as a problem at Preslite.
Manufacturing uncertainty

The data concerning English language presented in the remainder of this language and literacy section include only the responses of those interviewees who were born outside Australia, and for whom English was not the main language learnt as a child. The data therefore represent the views and experiences of 61 NESB workers for whom English was at best their second language, ranging through to negligible English language proficiency at the time of interview.

Of this group of NESB workers, 83 per cent of the men and 94 per cent of the women said that they spoke no English at all on arrival in Australia. Table 6.7 details the self-assessed level of English proficiency at the time of interview. While 37 per cent of the NESB women and 25 per cent of the NESB men described their English language proficiency as 'good' or 'very good', 39 per cent of the NESB women felt that they spoke 'poor' English. Over half of the NESB men described their English as 'fair'. While it should be remembered that these are self-assessments, and therefore the criteria on which the judgment is made may differ from person to person and according to levels of self-esteem, the percentage of NESB women who consider their English to be 'poor' is high enough to be of concern to a company that has provided a considerable amount of language training to its employees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.7: Self-assessed level of English competency of a selection of NESB workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of current spoken English (%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n = 61.

In relation to this English language training, 80 per cent of the NESB women and 83 per cent of the NESB men had undertaken English classes. Of these, all the women had done their training at work in paid time, as had 80 per cent of the men. Forty-six per cent of these women and 40 per cent of these men had at some time undertaken separate English-only classes, while 64 per cent of the women and 50 per cent of the men had done classes in which English language training was included with other work-related training (such as the EPC).

Over 80 per cent of the NESB women and three-quarters of the NESB men considered that it was important or very important to be able to speak English in their work area, reflecting perhaps the high level of participation in English classes. Table 6.8 outlines these NESB workers' multiple responses to a range of possible outcomes if they spoke better English. The majority of both groups of workers,
particularly the men, felt that if their English improved, so too would their job chances, their enjoyment of work, and their participation in training. Only a third of the men, and 29 per cent of the women thought they would be more involved with their union if they spoke better English.

Child-care
A total of eleven people (three AB/ESB women, three AB/ESB men, three NESB women, and two NESB men) identified the care of young children (as distinct from broader family and household responsibilities) as an issue relevant to their lives. Because the numbers in each group are small, percentages are not very meaningful and are not included in the discussion. The possibility of training outside work hours was seen by the NESB workers to be more of a problem than for the AB/ESB workers in relation to child-care. All of the children of NESB male and female parents, and of the AB/ESB men, were cared for in work hours by the worker’s partner or other family members, while the AB/ESB women used a mix of family or childminders in that person’s home. None of the parents from any group who had young children used child-care centres. In relation to child-care, a management representative commented:

We probably haven’t encountered some of the problems other companies have because all of our training is in company time so far, so we haven’t really met the problems of child minding and so on.

If training was to be done out of work hours, several parents felt the best child-care option would be child-care at work, several others felt child-care nearer where they lived would be best, and several others felt a combination of both these options would better suit their needs. Because of the current reliance of many of these parents on family members for child-care, only about a third felt that if they did do training outside their normal shift time that they would have to pay more money for either child-care for pre-school children, or for before- or after-school care for school-age children. Compared with employees at Ford, therefore, care of young children (as distinct from that of older family members) was not seen to be a barrier to training opportunities by Preslite employees.
Workplace culture
As the work force at Preslite consists predominantly of NESB workers—and in particular of NESB women—attitudes to questions of difference in treatment between men and women, and between AB and non-AB workers were of interest. Table 6.9 details interviewees' responses. While nearly half of the NESB males and over half of the NESB females consider that AB workers are treated better than immigrant workers at Preslite, this view is not shared by many AB/ESB workers. Conversely, the proposition that immigrant workers are treated better than AB workers received little support from the AB/ESB women and both groups of NESB workers, and only 27 per cent of the AB/ESB males supported this view. More of the AB/ESB males (55 per cent) than the other three groups agreed that some immigrant groups at Preslite are treated better than others, with the least amount of agreement coming from the NESB women (22 per cent). The AB/ESB women evidenced the most sanguine view about equal treatment, with 60 per cent feeling that all workers are treated the same. Considerably fewer NESB men (29 per cent) than AB/ESB men (46 per cent) agreed with this proposition.

Overall, the indication from the two groups of NESB workers is that more than half of each group feel that all workers are not treated equally, and that AB workers at Preslite receive better treatment than immigrant workers. This is felt despite the fact that immigrant workers comprise over three-quarters of the sample (and of the shop-floor population at Preslite).

In relation to perceptions about differences in treatment according to gender, the two groups of NESB workers had the most polarised views. While 35 per cent of the NESB men thought that women were treated better than men, 39 per cent of the NESB women thought that men were treated better than women. However, over half of both these groups considered that women and men were treated equally at Preslite, as did 73 per cent of the AB/ESB men and a convincing 90 per cent of the AB/ESB women. On this issue, there were no real extremes of views held by any of the four groups. However, one of the bilingual interviewers reported that many of the women spoke to her about their feelings that they were

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Propositions agreed to or strongly agreed to</th>
<th>NESB (%)</th>
<th>AB/ESB (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>females</td>
<td>males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB workers are treated better than other workers</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant workers are treated better than AB workers</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some immigrant workers are treated better than other immigrant workers</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All workers are treated the same</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are treated better than men</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men are treated better than women</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men and women are treated equally</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
treated like 'robots', and not like human beings. In this context, a Macedonian-born woman complained: 'They don't think about us. If the boss sees I am working good, he won't tell me "bravo, you are a good worker!" But he will give me more work.' Views towards the union were not always favourable either. At an anecdotal level, attitudes generally ranged from indifference to a feeling that the union did not have much involvement with the members. This applied both to union officials and to union representatives at the plant level. One young male worker said that in his area, there was at that time no shop steward or health and safety representative. He commented dryly: 'but even when they are here, we don't have them!' Again, we regret the lack of opportunity to have discussed with a union official the views of the union concerning its involvement at Preslite, and their perception of the level of interest in and commitment to training among union members.

Training and skills
This section covers a range of issues, beginning with knowledge of workplace matters such as available training, award restructuring, and enterprise bargaining. It also details the interviewees' involvement in training at work, their reasons for choosing whether or not to participate in this training, and their views on the merits of work-related training.

Knowledge of workplace issues
In the time since its decision in 1992 to commence training in an integrated manner, Preslite has clearly undergone a dramatic change in its approach to work-related training. It was surprising therefore that some employees claimed they did not know if the company's ideas about training had changed in the past few years: 10 per cent of the AB/ESB women, 18 per cent of the AB/ESB men, 21 per cent of the NESB women, and 41 per cent of the NESB men. This is especially puzzling as all the workers interviewed had been employed with Preslite since the beginning of the training. Still fewer NESB men thought that they had received information about the developments in training. Of those interviewees who had been given information about training, over 90 per cent reported that this information had been supplied by the company; a very much smaller percentage stated that the union had provided information, and several workers indicated that other workers had told them of any changes.

Nearly 100 per cent of the interviewees recorded that any information provided had been in English only, and not translated into the languages relevant to their workplace. Perhaps predictably therefore, while nearly 100 per cent of the AB/ESB female and male workers had understood all the information they were given, 55 per cent of the NESB women and 50 per cent of the AB/ESB men had understood either nothing or only some of the information. This probably explains the percentages of NESB workers who expressed little knowledge of changes in the focus of training at Preslite. Provision of information is a critical component of any change process, and in this respect a significant number of NESB workers at
Manufacturing uncertainty

Preslite appear to have been locked out of access to knowledge available to other workers.

In relation to award restructuring, all the AB/ESB men, 90 per cent of the AB/ESB women, 82 per cent of the NESB men, and 61 per cent of the NESB women had heard of this issue. However, far fewer people had actually been given information about it. While 80 per cent of the AB/ESB women thought they had received information, 55 per cent of the AB/ESB men, and only 41 per cent of the NESB women and 30 per cent of the NESB men said they had been given information. Given the amount of activity in the metal and engineering industry about award restructuring, these are low percentages of workers to have been supplied with relevant material. This is put in some context by a management representative who commented:

Award restructuring—we've had training programs for the people for that when it first came in. Although I dare say they have probably forgotten a great deal about it. We've had more important things to worry about, whether we had a job or not for the last three years, I suppose. I think it's indicative of the market picking up that the union has come back to pursue the claim now... The communications module and the industrial relations module in the EPC encompass concepts of award restructuring... and also include what the classification structure is and how you progress from level to level. So they are aware of that, those that have done that module which is basically everybody who has done the EPC. The people in the English-as-a-second-language class wouldn't be as aware as other people, but they will be aware of it via the people they work with.

For the NESB workers, this issue is given greater depth as two-thirds said they had received their information about award restructuring from sources outside their workplace. Combined with this is the fact that all of the workers reported that the material available at their workplace on this issue was available in English only, and not translated into any other languages. This seems an unsatisfactory situation from the perspective both of employers and the union in an industry employing such a large percentage of workers from a NESB. For example, at Preslite 60 per cent of the male NESB workers, and 43 per cent of the female NESB workers who had received some information about award restructuring reported that they had only understood 'some' of the issues and content. There seem to be high percentages of people with insufficient understanding of one of the major contemporary industry restructuring initiatives. This finding is consistent with those of Bertone and Griffin (1992, pp. 67-71).

As at Ford, knowledge about enterprise bargaining appeared to be even less widely held, particularly among NESB workers. Preslite was at the time of interview just commencing the process of negotiating its first enterprise agreement, and so the fact that 82 per cent of the NESB women and 59 per cent of the NESB men had not heard of this issue should be of concern. While 70 per cent of the AB/ESB women and 82 per cent of the AB/ESB men had heard of enterprise bargaining, only 50 per cent of the AB/ESB women, 27 per cent of the AB/ESB men, and a
very low 11 per cent of both the NESB women and men had received any information about it.

Of those workers who felt informed about enterprise bargaining (only 16 out of a possible 89 people), all the women (but none of the men) stated that their employer had provided the information, and some NESB women had received information from sources outside their workplace. Two NESB men said their information came either from another worker at Preslite, or from outside work. Two AB/ESB men reported that they had received information from the union. It is not really surprising therefore that of this small group of 16 workers, 50 per cent of the NESB women and all of the NESB men understood only 'some' of the material about enterprise bargaining, while a more hopeful proportion of the AB/ESB women (100 per cent) and of the AB/ESB men (67 per cent) reported that they understood 'most' or 'all' of it. There is clearly work to be done here in the dissemination of information in more appropriate style and languages so that all workers have access to information about the issues central to their working lives and conditions.

Participation in work-related training
When asked if anyone at Preslite had ever talked to them about how they might get a better paid job at the company, the majority of workers in each group said this had not happened (70 per cent of the AB/ESB women, 72 per cent of the AB/ESB men, 67 per cent of the NESB women, and 82 per cent of the NESB men). Nor, for most of them, had the prospect been raised of doing a job which they liked better than the one in which they were currently engaged. This is, again, puzzling as it might have been expected that the benefits of doing training to increase the potential for a better paid or more desirable job would have been made clear as an incentive to undertake the training program.

The number of people who expressed a desire to participate in training was less than the number actually engaged in it. Clearly some people were doing the training program for reasons other than the inherent attraction of training. Table 6.10 details this difference in attitude to training, and actual participation in it. The group with the highest expressed interest in doing training are the NESB women, but they are a close third in the ranking of the four groups actually engaged in training.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wanted to do training (%)</th>
<th>Actually done or doing training (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB/ESB</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>72.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The multiple reasons for doing training at work are explored further in table 6.11, which indicates that the most pressing reason for doing training for all four groups was to learn more skills. All of the AB/ESB males considered this to be a reason for doing training, as did 85 per cent of the NESB women, 82 per cent of the NESB men, and 80 per cent of the ESB women. More NESB women than any other group considered a further reason for participation to be that they would lose pay if they did not do the training. Almost three-quarters of the NESB women considered that they would do training in order to get a better paid job, as did 82 per cent of the NESB males, 70 per cent of the AB/ESB females, and 90 per cent of the AB/ESB males. A 46-year-old Macedonian-born woman thought this could no longer apply to her: 'It's too late now to get better paid jobs . . .'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for doing training</th>
<th>NESB (%)</th>
<th>AB/ESB (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn more skills</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will lose pay if don’t do training</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get a better paid job</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make work more interesting</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To understand more about changes in technology</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afraid of losing job if don’t do training</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To become a team leader or leading hand</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To become a supervisor</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While 80 per cent or more of NESB males, and AB/ESB females and males, thought that a reason for doing training was to make work more interesting, only 57 per cent of the NESB women thought this a valid reason. There were similar percentage differences between the NESB women and the other three groups in choosing the need to understand more about changes in technology as a reason to do training.

The percentage of NESB women indicating that they were afraid of losing their jobs if they did not do training was almost four times higher than that of the AB/ESB women, many of whom did not seem to rate possible financial repercussions (e.g. losing money if they did not participate in training) as critical criteria for participation in training. This is interesting when it is considered that 70 per cent of the AB/ESB women were the major income earners in their households. Stronger expressions of concern about the possibility of non-participation in the training program causing either loss of pay or loss of job might have been expected.

Among three of the four groups, enthusiasm for doing training in order to become a team leader or leading hand was not very strong, with more NESB males (59 per cent) evidencing interest in this reason. Training in order to become a supervisor
was of no interest to the AB/ESB women, but it was of interest to more of the NESB women (20 per cent). However, the move by women into positions of added responsibility was not always one that was approved of by male workers in the company. A management representative gave an example of difficulties encountered:

[In 1991] we introduced female leading hands into the company. They never had a female hand before. Never. Some of those female leading hands when we transposed on to this site here, they still remained as leading hands and have performed exceptionally well. It meant big increases for them financially. Some of them withdrew, they did not want to continue being leading hands, because it brought them into conflict with some of their nationality's issues. For instance, a particular lady... and her brother-in-law... He withdrew out of the training program, so SHE had to withdraw out of the training program. She was a leading hand [at the other plant], but when she came up here, knowing he was in the same area, she did not want to be a leading hand any more... It was just too difficult.

Changing work locations had brought this woman into close proximity to a male relation, and it was considered inappropriate that she had a more senior position than he did. Consequently, she had to give up her position as leading hand, and also to leave the training program when he withdrew from it. This particular example demonstrates that reasons for the stated lack of interest by NESB women in more supervisory positions may be far more complex than simply not wanting additional responsibility.

Over half of the NESB males and 46 per cent of the AB/ESB males seemed to think that aspirations to become a supervisor were a further reason for doing training. However, when this is considered in connection with a question seeking views on the opportunities at Preslite to actually get a promotion, it does not seem highly likely that the training will achieve the desired outcome. In response to this latter question, only 9 per cent of the AB/ESB men and 29 per cent of the NESB women felt that the opportunities were good, as did 40 per cent of the AB/ESB women and 53 per cent of the NESB men. Overall, two-thirds of the study sample disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposition that there were good opportunities at Preslite for promotion.

In summary, higher percentages of NESB women than of the other three groups expressed a desire to do training, and the most popular reason given by this group of women was to learn more skills. They clearly indicated interest in the issue of work-related training. In addition, a high percentage of NESB women (88 per cent) had undertaken some form of training at Preslite, albeit training which was paid for within work hours.

The actual type of training undertaken by the study sample is detailed in Table 6.12. Many more NESB women than NESB men had participated in English language and literacy training. While the percentage of NESB women engaged in EPC training was lower then the other three groups, this may be explained by the
fact that they had not completed a sufficient amount of language and literacy training to progress on to the certificate-only classes. At Ford, where much of the training is offered out of shift hours, the percentage of NESB women who did not participate in any form of training (45 per cent) was considerably higher than at Preslite (12 per cent), where training is during normal shift time. Indeed, the percentage of non-participating NESB women at Preslite is considerably lower than that of the NESB men, and close to the percentages of AB/ESB women and men who had not done any work-related training.

When this actual participation is considered in combination with the data outlined above concerning the stated interest in work-related training shown by NESB women at Preslite, it does suggest, for our sample at least, that given accessible training arrangements and structures, high percentages of NESB women are more than willing to participate in training programs—either language- or skill-based, or both. Despite two-thirds of the NESB women at Preslite self-assessing their levels of proficiency in English as either ‘poor’ or ‘fair’, 57 per cent of them have nevertheless participated in a nationally accredited training program and more are poised to move into this program when they have completed further English language training.

Analysis at Preslite of location of training produces data rather differently distributed from that of Baker and Wooden (1991), detailed in table 3.1. The caveat given in the previous chapter concerning such a comparison is repeated here: Baker and Wooden’s data encompassed all respondents, including those who had done training and those who had not. Our data refer only to those who at the time of interview had participated in some form of work-related training. Table 6.13 details the location of training for interviewees who had done some form of training at Preslite. There is a further explanation necessary in the consideration of this data. All of the EPC training at Preslite that did not include a language, literacy, or numeracy support component was delivered at a TAFE college, considered here by the interviewees as ‘external’, as indeed it is. It does not necessarily imply, however, any extra expenditure on the part of the company to provide training beyond the EPC modules.

Table 6.12: Type of training undertaken by study sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of training</th>
<th>NESB (%)</th>
<th></th>
<th>AB/ESB (%)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate training (EPC)</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>81.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (e.g. fork-lift, first aid)</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and safety representative</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop steward</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


What is interesting about these figures is the very small amount of training considered to have been given on the job. They contrast sharply with Baker and Wooden's data (see table 3.1). Anecdotal information given to us in the course of the interviews supports the conclusion that on arrival at Preslite, or on change of job within the company, people felt that they were given minimal training at their particular work station. The other point about the data is that they reflect the relative stages of training among the four groups; all of the AB/ESB women and men and 69 per cent of the NESB men involved in training, had undertaken their modules at a TAFE college, compared with only a third of the NESB women, many of whom were engaged in language-only classes or combined language and EPC classes, both of which were held in-house.

No one at Preslite at the time of interview had completed the first level of EPC training, and only one person (an AB/ESB male) reported any difficulty in getting permission from his supervisor to attend the training sessions.

**Views about the training programs**

Of those who had participated in work-related training, nearly 80 per cent of the AB/ESB women and 60 per cent of both the AB/ESB and NESB men considered the training to be either 'easy' or 'very easy'. The NESB women reported more difficulty, with 60 per cent describing it as either 'hard' or 'very hard'. This may have had more to do with the amount of information they could understand in relation to English language, rather than the complexity of the content, as over 50 per cent of the NESB women described the English used for the training as either 'hard' or 'very hard' to understand. The same response was made by 39 per cent of the NESB men, perhaps incorporating the 31 per cent who estimated they had understood only 'some' of the training they had undertaken.

Two-thirds of both the NESB women and men, and 70 per cent of the AB/ESB men, considered that either 'none' or 'some' of the training they had undertaken was relevant to the work in which they were currently engaged. A greater percentage of the AB/ESB women felt more positive: two-thirds felt that 'most' or 'all' was related to their current work. The comments reflect those made earlier in this chapter by the members of the Education and Training Committee, in which they expressed their hopes that the next set of training modules would be more relevant to the work done at Preslite.
There was a difference in perception about the relative importance of being with the same group of people for each training session. Two-thirds of the AB/ESB women and 70 per cent of the AB/ESB men considered this to be 'not at all important' or 'not very important', compared with 69 per cent of the NESB women and 62 per cent of the NESB men who considered it to be 'important' or 'very important'. Clearly, continuity of class membership was more important to the NESB men and women. This may be useful to consider when constructing the different class modules in the future.

Three-quarters of the AB/ESB women, 60 per cent of the AB/ESB men, and 62 per cent of the NESB men thought it was either 'important' or 'very important' to be in a training session with a group who all spoke the same language. This compares with 58 per cent of the NESB women who thought it was 'not at all important' or 'not very important'. More of the NESB women than the other three groups were involved in English language classes where there was presumably a range of language diversity, and this experience may have demonstrated to them the capacity of mixed language groups to operate effectively.

**Assessment**

While 80 per cent of the AB/ESB women, 82 per cent of the AB/ESB men, and 65 per cent of the NESB men considered that they would rather have the training tests in written form, 71 per cent of the NESB women indicated they would prefer oral tests. As over half of the NESB women had found the English used in the training program difficult to understand, this may have been the case for the assessment process too. Trainers may need to explore different assessment techniques to accommodate distinct needs.

There was some suggestion that a proportion of the NESB women may have found the training environment rather intimidating. When asked if they would prefer to do the testing in the training room or at their work-station, 45 per cent of the NESB women replied that they would prefer their work-station. This may not be practical in all cases of course, but it does suggest that there may be some discomfort felt about their training surroundings. This is a further issue trainers may need to explore; if participants feel relaxed in their training environment, they are more likely to have a positive training experience.

**Reasons for ceasing or not participating in training**

Of the seventy-seven interviewees who had participated in training, only three reported that they had ceased doing it. They were all NESB women, and all three said they stopped because they found it hard doing training as well as having family duties at home, and they all thought that the training was boring. One woman gave as a further reason for stopping that she found it too hard to understand the training, another that she was too tired to keep doing it, and two thought that the training was not relevant to their work. A 40-year-old Greek-born woman who had stopped training said: 'For younger employees, training is a must. But married women are under pressure from home . . . there is too much to do.'
further reason for stopping training: ‘I was actually told that one woman wouldn’t do it, wouldn’t continue, because her husband didn’t approve. I mean, I’d tell him to go to buggery!’ A NESB female committee member said that while many of the NESB women felt reasonably comfortable about doing training, for some others it was more difficult:

Sometimes, you know, they get upset or something and they sort of get too scared to do it, or they would like to do it but they can’t, they’ve got other problems.

The multiple reasons given by the twelve people who had chosen not to participate in training at Preslite included: simply not wanting to (one AB/ESB woman, five NESB women, and three NESB men); thinking training was not important (one NESB woman); feeling that their English was not good enough (four NESB women and three NESB men); thinking it takes too long to finish (one AB/ESB woman and three NESB women); and feeling they could not receive enough credit for training and skills already acquired (three NESB women). Some of the older workers expressed the view that training for them had come rather too late. An Italian-born woman complained: ‘Training should have been done 30 years ago—I am too old now!’ An Italian-born man commented similarly: ‘I am too old for training—what is it for?’

**Attitudes to training**

Despite this rather negative view expressed by a few workers, perceptions about training opportunities at Preslite overall were reasonably positive. Table 6.14 details these perceptions. Of all the four groups, the AB/ESB women had by far the most positive view of Preslite’s training activities in relation to the propositions outlined above. While just over half of both the NESB women and the AB/ESB men felt that women at Preslite were helped as much as men to do training, 77 per cent of the NESB men and 100 per cent of the AB/ESB women agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. This view was not shared by a Fijian-born woman, who complained that she was not given an opportunity to be trained on a new machine:

**Table 6.14: Perceptions about training opportunities at Preslite**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Propositions agreed to or strongly agreed to</th>
<th>NESB (%)</th>
<th>AB/ESB (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are helped as much as men to do work-related training</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>76.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who do not speak very good English are encouraged to do training</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone has the same opportunities to do training, no matter where they were born</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>70.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This company provides enough training to improve your skills</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

123
When they got a new machine, they computerised the work, and they did not ask me if I wanted to do it. They just got the men to do the work. But if the new machine breaks down, they have to come back to me to work the old machine. If they let me learn the new machine, I would have more chances. I would have liked very much to learn the new machine.

Nearly two-thirds of the two groups of NESB workers agreed that people who do not speak very good English are encouraged to do training at Preslite, but they were not convinced of this view in the same numbers as the two AB/ESB groups.

Large percentages of all four groups, especially the AB/ESB women and men, agreed with the next statement, that everyone has the same opportunities for training, no matter what country they were born in. Again, the views of the NESB workers reflected less agreement than those of the AB/ESB workers. There was more similarity in the responses of the NESB women and men and the AB/ESB men to the proposition that Preslite provides enough training to improve workers' skills. Over half of these three groups agreed with the statement, while more of the AB/ESB women (70 per cent) thought that this was true.

The positive perceptions of so many of the AB/ESB women are interesting in the context of their stated interest in participating in training. They were not the group with the highest percentage of expressed interest, and lagged somewhat behind the NESB women and the AB/ESB men (see table 6.10). They were, however, the group with one of the highest participation rates in the actual training program (90 per cent). So while more of them proportionally were not as interested in training as the NESB women, a greater percentage of them had a more positive opinion of Preslite's training opportunities.

When this is considered in relation to broader attitudes to training, the generally positive views held by the majority of the interviewees are reflected in their perceptions of the attitudes to training held by the wider community. Table 6.15 outlines the responses to a series of propositions about work-related training in general. All four groups, and particularly the AB/ESB males considered that training at work is worth doing. The next proposition, that people do training because it makes them feel more useful and confident workers, was again agreed to by large percentages of each group. Fewer numbers in each group agreed that people do training because they are afraid of losing their jobs, but each percentage was over 60 per cent. This is an interesting perception, considering such low percentages of all four groups responded that this would be a reason for them to participate in training (see table 6.11). Do they feel more secure in their jobs than they believe the rest of the community to be?

In relation to the next statement (that if people can learn more work skills they are more likely to be respected in their families and communities), more of the NESB interviewees responded in agreement than did the two AB/ESB groups, although the percentages for all four groups were 60 per cent or more. Percentages were
high in agreement to the next proposition, with more of the NESB than AB/ESB workers of the view that parents try to get better job skills so that they can be of help to their children. While quite high percentages of each group agreed that training at work helped men to move into positions of responsibility at work, lesser percentages in each group (particularly the NESB women and the AB/ESB men) agreed that it also helped women in the same way.

In order to explore further the reasons for the generally lower participation rate of women in industry training, a series of provocative statements were given to the interviewees with which to agree or disagree. As with the responses to this set of propositions in the Ford data, the results are interesting, although not as surprising as those of the Ford interviewees. The majority of responses of both NESB groups to the first proposal, that men should be the major income earners, indicate that a traditional view of the relative roles of women and men is held by over 50 per cent of both groups (table 6.16). This is not altogether unexpected given the rather older age profile of these two groups in comparison to the AB/ESB female and male respondents. A relatively low 20 per cent of the AB/ESB women agreed with the statement, indicating that 80 per cent of this group do not see that men should be either the major income earner or the recipient of more training than women. This is not really surprising when it is remembered that 70 per cent of the AB/ESB women earned the major income for their family or household. Unlike the corresponding group of AB/ESB women at Ford, 80 per cent of this group of women at Preslrite do not indicate unrealistic expectations about their attitude to independent or equally shared income provision. The fact that almost half of the AB/ESB males agreed with the statement is something of a concern, especially as 45 per cent of them are in the younger age-group of 21–30 years. Such traditional views may not augur well for the financial independence of their current or future female partners!

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**Table 6.15: Attitudes to training**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Propositions agreed to or strongly agreed to</th>
<th>NESB (%)</th>
<th>AB/ESB (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training at work is worth doing</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>76.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People do training because it makes them more useful and confident workers</td>
<td>88.3</td>
<td>88.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People do training at work because they are afraid of losing their jobs</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a person can learn good work skills, they feel they are more likely to be respected in their family and community</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>88.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents feel that it is important to get better skills at work so they can be of more help to their children</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>94.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training gives opportunities for men to move into positions as leaders at work</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>94.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training gives women opportunities to move into positions as leaders at work</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>76.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Manufacturing uncertainty

Table 6.16: Views on possible reasons why women do less training than men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Propositions agreed to or strongly agreed to</th>
<th>NESB (%)</th>
<th>AB/ESB (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men should be the major income earners in the family, and so should do more training than women</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women do not do much training because their husbands or boyfriends do not think it is important for women to get more skills</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men can understand the type of training done at work better than women can</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women would be more likely to do training at work if there were women-only classes</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women would do more training at work if they thought it would give them a real chance to move into a job with more responsibility</td>
<td>72.6</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>54.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>72.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While about 80 per cent of the two groups of men did not agree that a reason for women’s lower level of participation in training is because their male partners do not think it important for women to get more work skills, 40 per cent and over of the two groups of women agreed with the proposition. These percentages of women are indicating that they think this type of male reaction does occur, and while the great majority of men in our sample do not appear to share this view, they seem to be unaware that this could be an attitude held by other men. Yet, nearly half of the NESB women feel this to be the case. Some may have experienced it first hand.

Several of the bilingual interviewers recounted reactions of shrieks of derisive laughter given by many of the NESB women to the next proposition that men can understand the type of training done at work better than women can. Nearly 80 per cent of the NESB women, 82 per cent of the AB/ESB men, and 70 per cent of the NESB men and the AB/ESB women disagreed with this statement. This obviously was not a sentiment shared by many of the workers at Preslite, particularly in a work force that is predominantly female!

Responses to the proposition that women would do more training if there were more women-only classes were interesting. While the majority of the two groups of men agreed with this, two-thirds of the NESB women and 80 per cent of the AB/ESB women disagreed. This is consistent with the responses from the majority of the women at Ford. Evidently only a minority of women feel that women-only classes would encourage more women to participate in training. Do the men think that some women should be in classes for women only, or do they consider that some women might find the company of other women less threatening than that of men?

High percentages of NESB women, and AB/ESB women and men agreed that women would do more training if they thought it would give them a real chance
to move into a job with more responsibility. Less than a third of the women in our sample indicated a personal interest in doing training in order to become a supervisor or team leader (see table 6.11), so the responses of many of them to this statement are clearly in relation to other women and not to themselves. While 59 per cent of the NESB men also agreed with the proposition, obviously 41 per cent did not. As there are so few women at Preslite in positions of responsibility, neither the women nor the men have immediate experience on which to draw for their response to this statement.

Summary
To conclude this training and skills section, the overall impression gained from the data is that training at Preslite is generally viewed reasonably favourably, and that the majority of NESB women demonstrate at least as much interest in participating as the other three groups; indeed in some areas they evidence a more positive attitude. According to a management representative, the impact of training on some NESB women has been marked:

they are asking when we are ready to start [the training] again. That is from people who probably would never have spoken to you before. I think the other thing is that they question things a lot more too—day-to-day matters. Things like 'why are you doing it this way?' To the point where we are looking right now to putting in an improvement suggestion scheme to try and harness those sorts of suggestions from them . . . [Before], we have always said to them you can go back to your supervisor and relay it back through him, but they say 'I told him a number of times, and never got any further', so it was like hitting your head against a glass wall. That is changing, so we have created mechanisms where they can get it straight to a source other than the leading hand.

In this example of the provision of training in normal work hours, NESB women can be seen to have participated overall in training at Preslite in proportions almost equal to those of the AB/ESB women and men, and greater than that of the NESB men. There are no real impediments to participation in training at Preslite, other than personal concerns about whether or not the training is too hard or too boring, or the English language used too difficult to understand. This is really an issue of confidence, and one which has presumably been overcome by the many NESB women who have participated in either the language or the certificate training, or both. Most of the barriers to training for women generally (particularly affecting NESB women) which were detailed in the previous chapter do not apply at Preslite, and NESB women's participation in training is consequently high.

Baker and Wooden (1991) suggested that the major explanation for the lower participation rate of NESB women in training is English language difficulties. Our data suggest that a more complex explanation should be sought. For the NESB women at Ford, structural barriers were seen to operate to limit the opportunities of many of them to participate in the English language and VIC training program. In the case study at Preslite, where those barriers were not in existence, NESB
Manufacturing uncertainty

women participated in both language and EPC training, and only 12 per cent had done no work-related training, compared with 45 per cent at Ford. This suggests that structural barriers operate to exclude certain groups from access to training provision rather than just a lack of English language skills. The impetus for change, therefore, moves towards industry and government, and away from the relatively powerless NESB immigrant women. Resources to address and remove identified existing barriers will need to be forthcoming if women, and particularly NESB women, are to be able to compete equally for their share of the training agenda.

The future at Preslite

As discussed above, the issue of training in or out of work hours is clearly critical to the degree of accessibility to training programs. When the Education and Training Committee members at Preslite were asked about the likely participation rate in training if at some future time it was outside work hours, one female committee member summed up the discussion:

A lot of women would immediately drop out because they couldn’t handle it. Some couldn’t handle it simply because of the fact that they are single parents, but then you’ve got others whose family would say, ‘Well, your role is here!’ And you’d get the ones who just get guilty [about their families].

A male shop steward pointed out that this difficulty was not experienced only by women: ‘Males would drop out too ... They have other responsibilities, other things happening.’ One of the managers agreed:

I think their attitudes [to training] would change quite markedly if training was only available outside of work hours ... From the people I have spoken to I think it would ... They wouldn’t be interested at all. Even though they are aware that they can only gain increases in pay through skill acquisition.

This will undoubtedly become an issue of importance in the future of training at Preslite, and one which both management and unions will need to monitor carefully. The effectiveness of the training for the different groups (doing either EPC or English language training) is also of importance to the future of the company and the workers. When asked about this in relation to NESB workers, a management representative replied in the context of the existing training groups:

Now, within these groups we have a wide range of skills. Some people here who are from an AB/ESB, they have done nothing but EPC and are sailing through the program. And at the other end of the spectrum we’ve got someone who is in the English-as-a-second language program having difficulties conversing with people and reading the documentation, and because of that language barrier they can’t effectively participate.

This has had clear consequences for management’s perception of both past and future recruitment practices, affecting the profile of the work force at Preslite:

I should say that our recruitment policies changed in 1989, to the point where at that stage when we established a new plant ... we said that any employee that
comes into the company must be able to read, write and speak English. They have
to do a numeracy test, and that is a big change from what we used to do before.

This was not the only change, as the management representative explained in
relation to company policies about age and formal qualifications of prospective
employees. Any person commencing employment at Preslile has to be:

[aged] 18 to 38, for people on the shop-floor areas ... We are getting a higher
percentage of trades people into the shop floor now. Principally, the trades people
were in the maintenance department before, now we have got a higher percentage of
qualified fitters and turners within the plant areas doing specialised jobs ... We
haven't said that everybody has to have Year 12 or anything like that. The actual
test we give them for numeracy, there is a fair degree of comprehension and fairly
basic numeracy tests.

It was made clear that Preslile's future recruitment policies would reflect the
company's position of looking for a more skilled work force that is capable of
moving along the industry certificate training pathways. As with the situation at
Ford, this does not augur well for the employment possibilities of job aspirants
who do not fit these prescriptive requirements. Those who are outside the age
categories of 18–38 years, or who cannot demonstrate sufficient levels of English
language, literacy, and numeracy skills, are unlikely to be classified as 'suitable' for
employment at Preslile. This also raises concerns for the existing employees who
do not fit these specific requirements—mainly people from a NESB. If they are
not considered to be making adequate progress in current training programs, what
is their future? Will they too be added to the growing numbers of retrenched
workers from a NESB? What will their re-employment prospects be? These are
serious questions, and the answers may raise considerable concern about the
future unemployment profile of older NESB workers whose English language and
numeracy skills are not highly developed.

Additional concern must be expressed about the very gendered dimension of this
problem. It seems that changing attitudes were breaking down the traditional
(unwritten) demarcation between 'women's' jobs and 'men's' jobs, but not in ways
equally advantageous to both women and men. Management spoke of the
reluctance of some women to take on tasks that they considered to be 'male' jobs,
and the implications that this would have for future recruitment on the basis of
sex. In this context:

We take into account the fact that [the women] are not as physically strong and
things like that. We are not talking about jobs which are physically demanding on
them ... but they view [them] as men's jobs ... There is reluctance to do it.

Men on the other hand, did not generally object to doing tasks which had
previously been seen as 'women's' jobs:

Whereas with the male you can say, these are the jobs you will be doing, you will all
be trained how to be doing it, and in some cases you get very little resistance ... We've got more male solderers now than we ever had in the past. That was always
viewed as a women's job, because of the preconception that they are dealing with
Manufacturing uncertainty

little fiddly bits, and women are better at doing that. In actual fact now, some of the male solderers out there are doing real good.

When asked if this would affect recruitment policy and practice, the response was that the company would try to get more men into the factory in the future because of their perceived willingness to do a greater variety of tasks than women:

\[ \ldots \] We will have selected recruitment. Because [men] are prepared to do a wider variety of tasks, because in the past where we have had overtime and things like that, for whatever the reasons (and I understand the fact that some of these women go home to do another job—some of the things I got told by some of these women was unbelievable, what their husbands expect them to do). I appreciate this, but the fact is the business has got a need, and at the end of the day that need has to be fulfilled otherwise we don't get a customer. So we have had problems in the past, [women] working overtime, things like that, whereas I suppose males are more keen to get the extra income for the family.

Thus areas of work traditionally seen as appropriate for women were increasingly being given to men at Preslite. This challenge to the stereotyped division of labour is commendable, except that it seemed to be working only one way. Women were not moving into those areas historically seen as the domain of men. The effect of this is clear: numbers of men were increasing in areas of work new to them, while numbers of women in these same areas would therefore have to shrink to accommodate the transferring males. At Preslite, this means diminishing job opportunities for women, and expanded task areas for men. As expressed by management, this change is driven by clear imperatives:

The policies of yesterday no longer are good for today or tomorrow. You’ve got to keep changing. Going with the flow, I suppose, making sure that you are profitable this year, or the threat is that we will be closed.

The problem for NESB workers, and particularly for NESB women, is that ‘going with the flow’ may sweep numbers of them right into unemployment. If this were to be the case, those without sufficient job skills to re-enter the labour market will face a future with few positive job prospects. It is hoped for the sake of these workers, that ‘the flow’ at Preslite includes a continued commitment to industry training in its current accessible form, one that allows most workers the opportunity of participation irrespective of country of birth or gender.
Chapter 7: The food industry

This chapter will examine the findings of the research carried out at two companies in the food industry: Herbert Adams Bakeries and Lanes Biscuits Pty Ltd. A brief discussion of aspects of the food industry will set a context for the case study data.

The industry

The industry comprises a number of sectors, listed in the Industry Training Plan 1994–1997 (ITP) of the Victorian Food Industry Training Board (VFITB) as: food, beverages and tobacco; pharmaceutical and veterinary products; butchers; and bread and cake shops. These industry sectors between them employ 52,000 people, and earn annually some $10,000 million (VFITB 1993). The ITP claims that 'the food processing industry is arguably Victoria's most significant manufacturing industry in terms of its value added contribution to the Victorian economy and its capacity to provide jobs for Victorians' (VFITB 1993, p. 8).

However, in relation to export, Walker (1993) argues that 'for years, Victoria's food producers have chanted the mantra of value-adding. Yet the value actually added within the industry remains relatively small, restricted largely to a few specialised sectors. Affluent Asian consumers are not yet eating huge quantities of heavily processed Victorian food.' Walker presents opinion suggesting—in relation to export—that the process of value adding costs more than it earns, and that the solution may be to concentrate on exporting fresh produce rather than processed products. The ITP conversely argues that prospects for growth lie in the export of processed food products to both Southeast and Northeast Asian countries, as the local Australian market offers limited growth potential. It appears that despite growing attention to export performance, the major source of income for the industry—at least in the short term—will continue to come from the domestic market.

The Victorian food industry consists of a large number of small companies, and a small number of large establishments employing more than 100 people. It is divided into manufacturing and retail sectors, with nearly twice as many retail establishments as those in the manufacturing area. According to the ITP, only 14 per cent of workers within the industry are employed in skilled factory jobs, with over 40 per cent being engaged in relatively unskilled positions such as factory hands or packers (VFITB 1993).

While the percentage of women in the industry varies across the different sectors, overall women comprise around one-third of all employees. The two companies participating in our study are located in the baking sector, in which women represent over 40 per cent of the work force. This contrasts for example with the low percentage (around 11 per cent) of women in the meat processing sector of the industry.
Manufacturing uncertainty

In the past, the industry overall has paid little attention to training or workplace reform. The ITP reports that this neglect was noted in the 1992 Joint Statement on Australian Agri-Food Industries issued by the (then) Federal Ministers for Industry Technology and Commerce, and Primary Industries and Energy. In response to this Statement, a number of initiatives have occurred. Of relevance to this study is the increased recognition of the importance of training, 'particularly in the areas of language, literacy and communication as a prerequisite to equipping the workforce with the required skills to produce more highly processed products using more technically sophisticated processes . . .' (VFITB 1993, p. 21). Initial funding (over $3 million) spread over four years was provided by government via the Food Industry Language and Literacy Initiative Program (FILLIP), conditional on participating companies and unions achieving workplace reform (VFITB 1993). This was accompanied by calls for the need for training, award restructuring and industry reform to be more closely linked in order to facilitate the international competitiveness that industry and government are increasingly seeking.

In order to determine overall industry demographics and training needs, the VFITB in 1992 conducted the Food Industry National Demographic Project which sought data on establishment details and training information. This would provide the industry with data on the extent and type of existing training, and facilitate identification of the main areas for future training action. Unfortunately, as at March 1994 the project had still not finished extracting data from the survey, although it was hoped that analysis was close to completion. This kind of information is needed to assist policy and program development, particularly in an industry which has to date paid scant attention to the training needs of those workers who are least skilled and currently in receipt of little or no training.

National Certificate in Food Processing

To address this lack of training provision, a National Certificate in Food Processing (NCFP) has been developed to increase the skill levels of production and process workers. In the process of development, issues of sector- and stream-specific curricula, and of recognition of prior learning, were considered to be of importance. The ITP reports that 'industry representatives were enthusiastic about the opportunities presented by an integrated and national system of training and especially by the choice offered by a modular system delivered through a range of flexible delivery options' (VFITB 1993, p. 27). Given the increased amount of industry training generally being developed and delivered via a range of training providers, it is to be hoped that these providers are capable of sustaining the required quality and quantity of both curricula development and training program delivery. As reported in the previous chapter, the training program at Preslite Australia had been delayed by difficulties experienced with the contracted TAFE college in meeting deadlines for the delivery of training modules. In the course of this study, we heard similar stories suggesting that the resources of some sections of the TAFE system are overstretched. This has serious implications for future training development.
Funded by the Office of Training and Further Education, a number of pilot projects trialling various components of the NCFP were underway by the end of 1993, implementing both generic and core optional modules. The ITP identifies a number of key issues in relation to the development of the NCFP, including the need for curriculum development to reflect the needs of the different groups in the food industry workforce:

- NESB workers and AB/ESB workers with specific literacy needs;
- TAFE teachers involved in industry training who need a professional development program to ensure curriculum quality and relevance; and
- the industry, which needs to be informed about the Certificate and best practice models of implementation (VFITB 1993, p. 29).

This will be particularly important in the areas of language, literacy, and numeracy. The food industry employs large numbers of NESB workers, and while of course some NESB workers have a high level of competence in English language and literacy, others do not. In addition, as mentioned in chapter 2, language and literacy difficulties are also experienced by workers from an AB/ESB — these people too will require appropriately focused training. The skills of most production workers in the industry have been developed on-the-job, and more complex work demands will require an increasingly sophisticated understanding of a range of tasks. This will necessitate greater facility and confidence in the English language than is currently held by numbers of workers. As the ITP argues, while 'low levels of English language and literacy should not constitute a barrier to participation in training' it is increasingly important that workers have the ability to communicate and be responsive to change. Industry must incorporate language and literacy support into workplace training to ensure equal access and participation (VFITB 1993, p. 31).

The issue of numeracy is also important. A DEET-funded study into numeracy in the food processing industry recommended 'embedding numeracy training in literacy and other training wherever possible, and the inclusion of specific numeracy areas' in the NCFP (Goddard 1993, p. 4). This is consistent with the approach taken in training programs in both the vehicle and the metals industries.

Access to training inevitably raises the question of the timing of the programs. As discussed in the previous chapter, for many women—particularly those from a NESB—participation in training which is provided out of normal working hours is extremely difficult, and often impossible. Family responsibilities and/or the need to work overtime whenever it is offered create barriers to participation in training for many women. Unless it is provided within the hours of normal shifts, it seems that equal access for all workers to work-related training will continue to be denied. This has clear financial and planning implications for companies providing training, and in this regard the ITP lists a range of delivery options which could assist both companies and workers. These models include peer tutoring, small learning groups, open learning centres, and cluster learning arrangements enabling small organisations to share costs.
Recognition of prior learning emerges once again as a contentious issue. The ITP identifies this as an area of concern in the food industry, particularly in relation to the assessment of existing skills. Competency in a particular area may be acquired in either formal or informal ways, and training of assessors will be critical to the evaluation of those skills learned in the less formal (and previously non-accredited) arena of the shop floor.

While the food industry is lagging behind some other industries in the provision of training, it now has the opportunity to learn from the experience of existing work-based training programs operating in other industry sectors. Attention to access, curricula relevance, and integrated language and skill training should be a priority.

The companies

In the following sections, material is presented from two companies in the food industry: Herbert Adams Bakeries and Lanes Biscuits. The data will not be explored in quite as much detail as the previous two companies, as training at both Herbert Adams and Lanes Biscuits has in the past been minimal. Of particular interest in this context is the attitude of employees, management, and the union to the possible value of training, and its potential to benefit company growth and workers' skill levels. The union representing the workers interviewed at the two companies was at the time of interview the Pastrycooks, Bakers, Biscuitmakers and Allied Trade Union, and subsequently reshaped as the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union, Miscellaneous Workers Division, Baking Section, referred to for brevity in the following text as the LHMWU. Background material will be discussed separately for each company, and then data specific to each study sample will be presented in a joint format.

Primary data presented in this case study come from a variety of sources. Material is quoted from separate semi-structured interviews held with representatives of the LHMWU, management representatives from Herbert Adams and Lanes, and with members of the Herbert Adams Joint Consultative Committee and the Lanes Joint Consultative Committee. The remainder of the primary data were collected from the production and assembly workers at Herbert Adams and Lanes who comprised the sample for this industry sector.

Herbert Adams Bakeries

Herbert Adams Bakeries (referred to for brevity as Herbert Adams), is located in Kensington, an inner city suburb of Melbourne. The company, which is a member of the Pacific Dunlop Group of companies, makes a variety of pastry and cake products, including the well known Four 'n' Twenty Pies.

Personnel records were not kept in a form which aggregated employee data by gender and country of birth. This necessitated the researcher having to use the payroll print-out to construct an employee database; a laborious task, and one which we were surprised that the companies in our study had not already undertaken for their own purposes. The figures obtained from the payroll system
The food industry

proved to be somewhat inaccurate once the research process was underway, but they indicated that overall there were twice as many workers from a NESB as from an AB/ESB, and that the numerically dominant countries of birth of shop-floor workers at the company (in a numerically ranked order) were Australia, Macedonia, Greece, Italy, and Viet Nam. Again, the category of ‘Australia-born’ proved to be problematic, and the actual numbers at the workplace in this group appeared to be far fewer than the documentation suggested. More than twenty different countries of birth were represented in the shop-floor area.

Herbert Adams employs over 350 shop-floor workers in its production areas. Of these, around one-third are women and two-thirds men. The types of work undertaken have clear gender demarcation lines, as according to the company figures there are no women working in the dough room, despatch, garage, meat kitchen, meat preparation room, maintenance, dry goods store, or as engineers or cleaners. The only production area in which women outnumber men is in the packing section, and overall there are nearly twice as many women as men employed as casuals.

Workplace training has been minimal at the company for many shop-floor workers in the past. Some English classes have been conducted, although not recently, and basic training in communication, hygiene, and first aid has been provided to some employees. As one management representative commented: ‘I think it’s fair to say we haven’t done enough. We’ve done a bit, but how effective it’s been, and how coordinated it’s been, is questionable.’ However, it is hoped that this will change. According to another management representative:

I think we are going to put a great emphasis on training in the future, in areas of literacy, in areas of health and safety, training people up to be more skilled in the workplace. That has to come, if we don’t—we won’t survive.

In relation to industry-specific training such as the NCFP, the response was more cautious. The company at the time of interview was in the process of negotiating its enterprise agreement, and saw the question of training as part of these discussions. The company has a Joint Consultative Committee (JCC), with members drawn from both management and the three unions represented in the workplace: the LHMWU, the AMEU, and the Electrical, Electronic, Plumbing and Allied Workers Union of Australia (EEPAWU). Employee representatives on the JCC outnumber management representatives, and men outnumber women. The establishment of a training subcommittee of the JCC to consider training needs of production employees is planned, to match an existing training committee which considers training issues for trades employees. In response to questions about the possibility of integrating English language and broader industry-specific training, the company was non-committal.

In March 1994 the company and the unions agreed an interim enterprise bargaining agreement, in order to provide more time for negotiation on a final agreement. The interim agreement cites the establishment of a single skills-based classification structure for all manufacturing employees. The document states that,
Manufacturing uncertainty

'The Joint Training Committee will immediately commence the process of identifying properly accredited training and the implementation of training programs'. At the time of interview, the members of the JCC felt strongly that training had to happen, and that the amount of training to date had been insubstantial. In the view of a male shop steward:

Well, training should be ongoing all of the time. It’s a process of learning, isn’t it? It’s a continual ongoing thing... you go forward, you’ve got to train, you’ve got to be trained.

The importance of any training being properly accredited was stressed by both union and management committee members, and this view had clearly been reflected in the wording of the interim agreement.

The timing of any future training had not at this time been part of discussions. Certainly, any training that had been offered by the company in the past had been offered within normal working hours, and there had thus been no testing of employees’ willingness to participate in training out of hours. According to a management representative:

I don’t think we have an agreed position yet, but personally I think the company will give as much encouragement and time as possible, but then would expect the employee equally to put in time in their own hours.

The view of the union members of the JCC was that people would not participate in training out of normal work hours. Members of the JCC pointed out that this would be especially difficult for women workers. Comments included:

It depends on the family, because a lot of the people as well have got children, they’ve got to get their kids minded... I’ve got to go home to children.

Yes, the majority of women won’t do it.

It’s harder for women than probably it is for a man... because women go home and cook and clean and look after children.

There was some spirited debate about the relative difficulties for women and men, with one younger NESB male asserting: ‘I think the majority of the husbands would say, “Right, go to the training, don’t worry, I’ll look after the kids, I’ll do this, I’ll do that”.’

This provoked much derisive mirth from the women present. A rather older male NESB committee member summed up the discussion by agreeing with the women that the families and/or husbands of many of the women working at Herbert Adams would not be happy for the women to stay after work: ‘Yes, too right, yes, it’s a big problem, yes!’ This is clearly an issue that management and workers are going to have to consider in the future provision of training, as foreshadowed in the interim agreement.

As with the other companies in this study, there is a problem of communication in a workplace where more than fourteen different languages are spoken. Management sees this as a priority area to address: ‘I guess the first training course we implement is the English language and literacy’. The intention was to
issue, in about seven different languages, a one page summary of discussions coming out of the JCC. According to management, this emanated from problems encountered in the past with the dissemination of information:

It was a real problem, a lot of mis-information getting back to the work force, a lot of rumours flying around the place, and that’s when we decided we had to come up with written communication back to the work force regarding each of these meetings . . . We discovered that written communication is not all that useful if it’s only in English, and hence we’ve gone the next step . . . The last meeting we had we got seven languages plus English translated, and it was all put up on a page handout that was available to everybody . . . I think that’s the way we will continue unless we can find a better way of communicating.

The company has offered several rounds of redundancy packages in the past few years. The main group of workers applying for voluntary redundancy were the older workers who had been with the company for many years, and whose English language skills were not very high. This was seen as a mixed blessing by management. When asked if it was in the company’s interest for older workers to leave in this way, the management response was:

Yes, and no. A lot of the older people [provide] a stabilisation. They don’t speak good English, they don’t really want to know about [training], they’re not interested in progressing their career at the age of 58 or so, they’re happy to see out their last days where they are. But they come to work every day, they’re on time every day, they’re polite, they don’t cause trouble, they work very well with the people around them, and they’re a stabilising influence. You can’t afford to get rid of all of them—I wouldn’t like to see all of them go like that. You can’t afford to build up your factory with a lot of hot-heads either.

Styles of work are also under examination at the company. Ways of introducing a team approach to working are being explored, with management appearing more sanguine about the benefits of this approach than the workers or the union.

A management representative commented:

We’re certainly trying to get more team oriented, more participative in our management style . . . We have got probably six or eight teams now working in the production areas for shop-floor involvement—and the supervisors—and they’re working on particular production problems . . . For the whole process of team work, if you had a look at it from here it is just suited ideally for teams; it just flows from making the pastry, down into putting the pastry on the pies, down into the ovens and through into the boxes. It’s just a natural process for team area work groups.

Shop stewards on the JCC were more sceptical:

We need a lot of programming and a lot of organisation, then we’ll put it to use . . . See, it’s not only changes to the people’s attitude, its a change to the management’s attitude. The management’s got the attitude that they are still king of the castle . . . In between management and employees we’ve got a big gap, huge gap. If we don’t sort of make that gap a lot smaller, forget about it.
Manufacturing uncertainty

Union officials of the LHMWU were also unconvinced of the benefits to the workers of a move to team-oriented work styles. They felt that in their experience, this approach at other companies had not been positive:

The only effect was to put more pressure on team members. Workers were given more quotas, and the idea of quotas is to help team members get on with each other—this does not happen. People are not happy. It has in fact narrowed the number of tasks done because teams don’t move outside their own range of tasks . . . it becomes restrictive rather than broadening.

Again, the challenge for Herbert Adams is to come up with a model of team work that broadens rather than reduces the capacity to learn new skills, and that any training reinforces the benefits of this model of working.

Whatever the eventual outcome, both management and the shop-floor JCC members appeared to agree on the importance of a consultative process to determine the future of training at the company. As one of the JCC members argued:

Well, [the workers] will be consulted. I mean, you have to look at what people want to do, what sort of training people think they need, and then what sort of training the company thinks they need, and see how you can marry them off.

Given the practical experience of the companies in the previous two case studies, it will be interesting to look at Herbert Adams’ progress in a few years time, and to see if they did take advantage of the lessons emerging from companies already much further down the training track.

Lanes Biscuits

Lanes Biscuits Pty Ltd (referred to as ‘Lanes’ in the following text) is a biscuit manufacturer in the outer Melbourne suburb of Broadmeadows. The company had previously been ‘Nabisco’ until it was taken over by the New Zealand-owned Lanes organisation. Nabisco had been operating within an uncertain financial climate for a number of years before Lanes’ takeover. Staff reported that the future of the organisation had been unclear during those years, and that employees had operated in an almost constant environment of job insecurity. During that time, the company appears to have done nothing in the area of training, functioning as it was in a virtual state of limbo. Indeed, almost no training had ever been implemented for production staff. With the arrival of the new management, training was just beginning to be considered in conjunction with a number of other changes to the focus of the organisation.

Yet again, it was difficult to obtain accurate personnel records detailing gender and country of birth for the workers engaged in production in the three shifts operating at Lanes—day, afternoon, and evening. Workers in all three shifts were interviewed for this study.

As with the other three companies participating in this study, the figures provided proved to be somewhat inaccurate. According to the company records, permanent production employees numbered around 230, of whom about 44 per cent were
women and 56 per cent men. Company records also indicated that NESB workers at Lanes comprised around 70 per cent of the production staff, with those from an AB/ESB about 30 per cent. In fact, the percentage of production workers from a NESB appeared higher than the recorded numbers indicated, due to the same confusion between ‘Australia-born’ and ‘Australian citizen’ encountered in the data collected by all the companies in our study.

According to the company records, the numerically dominant countries of birth at Lanes were (in numerical order) Australia, Viet Nam, Portugal, Malta, Italy, Greece, and Turkey. These figures appeared to bear a reasonable relation to reality, apart from the figures for Malta which seemed inflated. Overall, some 31 different countries of birth were represented in the production area.

The type of training available to workers at Lanes had historically been a rudimentary amount of tuition for machine-operators, a small amount of first aid and hygiene courses for some workers, and training for a fork-lift licence for others. Management attitude to future training appeared rather ambivalent. In the view of one management representative:

Well from here we need to look at the training being done on a broad base because effectively the enterprise bargaining is the sort of cornerstone of everything... The basis of training is absolutely critical to where we have to go, but training on its own without motivation gets you nowhere.

In addition, this manager felt that:

We have a couple of people in the union side that believe that training is going to resolve all of the problems, and they are very enthusiastic, which is fine. But what is happening is that some of the supervisors are seeing this as if it is going to erode some authority, and there is a bit of conflict.

In relation to the type of training the management considered the company might pursue, English language and literacy appeared to be a priority:

One of the areas we need to do a lot of work in, I believe, is to get people to be able to understand, to be able to read and write, in English. That's the first step, if you can't read and write you're having problems. Then after that we need to go down the track in relation to training for operators, in terms of being able to run the machinery.

As an initial step towards the possible provision of English language training, the company had recently received Federal Government funding via FILLIP, and had contracted Broadmeadows TAFE College to conduct a language and literacy audit of its NESB workers. To the disappointment of Lanes' management, this had taken much longer to implement than the company had imagined, a problem in their view due primarily to staffing difficulties at Broadmeadows TAFE. In response to a question about the possibility of providing an integrated model of training incorporating both English and industry specific courses such as the NCFP, the answer from management was not very positive: 'We have looked at that as a matter of course. I sort of floated that idea with a few people and they're
not interested.' The problem appeared to be a perception that if this form of certificate training was offered, participants would expect to be paid overtime rates if it was out of normal shift time, and that this expectation was unreasonable. Workers appeared to have little knowledge of this type of training.

As a result of the enterprise bargaining agreement that had been signed in May 1993, a JCC had been established to consider a number of workplace issues, including training. This committee consisted of six management and six union representatives, all of whom were shop stewards from the three unions covering the production area: the AMWU, the EEPAWU, and the LHMWU. While four of the six union representatives on the JCC were women, all of the management representatives were male.

The company had recently attempted to start a small amount of specific training in some of the packing areas, particularly where there had been expenditure on new machinery. A management representative described the process:

a subcommittee [of the JCC] made up of five members has started to institute a training program for operators and people generally in that area. [Tasks] like identifying the people who should be trained, to what level of skill they should be trained, when they should be trained, and whether the manner of training will be classroom and/or on-the-job training. It sets the first major formalised step through the JCC for training. I would guess that they would be more recognised now that we have a need for a lot more training in the company as there has not been a lot over the last number of years.

Given this developing attention to issues of training, it was rather surprising that this was not reflected in the 1993 enterprise agreement. The only references to training were in a clause stating that, 'Subject to classification, training, skill and ability to perform the job, operators may exercise new duties, such as assisting with changeovers, setting up and minor adjustments to equipment', and in another concerning the establishment of the JCC: 'All members of the Committee shall receive consistent and detailed training and the best practice concepts as soon as possible after their appointment'. The issue of more broadly applied work-related training was not covered in this agreement, but a management representative commented that he would suggest that it came up 'the next time around'. Officials of the LHMWU felt that although training had not been addressed in many enterprise agreement negotiations, the union was looking at getting training built into awards. However, with the growing emphasis on the importance of enterprise specific agreements, it seems increasingly critical to build training into the negotiated agreement processes.

The feeling of the shop-floor members of the JCC was that interest in training had mainly been expressed by younger workers, and predominantly by men. A female shop steward explained the apparent lack of interest by women in training as being part of the history of the company:

I think basically this place falls down as in the past it's always been men orientated... women have always been pushed to the background, and never got the
the opportunity that the men have got, and I think that's why the women sort of lag behind in going for something like this...

In relation to promotion possibilities, a male management representative said:

Generally the only area where ladies really have had the opportunity to sort of grow within the company is perhaps [to become] leading hands, then supervisors, then shift-supervisors. There's not much other possibilities... generally it's easier for men.

Clearly, as there are only a limited number of these jobs, few women have been able take on positions of responsibility. Another female member of the JCC complained: 'We've got quite a few capable women here that haven't had the chance to have an advance in their work... they just don't get the chance'.

In a company where male Anglo-Celtic management and supervisory practices appear to have been the norm, the opportunities for NESB women to move into more responsible jobs seem to have been minimal, despite the fact that they comprise about 30 per cent of the production workforce.

Summary

It is clear that production workers at both Herbert Adams and Lanes have had minimal opportunities in the past to participate in forms of training that would increase either their language and literacy levels or their skill base. As NESB workers comprise large percentages of the work force in these companies, this has had the inevitable consequence of limiting job opportunities, and perpetuating Anglo-Celtic hegemonic work practices and leadership styles. Women in both companies have had few chances to move into more responsible positions, and for NESB women this has been particularly difficult while their English language skills have not been developed.

At the time of interview, both companies appeared poised to initiate some form of training for their production workers. Of the two companies, Lanes seemed the less interested in training that would involve food-industry certificate accredited programs. In discussion, neither company would commit themselves to a model of integrated language and skill training, despite this model having the benefit of providing a context for the teaching of English language and literacy. Union officials from the LHMWU similarly did not appear to know very much about the NCFP, although they did indicate that they were about to become more involved in the VFITB. Union action within the industry promoting this or similar forms of accredited training may be more sustained with this increased participation in VFITB activities.

Given the experience of training developments in other industries, there is a clear opportunity for the food industry to learn from both successful and unsuccessful practices of the implementation of work-related training. Indeed, some companies in the food industry are already providing innovative training programs for their workers. Herbert Adams and Lanes have the opportunity to benefit from existing knowledge in this area, and develop programs that will assist their companies to progress, while workers increase their skills.
Manufacturing uncertainty

The study sample

Demographic and social characteristics

Country of birth

Table 7.1 details the self-identified countries of birth of the interviewees at both Herbert Adams and Lanes. The major countries of birth represented in our sample at Herbert Adams (Australia, Macedonia, Greece, Italy, and Viet Nam) and Lanes.

Table 7.1: Self-identified country of birth of interviewees at Herbert Adams and Lanes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of birth</th>
<th>Herbert Adams</th>
<th>Lanes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia-Herzegovina</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Timor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibraltar</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seychelles</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The food industry

(Australia, Viet Nam, Portugal, Greece, Turkey, Croatia, Italy, and Malta) were very similar to the numerically dominant groups at both companies, with some minor variations. The number of non-AB interviewees from an ESB at Herbert Adams was three (two women and one man), while at Lanes there were eight (four women and four men).

**Gender**

The background and gender composition of the interviewees at both companies are presented in table 7.2. In the sample at Herbert Adams, there are smaller numbers of AB/ESB women and men than of NESB men, even though every available AB/ESB male and female worker in the production area was interviewed. This demonstrates the inaccuracy of the company figures, which indicate far higher percentages of AB workers than is actually the case.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent of total</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent of total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert Adams</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB/ESB</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lanes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB/ESB</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This was also the situation with the workers at Lanes, with fewer AB males than the company figures indicated. The number of women interviewed at both companies was close to double the number of men, and more than twice as many as workers from a NESB were interviewed from an AB/ESB.

**Period of residence in Australia**

The length of time lived in Australia by overseas-born interviewees at Herbert Adams ranged from 4 to 40 years, while at Lanes the range was 4–43 years. At Lanes, over half of both NESB female and male interviewees had lived in Australia for longer than 21 years, as had 54 per cent of the NESB women interviewed at Herbert Adams. Of the NESB males in the sample at Herbert Adams, over 50 per cent had lived in Australia for longer than 16 years.
Languages spoken
From the sample at Lanes, one NESB woman spoke five languages, and six women spoke four languages, as did three NESB women at Herbert Adams. Over 10 per cent of the NESB women and men in the sample at both companies spoke three languages, and yet there had been no formalised use of their language skills at either workplace.

Age
The age profiles of the sample at the two companies had some similarities: over 60 per cent of both groups of NESB women were in the range of 41–60 years; over 50 per cent of the AB/ESB males interviewed at both companies were in the younger age category of 21–30 years; and around 50 per cent of the two groups of NESB males were in the range of 21–40 years. The main difference was between the AB/ESB females: at Herbert Adams these interviewees were a younger group, with two-thirds aged 21–40 years, while at Lanes nearly 75 per cent were in the 41–60 age-group.

Marital and parental status
Of both groups of NESB female interviewees, over 90 per cent were married, as were over 80 per cent of both groups of NESB males and 50 per cent of both groups of AB/ESB males. Again the main difference in the samples of the two companies were the AB/ESB women: at Herbert Adams less than 50 per cent were married compared with 87 per cent at Lanes, thus reflecting their differing age distribution and also the fact that at Herbert Adams there was a bigger percentage of AB/ESB women in de facto relationships. This difference is reflected in the percentage of AB/ESB women with children: 96 per cent at Lanes, and only 46 per cent at Herbert Adams (most of these women in both groups still had children living at home). Of the NESB women at both companies, over 94 per cent had children, 90 per cent of whom (for both groups) were still living at home. Of the men, less than half of both groups of AB/ESB men had children, compared with 70 per cent and more of the two groups of NESB men.

The picture that emerges from interviewees at both companies is of two groups of older NESB women, slightly younger NESB males, and even younger AB/ESB males. Family responsibilities were a constant reality for nearly all of the two groups of NESB women, for most of the AB/ESB women at Lanes, and for just under half of the AB/ESB women at Herbert Adams.

Education and work history
Education
Once again, the group profiles of the interviewees at the two companies are quite similar, except that three NESB women and one AB/ESB woman at Herbert Adams reported that they had received no formal education. Of both groups of NESB women and men, over a third had spent 3–7 years at school, around half had spent 8–13 years, and over 7 per cent had spent more than 13 years. Of both groups of AB/ESB women and men, over 90 per cent had spent 8–13 years at
The food industry

school. Many NESB interviewees had clearly received less formal education overall than had the majority of the AB/ESB interviewees.

Qualifications gained in Australia

High percentages of the NESB workers interviewed at both companies reported that they had no formal qualifications gained in Australia. Of the AB/ESB interviewees, while most of the women at both companies had no qualifications, several at Herbert Adams had either a trade certificate or a diploma (unrelated to their current job) and one had a university degree. The largest difference was between the two groups of AB/ESB males—at Herbert Adams over half had no qualifications (with the remainder holding work-related licences or tickets) while at Lanes, 72 per cent had some form of credential (again predominantly fork-lift licences or tickets). Most of the workers interviewed, however, had not engaged in training in Australia that had resulted in a formal credential that would have enhanced their job prospects.

Overseas qualifications

Of the ESB women and men interviewed at the two companies, none of the women had any overseas qualifications, while one ESB man at each company had trade certificates gained overseas which they had tried without success to have accredited in Australia. Of the NESB interviewees with overseas qualifications, two women at Herbert Adams and one woman and one man at Lanes had university degrees; four women and three men at Herbert Adams, and three women and two men at Lanes had trade certificates; and five women and two men at Herbert Adams and three women at Lanes had diplomas. None of these qualifications had been accredited in Australia, and only one had any relation to the work in which the holders of these qualifications were currently engaged.

This does seem to be a waste of skills and competencies. Herbert Adams management indicated that while they currently had no system for gaining information about overseas qualifications other than word of mouth, they have ordered a system that should be capable of extracting that type of data: ‘a databank of all employees’ full details and what qualifications they’ve got and how their training is progressing and such—a full personnel base’. Given the data inaccuracies encountered during this research, this is a welcome development at this company. At Lanes, the response was not quite so definite:

It is something I haven’t put a lot of energy into, but it is something we should in fact probably look at in an ongoing basis. But generally speaking, jobs that require that sort of level of training don’t come up very often, and frequently what happens is that those people [with qualifications] leave anyway because they have got a job somewhere else.

The accuracy of this perception is uncertain, but even if it is true, if people with qualifications relevant to the company were given a chance to demonstrate and utilise their particular competencies, perhaps they would then stay longer with the organisation.
Manufacturing uncertainty

Work force participation
At Herbert Adams, over half of the AB/ESB and NESB women recorded that they had been in the work force in Australia for more than 16 years, while the NESB males' Australian work force participation was more evenly spread over 6–30 years. Over 50 per cent of the AB/ESB males had worked in Australia for shorter periods of 3–10 years. Time spent at the Herbert Adams worksite for over two-thirds of all four groups ranged from 3 to 10 years.

At Herbert Adams, while two-thirds of the AB/ESB males reported that they had been doing the same job for 1–3 years, over 50 per cent of the NESB and AB/ESB women had been in the same job for much longer: periods of 6–15 years. The majority of the NESB males were clustered in the range of 4–10 years doing the same job.

At Lanes, Australian work force participation for 70 per cent of the AB/ESB women was in the range 16–30 years, while for the NESB women and men it was evenly distributed over 6–30 years. Over 50 per cent of the AB/ESB males had worked for 6–15 years, again shorter periods of time overall than the majority of the other three groups. Over two-thirds of the AB/ESB men and the AB/ESB and NESB women, had worked at the Lanes (and Nabisco) workplace for 6–15 years. Of the NESB males, a third had been there for between 6–10 years, and a further third for between 16–30+ years.

Over 40 per cent of the AB/ESB and NESB women and 50 per cent of the AB/ESB men at Lanes had spent 6–10 years in the same job. Quite a large percentage of the two NESB groups (29 per cent of the women and 35 per cent of the men) had spent 11–15 years doing the same work. This could not have given them much opportunity to learn new skills. There is clearly a challenge here to explore new forms of work organisation to enable these workers to expand their skill and competency base.

Task rotation
Forty per cent of the NESB men and women at Lanes reported that they were never moved around to different tasks within their job. Over 30 per cent of the AB/ESB women and men reported the same situation in relation to their work. For these people, the lack of task rotation means that they are never given the opportunity to learn anything that may assist them to get better jobs, either at Lanes or elsewhere. In addition, the sheer boredom of the constant repetition involved in doing the same work over long periods of time must be very wearing.

At Herbert Adams, the percentages of people in this situation were even higher than at Lanes. A third of the AB/ESB men, over half of the AB/ESB women and the NESB men, and a very high 71 per cent of the NESB women reported that they never altered their tasks or job. Multiskilling has clearly not been well understood or implemented at this workplace. There is an opportunity for this to be addressed in the proposed training program the company and the union foreshadow in their interim enterprise agreement.
Role in supervision
Among the sample at Herbert Adams, none of the female interviewees—either AB/ESB or NESB—were in positions of leading hand, team leader or forewoman, contrasting with 25 per cent of the AB/ESB males and 12 per cent of the NESB males who were leading hands. We interviewed one NESB female supervisor who commented that her position was unusual in the workplace. At Lanes, there were more female leading hands among the interviewees: 13 per cent of the AB/ESB women and 8 per cent of the NESB women, compared with 21 per cent of the AB/ESB males and 28 per cent of the NESB males. There are few chances for any worker on the shop floor to move into a position with additional responsibility, but for women the opportunities are even more limited in work cultures where male supervisory practices have been the historical norm. With interest developing in moving toward a more team-oriented approach, it will be interesting to see if more women are given opportunities to assume positions with increased responsibility.

Income levels
As in all the case studies, most workers could not give an accurate estimate of their gross pay levels and the data were therefore unreliable. However, the relative importance to the household of personal income was able to be estimated. Table 7.3 details the proportion of interviewees at both companies for whom their own pay was the major income for their households. For the large majority of NESB women in our sample at both companies, their income was not the major contribution to their household, contrasting sharply with over 80 per cent of the NESB males at both workplaces whose pay was the major income for the household. As high percentages of NESB women at both companies were married, this indicates that most of them earned less than their husbands—data which are supported in the wider population by the uneven distribution of income between women and men. Consistent with this phenomenon is that at both workplaces, higher percentages of AB/ESB males than AB/ESB females earned the major income for their households. A higher proportion of AB/ESB women at Herbert Adams than at Lanes were the major income earners for their households, which may be explained by the fact that more of the AB/ESB women in the sample at Herbert Adams were single, and hence possibly in households where their income was the sole contribution.

Table 7.3: Proportion of interviewees earning the major income for their household

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Herbert Adams (%)</th>
<th>Lanes (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB/ESB</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>88.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Manufacturing uncertainty

Transport
Transport is a potential difficulty for participation in training which is conducted outside normal shift time. If workers are reliant on others, or on public transport, for transport to and from work, independence of movement is made difficult. At Herbert Adams and at Lanes, this issue was of most relevance to the NESB women interviewees, as around 40 per cent of them at both workplaces relied either on their husbands, on other workers, or on public transport for access to their place of work. The lack of transport independence for these women would need to be considered in decisions about timing of any training programs.

Numeracy and English language

Numeracy
While over 80 per cent of AB/ESB women and men at both companies felt confident in their ability to use graphs and charts at work, over 30 per cent of both groups of NESB women and men said that they were either not at all or not very confident in this area. At Lanes, more of the NESB women (59 per cent) than at Herbert Adams (41 per cent) expressed confidence in their capacity to do ‘everyday’ maths, compared with 48 per cent of the AB/ESB women at Lanes and 64 per cent at Herbert Adams. When these figures are considered in combination with the fact that over 30 per cent of the NESB males at both companies stated they did not feel confident in this area, there is still quite a large proportion of the sample who did not feel confident using simple maths. This has clear implications for the amount of numeracy training that may be necessary if production procedures are to become more numerically complex.

Language and literacy
Despite the fact that some interviewees at Herbert Adams had participated in English classes at work, the level of confidence in English language skills was slightly higher among NESB workers at Lanes. While the AB/ESB workers at both companies expressed no difficulty in their English reading and writing capacities, only 25 per cent of the NESB women and 40 per cent of the NESB men at Herbert Adams said they could read English as well as they could speak it. This compares with 57 per cent of the NESB women and 48 per cent of the NESB men at Lanes. In relation to the capacity to write English as well as they could speak it, at Herbert Adams 20 per cent of the NESB women and 28 per cent of the NESB men responded that they could, while at Lanes 40 per cent of the NESB women and 27 per cent of the NESB men responded similarly. Clearly at both companies, for our sample at least, levels of confidence in English literacy skills are demonstrably quite low for many NESB workers.

The data concerning English language presented in the remainder of this language and literacy section include only the responses of those interviewees who were born outside Australia, and for whom English was not the main language learnt as a child. The data therefore represent the views and experiences of those NESB workers for whom English was at best their second language, ranging through to
negligible English language proficiency at the time of interview (79 at Herbert Adams and 69 at Lanes).

Over 80 per cent of these NESB workers at Lanes—both female and male—reported that they spoke no English at all on arrival in Australia. At Herbert Adams, the percentages in this category were smaller—73 per cent of the NESB women and 55 per cent of the NESB men. Table 7.4 details the self-assessed level of English language competency at the time of interview. It must be remembered that these figures represent a subjective assessment rather than any professional measurement of English language capacity. With this caveat, however, table 7.4 indicates that at both companies about two-thirds of the NESB women and men describe their English as ‘poor’ or ‘fair’. More of the NESB women at Herbert Adams (24 per cent) than any of the other groups felt that their English was ‘poor’. Again, this has implications for confidence about participation in any future work-related training, unless it is accompanied by language classes integrated with the skill training.

Table 7.4: Self-assessed level of English language competency of a selection of NESB workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herbert Adams</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lanes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: At Herbert Adams n = 79 and at Lanes n = 69.

While over 50 per cent of both NESB women and men at Herbert Adams had done English classes (primarily at work, in paid work time, and not combined with any work-related training), only a third of the NESB women and men at Lanes had participated in any English language training. For all of these people at Lanes, the classes had not been at work.

Over three-quarters of NESB women and men at both companies considered that it was important or very important to be able to speak English in their work area. Table 7.5 outlines the multiple responses of these NESB workers to a range of possible outcomes if they spoke better English. In the view of high proportions of all these NESB groups, both female and male, there are positive perceived outcomes in relation to their working lives in being able to speak better English, particularly at Herbert Adams. The only outcome not seen as being affected by increased English language ability by the majority of interviewees was an increased involvement with their union.
Manufacturing uncertainty

Table 7.5: NESB workers’ views on possible outcomes of speaking better English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible outcomes</th>
<th>Herbert Adams (%)</th>
<th>Lanes (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would apply for better paid jobs</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier to get a better job</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would enjoy work more</td>
<td>86.4</td>
<td>95.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would do more training at work</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would be more involved with the union</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: At Herbert Adams n = 79 and at Lanes n = 69.

Child-care
At Herbert Adams, of those interviewees who had children of an age requiring child-care, 100 per cent of the AB/ESB women and the NESB men, and 69 per cent of the NESB women felt that it would be either difficult or impossible to participate in training out of normal working hours. Three-quarters of the AB/ESB men did not consider this to be a problem.

At Lanes, where on average the children were older, the possibility of participating in training out of work hours did not present a problem in relation to child-care for as many of the interviewees. However, it still would be difficult or impossible for 40 per cent of the NESB women and 46 per cent of the NESB men with children. Only a few AB/ESB women and men had children of child-care age, and they were equally distributed across ‘difficult’ and ‘manageable’ in relation to child-care and participation in out of hours training.

Children of both female and male NESB workers at both companies were looked after by either spouses or other family members while the interviewee was at work. The numbers of workers, either male or female, AB/ESB or NESB, who used child-care centres or family day care was negligible. In nearly all cases, the families of these workers provided the necessary child-care support, but this ‘service’ clearly did not extend to looking after children out of work hours. Again, this has implications for the timing of any possible work-based training.

Workplace culture
Attitudes to relative treatment in the workplace of women and men, and AB/ESB and NESB workers were explored. Table 7.6 outlines the perceptions of the interviewees on these issues. Despite the fact that NESB workers outnumbered AB/ESB workers by two to one, nearly half of the NESB women and nearly two-thirds of the NESB men interviewed considered that Australian-born workers were treated better than immigrant workers at Herbert Adams. This perception was clearly not shared by many of the AB/ESB workers. Conversely, more of the AB/ESB than the NESB workers considered that immigrant workers received better treatment. Of all four groups, 40 per cent or more thought that some immigrant workers were treated better than others, with more of the NESB
women agreeing than the other groups. In relation to the relative treatment of men and women in a workplace where there are twice as many men as women, AB/ESB women felt most strongly that men were treated better than women, while about a third of the NESB women agreed with this proposition. The perceptions of the AB/ESB men and the NESB men to this issue were reasonably evenly matched.

At Lanes the reactions to the same issues indicate similar variations in attitudes with regard to the relative treatment of Australia-born and immigrant workers. Many NESB workers in the sample considered that they were not as well treated as Australia-born workers and vice-versa. The more interesting figures in this table are those relating to the relative treatment of men and women. High percentages of both NESB and AB/ESB women interviewees considered that men were treated better than women at Lanes. In a workplace where women comprise only 30 per cent of the work force, and where the work culture is strongly delineated along gender lines, this is perhaps not surprising.

If the views of the women in the sample are indicative of the broader group of women at Lanes (more than 70 per cent of whom are from a NESB), then these women may not feel very supported or encouraged about entering into training programs in an environment which they consider is less sympathetic to their interests than to those of male employees. If the proportion of NESB women engaging in training is to be increased, workplaces may need to look critically at their workplace culture in order to ensure greater parity between women and men.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Propositions agreed to or strongly agreed to</th>
<th>Herbert Adams</th>
<th>Lanes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nesb (%)</td>
<td>Ab/ESB (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB workers are treated better than other workers</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>64.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant workers are treated better than AB workers</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some immigrant workers are treated better than other immigrant workers</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All workers are treated the same</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are treated better than men</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men are treated better than women</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men and women are treated equally</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Manufacturing uncertainty

Training and skills
This section examines knowledge of workplace issues, and details the type of training undertaken by interviewees at the two companies. As the amount of training available at Herbert Adams and at Lanes at the time of interview was minimal, the data presented here will not be as detailed as in the previous two case studies.

Knowledge of workplace issues
The data from the two companies is remarkably similar in relation to workers' knowledge of workplace issues. Overall, female and male workers from an AB/ESB were much more informed about both award restructuring and enterprise bargaining than either women or men from NESBs. Percentages of NESB workers who had heard of either of these workplace issues were quite low in the two companies, and the NESB women appeared particularly uninformed. As none of the available information at either workplace had been translated into languages other than English, this was not surprising.

These findings, concerning the paucity of knowledge held by NESB workers about workplace issues, are consistent with those from the two companies in the previous case studies. If these workers are to participate more fully in training and workplace change, they will need to be provided with information in a form that can be understood. Appropriate communication strategies of companies and/or unions are clearly necessary.

It was puzzling, therefore, that, in the view of the union officials who were interviewed for the study, interpreters at Herbert Adams were not really needed for union meetings. Given the self-assessed levels of English language proficiency described earlier (table 7.4), the views of the union officials appear to be somewhat unrealistic. If the data from these two companies concerning the limited levels of understanding about changes at the workplace and in the industrial arena are representative of the wider shop-floor population, there is a real need for verbal and written material to be translated. Initiatives implemented by management at Herbert Adams outlined earlier in this chapter, such as translating summaries of decisions made at JCC meetings, are a positive start to the process of ensuring that all workers are informed about any industrial or procedural changes occurring at their workplace. It is more likely that workers will agree to participate in new programs if they feel informed—and hence more in control—of their working lives.

Participation in work-related training
Interviewees were asked if anyone at their workplace had ever talked to them about how they might get a better paid job. At both Herbert Adams and Lanes, over 80 per cent of all groups indicated that this had never happened. Similar percentages of the sample responded that no person from their workplace had ever talked to them about ways in which they might get a job they preferred more than the one in which they currently worked. The significance of this is reinforced...
when considered in relation to the length of time many workers at the two companies had been in the same job (see Education and work history: Work force participation).

The desire to participate in training appeared at both companies to be much greater than the opportunity to actually engage in any. Table 7.7 details these differences. There was generally more enthusiasm for training at Herbert Adams than at Lanes. An Italy-born woman at Lanes thought that more people would be interested in the idea of training if they could see some positive outcomes: ‘There is no point in doing more training because there are limited opportunities to apply the training here’.

Table 7.7: Comparison between percentages of interviewees wanting to do training and those actually doing it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Wanting to do training (%)</th>
<th>Actually doing training (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert Adams</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB/ESB</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>84.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lanes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB/ESB</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>48.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nevertheless, there was still a far greater indication of willingness to participate in training than there had been opportunities to do so. NESB women at each company were the group with the second highest percentage of expressed interest. Anecdotally we had been told that at these workplaces most NESB women were not interested in or willing to participate in training. The figures from our sample seem to suggest otherwise.

Exploring this interest further, Table 7.8 lists multiple reasons for participating in training at work. The most important reason for participating in training according to a high percentage of the NESB women in the sample at Herbert Adams was to get a better paid job. Almost three-quarters of this group considered a further reason was to make work more interesting, which is not surprising considering many of them had been doing the same job with little or no variation for some years. Two-thirds thought the need to understand more about changes in technology was an important reason, and 62 per cent were interested in learning more skills.

These figures are consistent with those from Ford and Preslite (tables 5.12 and 6.11), and indicate an interest by relatively high proportions of NESB women in participating in training. Table 7.8 provides a number of motivating factors for this stated interest. Many AB/ESB women in the Herbert Adams sample shared
these perceptions, which demonstrates that for this group of women at least, there appears to be a desire to participate in work-related training. The majority of the two groups of women did not indicate a great deal of interest in team leader or supervisory positions as a reason for doing training, but again this may be because, as the woman quoted above observed, they do not see the opportunities at their workplaces to move into such positions.

High percentages of both groups of male interviewees at Herbert Adams also demonstrated interest in a range of reasons for participating in training. Opportunities to satisfy this interest would add to the skill base of the employees, and also hopefully to the competitive edge the industry is currently seeking.

At Lanes, the responses of interviewees to the same list of reasons for participating in training at work, indicate again, that there was interest from high percentages of NESB women interviewees—and also from the other three groups—in participating in training for a variety of reasons. Considering that historically there has been little formalised training activity at both these companies, the interest in participating in training must appear heartening to companies considering the implementation of more organised training procedures in the future.

As the amount of training in the past at both companies had consisted primarily of small amounts of either hygiene, first aid, fork-lift, or rudimentary English language training, and a large number of interviewees in our study had not participated in these, the actual figures on the amount of training undertaken are not worth citing. Most of the Lanes sample had been given some brief training at their workstation, but there were a number of complaints voiced about the

| Reasons for doing training | Herbert Adams | | | Lanes | | |
|----------------------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|
|                            | NESB (%)      | AB/ESB (%)  | NESB (%)     | AB/ESB (%)    |             |
| To get a better paid job   | 87.7          | 80.0        | 100.0        | 83.3          |             |
| To make work more          | 72.3          | 76.0        | 100.0        | 91.7          |             |
| interesting               |               |             |              |               |             |
| To understand more about   | 66.2          | 76.0        | 63.6         | 91.7          |             |
| changes in technology      |               |             |              |               |             |
| To learn more skills       | 61.5          | 80.0        | 100.0        | 91.7          |             |
| Afraid of losing job if    | 50.8          | 28.0        | 9.1          | 33.3          |             |
| don't do training          |               |             |              |               |             |
| Will lose pay if don't     | 44.6          | 58.3        | 9.1          | 8.3           |             |
| do training                |               |             |              |               |             |
| To become a supervisor     | 18.5          | 40.0        | 36.4         | 66.7          |             |
| To become a team leader or | 20.0          | 36.0        | 27.3         | 33.3          |             |
| leading hand               |               |             |              |               |             |
reduction in this learning period at the company: 'they should give more time to learn what you need to learn on the machines. Before, [people] got five to ten days. Now they get two to three days, or only one day if short of staff.'

At Herbert Adams, apart from two males, none of the interviewees reported that they had been given a 'learning period' in their jobs. They complained that they were just expected to pick up what was necessary as they went along, although as many of them were not moved around to new jobs very often, this was not a current problem for those who had been doing the same work for a long time. It does indicate, however, the low priority demonstrated by the company in the past to the teaching and learning of skills necessary for jobs on the shop floor, which could be of particular concern in the area of machine operation.

The picture that has emerged from the data at both of these workplaces is of organisations that have ignored the training and skill development needs of their production workers, to the point where many of these people have been in long-term repetitive jobs with little prospect of change or promotion. Despite this neglect, the majority of the workers—including the NESB women—have indicated an interest in participating in work-related training for a number of specific reasons. Far from being a dulled and indifferent work force, the people interviewed had retained a desire to get more from their working lives than had been possible to date, although some of the older workers felt that perhaps it was too late for them.

**Attitudes to training**

Having established why the interviewees would be interested in participating in work-related training, we sought their views on the reasons why people generally participate in training (not just at their particular workplace but more widely in the community). Their responses to a series of propositions on this subject are outlined in table 7.9. The perception at Herbert Adams that training at work is worth doing was felt by high percentages of all four groups to be a reason for people to undertake training, as was the view that people participate in training because it makes them feel more useful and confident workers. Far fewer of the NESB women thought that training would help women to move into positions of responsibility at work than agreed with the proposition that it would help men. Perhaps they were reflecting on their own workplace experience.

In response to the same set of propositions, high proportions of all four groups of interviewees at Lanes agreed with the propositions, apart from the statement about people being afraid of losing their jobs. This view of training as important for respect from the community, and for parents to be able to help their children, gives further indication of the value that is placed on the acquisition of skills. Despite the fact that so many of the women at Lanes felt that men were treated better than women at their workplace (table 7.6), they still thought that women could be given opportunities to move into a leadership position if they had access to training.
## Table 7.9: Attitudes to training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Propositions agreed to or strongly agreed to</th>
<th>Herbert Adams</th>
<th>Lanes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NESB (%)</td>
<td>AB/ESB (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training at work is worth doing</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People do training because it makes them feel more useful and confident workers</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People do training at work because they are afraid of losing their jobs</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>72.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a person can learn good work skills, they feel they are more likely to be respected in their family and community</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>96.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents feel that it is important to get better skills at work so they can be of more help to their children</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>88.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training gives opportunities for men to move into positions as leaders at work</td>
<td>92.4</td>
<td>76.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training gives opportunities for women to move into positions as leaders at work</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To explore further the views of the interviewees on reasons for the lower participation rate of women than men in most work-related training, a series of deliberately provocative statements were given. The responses to these statements are compiled in table 7.10. The AB/ESB women in the sample at Herbert Adams clearly demonstrated disagreement with the first proposition, that men should be the major income earners and so should do more training. This is probably not surprising, as over half of the AB/ESB women in this sample recorded that they were the major income earners in their households (table 7.3). The responses of the NESB women and men at Herbert Adams indicated that quite a high percentage held a fairly traditional view of the relative roles of women and men. Combined with the responses to the next proposition, that women do not do much training because the men in their lives do not think it is important for women to get more skills, the NESB women in particular present an image of the realities of life of a rather older, traditional group of immigrant women. It was interesting that 50 per cent of the AB/ESB males—a younger group than the NESB men overall—also shared this perception.

The proposition that men can understand the type of training done at work better than women can, and that this may be a reason for the lower participation rate of women in training, was not acceptable to the majority of any of the four groups at Herbert Adams. The next statement, concerning women-only classes, was not agreed with by the majority of NESB women and men, but surprisingly, 83 per cent of the AB/ESB males agreed with this proposition. At Herbert Adams large percentages of all four groups, and in particular the NESB women, agreed that women would do more training if they thought it would make a real difference to their job prospects. One NESB woman summed up her views on barriers to the participation in training: 'Women don’t do training because they have kids, and have to cook for husbands!' She continued to explain that the reason men do not want women to do training is, ‘because they think the women will be late home to cook their meals!'

The NESB women in the sample at Lanes appear to be a group with more independent and progressive views about the relative positions of women and men than their counterparts at Herbert Adams. Of this group at Lanes, 72 per cent disagreed that men should be the major income earners and so do more training, even though these omen were the group with the lowest percentage of major income earners in their households (table 7.3). The NESB men at Lanes, however, presented a much more traditional perspective, with 72 per cent agreeing with the proposition. If many of their wives work at Lanes, there may be some interesting discussions about who will participate in any future training!

Less than half of all four groups at Lanes agreed that a further reason for women’s lower participation in training is that the men they live with do not think it is important for women to get more skills. The next proposition, that men can understand the type of training done at work better than women can, was received with a particular lack of enthusiasm by the two groups of women, while nearly 50 per cent of the NESB males agreed. Many of the NESB men at Lanes clearly
Table 7.10: Views on possible reasons why women do less training than men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Propositions agreed to or strongly agreed to</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NESB (%)</td>
<td>AB/ESB (%)</td>
<td>NESB (%)</td>
<td>AB/ESB (%)</td>
<td>NESB (%)</td>
<td>AB/ESB (%)</td>
<td>NESB (%)</td>
<td>AB/ESB (%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females Males</td>
<td>Females Males</td>
<td>Females Males</td>
<td>Females Males</td>
<td>Females Males</td>
<td>Females Males</td>
<td>Females Males</td>
<td>Females Males</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men should be the major income earners in the family, and so should do more training than women</td>
<td>61.5 64.0</td>
<td>18.2 33.3</td>
<td>28.3 72.3</td>
<td>21.7 42.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women do not do much training because their husbands or boy friends do not think it is important for women to get more skills</td>
<td>66.1 40.0</td>
<td>36.4 50.0</td>
<td>43.3 34.5</td>
<td>30.4 42.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men can understand the type of training done at work better than women can</td>
<td>26.2 24.0</td>
<td>9.1 16.7</td>
<td>11.1 48.2</td>
<td>8.7 21.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women would be more likely to do training at work if there were women-only classes</td>
<td>21.5 40.0</td>
<td>54.6 83.3</td>
<td>47.1 62.1</td>
<td>47.8 57.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women would do more training at work if they thought it would give them a real chance to move into a job with more responsibility</td>
<td>92.3 72.0</td>
<td>81.9 83.3</td>
<td>98.1 86.2</td>
<td>95.7 26.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
see males as dominant and more capable at work, and appropriately located in the breadwinning role. More of the men than the women in this sample considered that more women would participate in training if there were classes for women only. The AB/ESB men at Lanes were the only group with a high proportion disagreeing with the final proposition that women would do more training if they thought that it would really help them to get a more responsible job. Despite their generally younger age distribution in the Lanes sample, quite a number of AB/ESB men overall have responded to this set of propositions in a manner that indicates a fairly conservative perception of the relative merits and roles of women and men.

Summary
Concluding this training and skills section, the data indicate that despite having had few opportunities to engage in training, many of the workers at the two companies have a positive perception of the value of work-related training, and see participation as useful. Consistent with the data from Ford and Preslite, many of the NESB women at Herbert Adams and Lanes defy the anecdotal view that NESB women are not interested in training at work. What would be particularly difficult for them is participation in a program held outside normal shift hours. As with numbers of female workers at the other workplaces in this study, many have family responsibilities that limit the time they can spend engaged in an activity that, from the perspective of the family, does not have the legitimacy that sanctions participation in other after-hours activities, such as working overtime.

Many of the workers at Herbert Adams and Lanes have been engaged in the same activities in their workplace for far too long. If companies are serious about investing in training programs intended to raise the skill levels of their work force, their funding would arguably be better spent devising a process that gives their workers some choice, and some empowerment over their working lives. If they implement training out of work hours, they will be forcing women, particularly NESB women, to choose between family responsibilities and training, which is no choice at all. Giving workers English language training that has no work-related context will limit their capacity to learn new work skills in a supported environment. These are the sorts of issues with which companies will need to grapple in order to create a workplace, and a work force, that can truly aim at international competitiveness and excellence.

The future at Herbert Adams and Lanes
When asked what the work force at Herbert Adams would look like in five years time, one of the managers said:

Educated I guess . . . A lot of migrants . . . Probably a fair bit younger than it is now, but you would still have a lot of females . . . because a lot of the work is not heavy and not hard . . . and English-speaking.
Manufacturing uncertainty

When members of the Herbert Adams JCC were asked to describe their ‘wish-list’ for the future, one male shop steward said decisively:

I think the main thing here we are all looking for is job security . . . Job security is the main point of everything . . . I mean, training, communication and everything like that falls in under that one umbrella. If you haven’t got job security then you can forget about your communications, your training, forget about your money too, because there’s nothing there.

The question this raises is whether these two perspectives are compatible. How is job security achieved in a climate of changing work practices, with altered demands and shifting priorities? What job security has an older NESB woman who has been kept on the same job for ten years, who has had no opportunity to develop a range of work skills, and whose responsibilities outside work preclude her from participating in after hours English language and work training programs? Apart from being female, she does not fit the general description of the manager’s ‘employee of the future’. These are serious issues, of relevance to large numbers of workers in the manufacturing industry.

At Lanes, it was possible to visualise the picture of the future in rather more detail, and with a bleaker outlook for certain groups of workers. A management representative forecast that in five years time:

the number of people would be less. I suggest that the manual work would be reduced to less than half. Probably if I had my way, maybe down to 10 per cent. We would have a lot of automation, hopefully including robots. Our work force would be much higher in skill levels, especially electronics, and probably our number of electricians may well have doubled or trebled in that time . . . Our requirement for manual work will diminish rapidly, but our requirement for skills, particular skills, is going to increase. So computers will be all over the place . . . Effectively, I don’t believe that all the people we have got here now will in fact be here then.

This scenario too does not seem to leave a place for the unskilled immigrant worker with low levels of English language proficiency. The question must be asked about the work future of these workers: Where will they go? Who will employ them? What is government doing about this aspect of employment and potential unemployment?

In this changing work environment, with its emphasis on skill, English language and communication, and fewer workers, this manager did see some possibilities for increasing the number of women in more responsible positions in his company. These will not be the unskilled women, but those with the training to take advantage of changing work styles. He commented:

Some of the problems here are that a lot of the leading hands, the supervisors, had to get involved with some fairly heavy work. Now that is being eliminated, slowly but surely, and women are taking more active roles in machine operations because they don’t physically have to do things. It is a matter of punching in numbers into screens, and they’re very happy to do that and they understand what you are talking
about. And they're very quick in the overall sense. But as far as I am concerned, in
the food industry women are more intelligent, because they have had to go to work
to sustain their way of life. It is not a matter of just working because it is something
to do. They have had to work to improve their standard of living, and therefore
they have a better incentive to have a job and maintain it, and I find they are far
more intelligent.

While this augurs well for some of the more skilled women workers, it does not
provide a positive outlook for older, less trained workers, particularly women,
whose spoken English is not adequate to meet the rigours of the technologically
driven future. As one of these older NESB women dryly commented: 'Men got
more time to do a course!'. Women also must be given their share of time if they
are to participate equally in the job market of the future.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

This research study examined specific experiences of AB/ESB and NESB female and male production workers in relation to training at work. The purpose was to establish, at a microlevel, the reasons why NESB women generally have a lower participation rate in training than NESB men, and AB/ESB women and men. Quantitative data have suggested that the major reason for this disparity is English language proficiency. We explored this proposal further, and heard from workers themselves about their views on work-related training and workplace change. The nature of these changes in the workplace and the industrial relations system are detailed in chapter 2. The central theme developed in this chapter concerns the disadvantage experienced by many NESB women in the workforce and in the process of change. As there was little literature available specifically on NESB women and training, a broader literature review was undertaken of material dealing with this topic more broadly, such as award restructuring, enterprise bargaining, and training and skills. From this literature review (chapter 3), and consistent with the theme developed in chapter 2, we concluded that women generally, and NESB women in particular, have not benefited from initiatives undertaken to restructure and reform the industrial arena.

Work practices historically have been constructed in a form that generally advantages men over women, and AB/ESB workers over NESB workers. In this way, NESB women are doubly disadvantaged. The literature suggests that recent workplace changes do not appear to have made any real impact on this hierarchy of opportunity.

A research process was designed to elicit demographic, experiential, and attitudinal data relating to the work experiences of AB/ESB and NESB women and men. Chapter 4 describes the research method. By conducting face-to-face interviews with workers in their own first language, we consider that we have collected reliable data in an appropriate manner. We feel that this is an important methodological issue.

Four companies in three sectors of the manufacturing industry participated in the study. The selected companies presented differing training experiences, ranging from English language and literacy and work-related accredited programs which had been underway for several years, to almost no work-related training at all. With this varied training profile, we were able to explore workers’ views about training, irrespective of the extent of their participation in any training programs. Chapters 5–7 outlined the research findings of the case-studies: chapter 5 was concerned with Ford (Broadmeadows), in the vehicle industry; chapter 6 with Preslite Australia, in the metals and engineering industry; and chapter 7 with Herbert Adams Bakeries and Lanes Biscuits, in the food industry.

While the implementation of training differs at the four companies, our findings indicate some clear similarities in perceptions and attitudes towards work-related training; some important indications about barriers to training; and some projections about future work profiles that raise concerns about the employment prospects of workers with low levels of skills and English language proficiency.
Conclusion

Attitudes to training

We had been told a number of times at an anecdotal level that NESB women generally are not interested in the idea of training. Our findings indicate otherwise. The responses of the NESB women interviewed to a range of issues related to work and training were consistently positive. High proportions of these female interviewees from all four companies indicated that if they spoke better English, there would be real benefits: they would apply for better paid jobs; it would be easier to get a better job; they would enjoy work more; and they would do more training at work.

Far from being uninterested in work-related training, consistently high percentages of NESB women from the four workplaces gave the following reasons for their interest in participating in structured training at work:

☐ to get a better paid job;
☐ to learn more skills;
☐ to make work more interesting; and
☐ to learn more about changes in technology.

While the proportions of NESB women interested in undertaking training in order to become a supervisor or leading hand were uniformly quite low, in some cases they were higher than for the corresponding AB/ESB women and men, or the NESB men. Some women from a NESB thus indicated that they had job aspirations beyond their current positions, and would be willing to take on additional responsibility. This again was contrary to general perceptions of female NESB workers.

At the two companies in the food industry where training in the workplace was not well established (Herbert Adams and Lanes), attitudes to training were nevertheless revealing. Over 85 per cent of the NESB women interviewed at both companies considered that training at work was worth doing, and there was a far greater indication of willingness by these women to participate in training than there had been opportunities to do so. However, there was also evidence that this willingness could not extend to participation in training outside work hours. This was for a variety of reasons, but primarily due to the demands of family and home. Activities which threatened to keep the wife/mother from fulfilling her responsibilities in the household were not sanctioned by family members, and often not by the woman herself.

Barriers to training and skill development

Having established the high level of interest in training among the NESB female interviewees, it was important then to determine the proportions of NESB women who had actually participated in any work-related training, and in what circumstances. At Ford, where an integrated English language and VIC training program have been implemented for a number of years, both in and out of work
hours, nearly half of the NESB women in our sample had not participated in any work-related training (either language or certificate based) in their time at that company. The proportion of NESB women participants in the VIC program (41 per cent) was in sharp contrast to over 70 per cent of the NESB men and the AB/ESB women and men who had undertaken VIC training. There were five major reasons given by the NESB women for not participating in any structured training, in the following order:

- they felt that their English was not good enough to participate;
- training was out of normal work hours;
- it took too long to finish;
- it was in unpaid time; and
- they had child-care difficulties.

So, despite a clear indication of interest by high proportions of our sample of NESB women at Ford in the notion of training, there were either skill barriers (English language) or structural barriers (such as training being out of work hours) which prevented them from undertaking a training program designed to provide them with an accredited certificate. This clearly operated to deepen the disadvantage which the literature suggests many NESB women experience in the workplace.

A contrasting model of training provision at Preslite offered further insights. Preslite provides both English language and certificate (EPC) training in work hours via the Federal Government sponsored TASK program. Only 12 per cent of the NESB women had not done any work-related training at Preslite, compared with 45 per cent at Ford. Nearly 80 per cent of the Preslite NESB women had participated in English language training, and 57 per cent in the EPC program. While the proportion of NESB women engaged in EPC training was lower than that of the other three groups, it may be explained by the fact that they had not completed sufficient language and literacy training to progress to the certificate-only classes, but were poised to do so when their English language skills had increased.

When these data from Ford and Preslite are compared, and combined with the stated interest in training from the NESB women, it suggests that given accessible training arrangements and structures, high percentages of the NESB women interviewed were more than willing to participate in training programs, either language or skill based, or both. However, it appears that if the training is provided at a time that conflicts with expectations to fulfil family responsibilities at home (as at Ford), training is not an option for many NESB (and AB/ESB) women. In making this comparison, we recognise that Ford and Preslite are two different case studies having quite different characteristics, such as size, industry, work force composition, industrial and training arrangements and so on. Nevertheless, it is clear that, in spite of these differences, a common element of
responses by women workers in both plants was the perceived difficulty of undertaking training outside normal working hours. While the fact that training was available in work hours at Preslite cannot be conclusively linked with the higher participation rate of NESB women in training at that plant, it is reasonable to suggest that this was likely to be an important factor. This is supported by the statements of the Preslite women themselves, who indicated they would be less likely to participate in training outside normal work hours.

In relation to the proposition from Baker and Wooden (1991) that a major reason for the lower participation rate of NESB women in training is difficulty with English language, our findings support this conclusion, but suggest that wider reasons must also be sought. For the NESB women at Ford, both language difficulties and structural barriers were seen to limit the opportunities of many of them to participate in the English language and VIC training program. In the case study at Preslite, where those structural barriers were not in existence, the percentage of NESB women who did not participate in training was quite low (12 per cent).

Reasons put forward for NESB women's lower rate of participation in training have tended to rely on 'problems' with the women themselves, such as 'lack' of English language proficiency. A more helpful, and more strategic perspective, would be to locate explanations for this phenomenon in the identification of structural barriers which operate to exclude certain groups from equal access to the provision of training. For example, if language and literacy training was conducted at a time that recognised the broad family responsibilities of many workers (particularly women), access for NESB workers would be facilitated and their English language skills could be enhanced. By shifting the responsibility away from workers, impetus for change moves towards industry and government. Resources to identify and remove existing barriers will need to be forthcoming if women, and particularly NESB women, are empowered to compete equally for their share of the training agenda.

There were a range of other issues that impinged on work practice and culture. Sexual harassment was cited as a problem in some workplaces, especially where the culture was strongly marked as masculine. Ford in particular was making attempts in combination with the union to have some positive impact on this unacceptable practice. Until these kinds of issues are strongly condemned and appropriate action taken, workplaces continue for many women to be hostile environments.

We found that information provision in an appropriate form about changes at work was of concern to many workers. At all four companies, the proportions of interviewees who recorded that they either had not received or did not understand material about award restructuring, enterprise bargaining, or available training, were much higher for the NESB women and men than for the AB/ESB workers. While there did seem to be a real effort in this regard from Ford and the
AMEUVD in particular, generally communication strategies seem to need considerable attention in the future if all workers are to be informed about changes that affect their working lives.

One of the underlying principles of award restructuring was the issue of multiskilling. This necessarily involves workers being given opportunities to move to different types of jobs, and to perform a variety of tasks. In this way, skills may be broadened, and the potential for gaining new and perhaps more responsible positions would be enhanced. For many workers at the two companies with minimal training (Herbert Adams and Lanes), however, this does not happen.

This was particularly apparent for the NESB women we interviewed. At Herbert Adams, over 70 per cent of the NESB women reported that they never altered their tasks and they always stayed in the same type of job. At Lanes, over 40 per cent of the NESB women indicated the same situation. Task variation was more usual in the two companies where there were training programs (Ford and Preslite), but considering that rotation was an integral component of these programs, there was a surprisingly high number of interviewees who were never, or only minimally, moved around. This seems paradoxical in an environment where the rhetoric of skill upgrading is cited as an essential component of workplace reform.

Future employment profiles in the manufacturing industry

A further finding of considerable importance was the view expressed by some of the managers about the future of their workplaces. Recruitment policies and practices will reflect the companies’ desire to employ a more skilled work force, capable of considerable adaptation to change, and willing to move along the pathways delineated by increased training and skill. One manager envisaged workers of the future at his company as ‘white Anglo-Saxon Protestant and much better educated . . .’ Recent recruiting at the plant had confirmed the accuracy of his prediction. The implications of this for NESB workers, especially the older women and men, are serious indeed.

An additional concern at another company was the gender bias of possible recruitment. In this workplace, work traditionally seen as ‘appropriate’ for women was increasingly being given to men to perform. If this had been a two-way process, with tasks historically labelled as ‘men’s work’ being given to women to do, this would not have been a problem. However, this was not the case. The effect was clear—numbers of men would be increasing in areas of work new to them, while numbers of women in these same areas would therefore have to shrink to accommodate the transferring males. This results in diminishing job opportunities for women and expanded task areas for men.

The employment/unemployment consequences of this development are obvious. For those women without sufficient job skills—many of whom are from a NESB—re-entering the labour market presents a forbidding future of poor job prospects.
To minimise the impact of these changes, a commitment to industry training in accessible form is urgently needed to enable workers to have the opportunity of participation, irrespective of country of birth or gender.

Conclusion

This study does not, of course, claim to be representative of the three industry sectors. The object was to provide a case-study approach that reflected a variety of work practices, and a range of views that gave a voice to groups of workers in the analysis of effects of change. Our findings indicate that while there were different rates and models of training development in the four companies, there were similarities in the views and experiences of shop-floor workers—particularly of many NESB women. Almost universally, these women demonstrated an interest in the notion of training, and in the potential benefits that training could bring. Consistent across the four workplaces was the view that training out of work hours was not a suitable model for people with family responsibilities, the majority of whom were women, and in particular NESB women.

Unless companies and industry generally are willing to explore this further in their own workplaces, and can exercise some imaginative and creative planning in the provision of work-based training, our data suggest that for many workers—particularly for many NESB women workers—the opportunity to participate in skill enhancement in their workplaces will be nothing more than a mirage.

Suggestions for further research

Arising from this study, the authors make the following suggestions for further areas of research:

- Given that a greater number of NESB women work in community services (101 700), than in manufacturing (92 400), the findings of this study suggest that it would be important to investigate issues related to NESB women’s participation in workplace reform and training in community services. As the community services industry differs significantly from manufacturing in many of its characteristics, such as structure of ownership, size of undertaking, work-force composition and employment practices, a study of this area may provide important and unique insights into the situation of NESB women with respect to training in this industry.

- An area which appears to have been little researched is that of management perceptions and attitudes to the training of NESB workers, both men and women. A larger study which focused on this aspect could provide valuable data—from a management perspective—on reasons for training patterns across various industries, particularly in relation to NESB workers. The findings of this research would assist policy-makers in determining how best to allocate training resources to various industries.
A follow-up study on NESB women and training in manufacturing industry, to be conducted in five years time, is recommended in order to ascertain what changes, if any, have occurred in the implementation of industry certificates and the participation of NESB women in such training. It would be important to gauge whether the attitudes and experiences of NESB women with regard to training have changed, and whether they have succeeded in gaining more access to training or remain underrepresented in training activities.
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### Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AB/ESB workers</th>
<th>4, 5, 31, 33</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>at Ford</td>
<td>56, 63, 64, 65, 69, 70, 74, 79, 80, 81, 85, 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>birhplaces</td>
<td>49, 63, 103, 141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in food industry selected companies</td>
<td>141, 142, 146, 150, 152, 153, 155, 157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcorso, C.</td>
<td>13, 28, 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apius Network</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
<td>2, 12, 14, 22, 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Industrial Relations Commission</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Language and Literacy Policy</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Manufacturing Council</td>
<td>1, 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey</td>
<td>10, 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collective agreements and NESB workers</td>
<td>10-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>award restructuring</td>
<td>7-9, 23-4, 165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immigrants and</td>
<td>26-7, 76-7, 115, 151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge of</td>
<td>76-7, 91, 115, 164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women and</td>
<td>15, 24-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Baker, M. | xiv, xvii, 2, 17, 22, 31, 32, 37, 47, 80, 81, 82, 119, 120, 126, 164 |
| Baldock, C. | 22, 25 |
| Bean, R. | 33 |
| Bee, B. | 22 |
| Bell, S. | 8, 37 |
| Bertone, S. x | 13, 19, 28, 76, 90, 115 |
| birthplaces of interviewees | 49, 63, 97, 103, 141 |
| Boland, C. | 27 |
| Boxhall, P. | 1, 23 |
| Brown, A. | 35 |
| Bureau of Immigration and Population Research | 13 |
| Bureau of Immigration Research | 12 |
| Burgmann, M. | 25 |
| Burton, C. | 34 |
| Chataway, G. | xiv, 1, 14, 20 |
| Cox, E. | 30 |
| Curthoys, A. | 20 |
| D’Arcy, B. | 28 |
| Deery, S. | 8 |
| definitions | 5-6 |
| Department of Employment, Education and Training | 16, 23, 33, 34, 35 |
| Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs | 19, 30 |
| Department of Industrial Relations | 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 25 |
| Dibden, C. | 27 |
| Docherty, J. | 8 |
| Eisenstein, H. | 62 |
| Employee Relations Act 1992 (Vic.) | 7 |
| Engineering Skills Training Board | 23-4, 39, 40, 93, 94, 95, 96 |
| English language and literacy training | xvi, 11, 12, 18-19, 33-5, 57, 72-3, 89, 99, 111, 118-19, 148-9, 162 |
| results of | 33, 73, 112 |
| enterprise bargaining | 9-12, 77-8, 134, 139 |
| Enterprise Bargaining Principle | 9 |
| Structural Efficiency Principle | 7-9 |
| understanding of issues | 77-8, 115 |
| women and | 25-6 |
| Ewer, P. | 25 |
| Fincher, R. | 28 |
| Flatau, P. | 23, 27, 29 |
| food industry | 38-9, 130-60 |
| access to training | 132 |
| Food Industry Language and Literacy Initiative Program | 131 |
| industry earnings | 130 |
Industry Training Plan (ITP) 130, 131
NESB women in 38
National Certificate in Food Processing 131–3
numbers employed 130
skills of workers 130
women employed 130
see also Herbert Adams Bakeries, and Lanes Biscuits
Food Industry Language and Literacy Initiative Program (FILLIP) 131, 138
Ford Australia xvii, 41, 45, 47, 49, 54–92
ages of interviewees 65
attitudes to training 79, 84–8, 89, 163
awareness of work issues 76–8
barriers to training participation xvii, 59–60, 83, 87
birthplaces of workers 57, 63
child-care 73–4
education levels of workers 66
employee numbers 56
English language classes xvii, 57, 63, 80
future trends 91–2
gender of workers 56–7
income levels 70
leadership roles 69–70
length of residence of workers 64
literacy and numeracy 71–3
marital status of interviewees 65–6
NESB workers xvii, 42, 56, 80, 89, 163
Natural Work Groups 62–3
overtime 70–1
participation in training xvii, 57, 59, 78–82, 163, 164
promotional opportunities 79, 80
qualifications of workers 66–8
sexual harassment 60, 75–6, 164
task rotation 68–9
training provided 42, 57–60, 81–4
transport to work 71
union attitudes towards 90
union views on training 88
Vehicle Industry Certificate xvii, 39, 55, 60–2, 66–7, 80, 82–4, 88
women workers 42, 56, 57, 58, 64
work force participation 67–8
workplace culture 74–5
Ford Australia Enterprise Agreement 1993 58
‘Fordism’ xiv, 1
Post-Fordism 9
Foster, L. xv, 3, 12, 27, 29, 37, 38, 40, 95
Franzway, S. 24
Game, A. 20
Goddard, R. 132
Griffin, G. 13, 19, 28, 76, 90, 115
Hag, R. 34
Hall, P. 24, 25
Harrison, G. 13, 30
Hemmings, P. 23, 27, 29
Henry, M. 24
Herbert Adams Bakeries 41, 47, 133–7
age of employees 143
attitudes to training 154–8
awareness of work issues 151
birthplaces of employees 134, 141
child-care 149
dissemination of information 136
education of employees 143
English language training 134, 135–6
enterprise bargaining agreement 134–5
future trends 158
gender of employees 142
income levels 146
Joint Consultative Committee 134–7, 159
labour force participation 145
leadership positions 146
length of residence of employees 142
literacy and numeracy 147–9
marital status of employees 143
participation of employees 144
qualifications of employees 144
task rotation 145
training provided 43, 134, 135
work teams 136–7
workplace culture 149–50
Hill, E. 26, 28
Hill, M. 18, 28, 38
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 23
How Workers Get Their Training 31
Index

illiteracy rates 18, 33
Industrial Relations Act 1988 9
information provision in workplace xviii, 76–8, 114–16, 136, 164
Iredale, R. 21, 28, 34

Jamrozik, A. 27
Jobson, S. 30

Knox, M. 10, 12, 19, 22, 33

labour force Australia
  gender segmentation 13–15, 20, 24
  mobility 28
  NESB workers 12, 30
  numbers of 12
  participation 12, 30, 107–8, 145
  women in 13, 30
Labour Market Alternatives 11, 25, 26
Labour Research Centre 17, 18, 24, 25
Lanes Biscuits Pty Ltd 41, 45, 47, 137–40
  age of employees 143
  attitudes to training 154–8
  awareness of work issues 151
  birthplaces of employees 138, 141
  child-care 149
  education of employees 143
  English language training 138
  enterprise bargaining agreement 139
  future trends 158
  gender of employees 142
  income levels 146
  Joint Consultative Committee 139
  labour force participation 145
  leadership positions 146
  length of residence of employees 142
  literacy and numeracy 147–9
  marital status of employees 142
  number of employees 137
  participation in training 151–4
  qualifications of employees 144
  task rotation 145
  training provided 43, 138
  workplace culture 149–50

Lever-Tracy, C. 28, 29, 90
Levine, M. 28, 43, 54
Lewis, H. 1
literacy 18, 33, 72–3, 110–12, 132, 147

McCredie, S. 24
MacDonald, H. 16, 17, 18, 33, 72
McKenzie, D. 54
McLennan, P. 28, 43, 54
Madden, K. 1
manufacturing industry
  decline of 8
  future employment profiles 165–6
  NESB women in xv, 12, 13–15, 37
  numbers employed xv, 3
  sectors 38–40
  structural change in 3, 15–18
  training in 2, 16–17, 31, 37
Marshall, A. xv, 3, 12, 27, 29, 37, 38, 40, 95
Martin, J. 30
Mathews, J. 1, 25
metals and engineering industry 39–40, 93–129
  access to training 40, 94
  employment in 93, 94
  Industry Training Plan (ITP) 93, 94
  training issues 95–7
  women employed in 40, 96
see also Preslite Australia
Miltenyi, G. 33
Mitchell, M. 27
Morrissey, M. 12, 26, 27
multiskilling xviii, 165

NESB immigrants
  and restructuring 26–7
  birthplaces 49, 63, 97, 103, 134, 141
  discrimination against 29
  labour force participation 12, 30, 107–8
  participation in unions 13, 15, 62
  skills recognition 34
NESB women immigrants
  access to training 2, 17–18, 30, 57, 58, 88, 132, 163
Index

age of interviewees 65, 105, 143
attitude to training xvi, xix, 17, 79, 82–8, 116–17, 122–6, 155–8, 162, 163
awareness of work issues xviii, 76–8, 91, 114–16, 151, 164
child-care 73–4, 112, 149
definition of xv, 5
disadvantage of xiv, xvi, 30, 161, 163
English language courses 11–12, 33, 72–3, 99, 111, 118–19, 163
English language problems xvii, 17–19, 32, 59, 83, 89, 110, 161
external training xiv, 2, 31, 81, 120
future employment outlook xviii, 165–6
in manufacturing xv, 3, 13–15, 37
in-house training xiv, 2, 31, 81, 120
income levels 70, 109, 146
industries employing 37
labour force participation 30, 107–8
leadership positions xvi, 69–70, 109, 118, 146, 162
length of residence 64, 104
literacy and numeracy 71–3, 110–12, 147–9
marital status 65–6, 105–6
on-the-job training xiv, 2, 31, 81, 120, 126
overtime worked 71
participation in training xiv, xvii, xviii, 14, 29, 31, 32, 37, 58, 59, 78–84, 116–20, 152–4, 161
position in industry 1, 13–15
reasons for non-participation in training xiv, xvii, 82–4, 86–9, 121–2, 132, 162–3
recognition of overseas qualifications 20–1, 26, 67, 107, 144
recognition of skills 19–21, 34–5
study for qualifications xiv, 2
transport to work 71, 110, 147
unemployment 29, 30
union participation 15, 62
workplace agreements and 10–12
workplace change and 14–15, 76–8

National Advisory Committee on Skills Recognition 20, 35
National Automotive Industry Training Board 39
National Certificate in Food Processing (NCFP) 131–3
National Training Board 17
numeracy 71, 110, 132, 147
occupational mobility 28
O’Donnell, C. 25
Office of Multicultural Affairs 21, 34

part-time workers 14
Pearce, J. 28, 43, 54
Peetz, D. 8
personal data held by employers 47, 53, 56, 133, 144
Pickersgill, R. 22
Pinkstone, B. 12, 26
Plowman, D. 8
Pocock, B. 34
Preslite Australia 41, 45, 47, 97–129
ages of interviewees 105
attitude to training 116–17, 122–6
awareness of workplace issues 144–6
barriers to training 121, 125–7
birthplaces of workers 97, 103
child-care 112
EPC training xvii, 40, 94, 95–7, 98, 99, 115, 118–19, 163
Education and Training Committee 99–102, 127
education levels 106
enterprise agreements 115–16
future trends 127–9
gender of employees 103–4
income levels 109
labour force participation 107–8
language and literacy training xvii, 98, 99, 111–12, 118, 163
leadership positions 109, 118
length of residence of interviewees 104
literacy and numeracy 110–12
number of employees 97
qualifications of workers 106
tariffs and 93
task rotation 108
TASK training xvii, 98–9
views on training provided 100–2, 120–1
women workers 42, 74
Index

work teams 102-3
workplace culture 113-14
Preston, A. 8, 27
Prices and Incomes Accord 7, 8
Pringle, R. 20
Probert, B. 24
Quinlan, M. 28, 29, 90
recognition of overseas qualifications 20-1, 26, 34-5, 55, 67, 107, 144
recognition of prior learning (RPL) 35, 56, 58, 67, 107, 133
research aims 1-3
research methodology 4, 5, 37-53
access to workers 45
company selections 40-3
data collection 43-9
industry selection 37-40
interviewees 46-51
questionnaire 46
research issues 52-3
research suggestions 166-7
Sachs, J. xiv, 1, 14, 20
Sawer, M. 62
sexual harassment xviii, 60, 75-6, 164
Singh, S. 19, 33
skills, recognition of 19-21, 34-5
State Training Board and Manufacturing Council of Victoria 23
Stephens, J. x
Stewart, D. 27
Stromback, T. 27
Structural Efficiency Principle 7-8, 9
‘Taylorist’ management principles 1, 9
Thomson, G. 34
training
assessment 83-4, 121
attitudes to xix, 17, 79, 82-8, 116-17, 122-6, 154-8, 162
awareness of workplace issues 76-8, 114-16
barriers to participation xvii-xviii, 32, 59, 83-4, 88, 89, 126, 132, 162-3, 164
Carmichael Report 55
definition of 22, 31
effectiveness of plans 24
English language and literacy 18-19, 33-5, 57, 59, 72-3, 80, 89, 99, 111, 118-19, 148-9, 162
external courses 2, 31, 32, 81, 119, 120
Ford Australia 42, 57-60
in-house courses xiv, 2, 31, 32, 81, 120
literacy of workers 33
multiskilling xviii, 165
numbers participating 57, 78-9, 116, 138
on-the-job xiv, 2, 31, 32, 81, 99, 119, 120, 126, 127
out-of-hours and child-care 71, 73-4, 89, 112, 132, 164
reasons for non participation 82-4, 121-2
reasons for participation xvi, 79-80, 85-8, 112, 117, 153, 162-4
restructuring and 15-18, 23-4
study for qualifications xiv, 2
types of, undertaken 80, 118-19
Vehicle Industry Certificate xvii, 39, 55-62, 66-7, 80, 82-4
views about programs 82-4, 120-1
Turpin, T. 12

Unemployment
and English skills 27
women immigrants 29, 30
unions 90-1
members’ attitudes towards 90, 114
views on training 88
women and voting 62

Vehicle Industry Certificate 39, 55-62, 80
attitudes towards 66-7, 82-4
barriers to participation 59, 88
vehicle manufacturing industry 39, 54-92
employment in 54
tariffs and 54
training per employee 39
VAITP 55
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vehicle Industry Certificate</strong> 39, 55–62, 66–7, 80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>see also</em> Ford Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victorian Automotive Industry Training Board</strong> 24, 39, 55–6, 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victorian Food Industry Training Board</strong> 24, 38, 130, 131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Walker, D. 130</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Webber, M. 28</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Williams, L. xv, 3, 12, 29, 37, 38, 40, 95</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wilson, B. 24</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Windsor, K. 24</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women's Employment Branch 13</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wooden, M. xiv, xvii, 2, 17, 22, 27, 31, 32, 37, 47, 80, 81, 82, 119, 120, 126, 164</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Workplace Bargaining Survey 10</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yeatman, A. 25, 26, 27</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BUREAU OF IMMIGRATION, MULTICULTURAL AND POPULATION RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

The Bureau has an extensive list of research publications on immigration, multicultural and population issues in Australia. The following is a selection of these publications.

*Australian Immigration: A Survey of the Issues* (second edition) by Mark Wooden, Robert Holton, Graeme Hugo and Judith Sloan, National Institute of Labour Studies, Flinders University of South Australia, Bedford Park

*Community Profiles, 1991 Census*, by Statistics Section, BIMPR, Canberra

*Disadvantage and Children of Immigrants: A Longitudinal Study* by Janet Taylor and Helen MacDonald, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne

*The Economic Implications of Emigration from Australia* by Graeme Hugo, University of Adelaide

*Exile or Refugee?: The Settlement of Refugee, Humanitarian and Displaced Immigrants* by James Jupp, Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies, Australian National University, Canberra

*Labour Market Barriers for Immigrant Engineers in Australia* by Lesleyanne Hawthorne, BIMPR, Melbourne

*Migration Oz: A Secondary Education Resource Kit* by the History Teachers' Association of Victoria, Melbourne

*Mosques and Muslims in Australia* by Gary D. Bouma, Monash University, Melbourne

*Regional Population Decline in Australia* by Fiona McKenzie, BIMPR, Melbourne

*Regional Population Growth in Australia* by Chris Maher and Robert J. Stimson, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne

*The Role of Skilled Temporary Residents in the Australian Labour Market* by Clive Brooks, Jill Murphy and Lynne S. Williams, BIMPR, Melbourne

*The Social Characteristics of Immigrants in Australia* by Australian Bureau of Statistics, Queensland

Bureau publications are available for sale at Commonwealth Government bookshops.
Recently the agenda has been set for a restructuring of Australian manufacturing, with a declared intention to move to more flexible and potentially more democratic forms of work, offering workers the opportunity to receive structured accredited training, upgrade skills, move between jobs and access career paths. The manufacturing industry employs a large number of people, including a significant proportion of women from a non-English-speaking background (NESB). As a group, NESB women workers are predominantly employed at the bottom of work pyramids, as production or process workers, with little avenue for advancement.

Using a case-study approach, *Manufacturing Uncertainty* looks at the specific experience of a sample of NESB women in the manufacturing industry in relation to work-related training, as well as:

- the specific factors responsible for the disadvantaged position of NESB women in relation to work-related training;
- current trends in the manufacturing industry which may affect the future access and participation of NESB women in work-related training;
- recent initiatives in the manufacturing industry which have the potential to improve the access and participation of NESB women in work-related training;
- any successes relating to individuals or groups of NESB women which can be used as a model for future reforms in this area.

This study does not claim to be representative of the industry sectors studied; rather it reflects a variety of work practices and a range of views regarding the effects of change within the industry. Almost universally, NESB women demonstrated an interest in the notion of training, and in the potential benefits training could bring. Consistent across the four workplaces studied was the view that training outside work hours was not a suitable model for people with familial responsibilities, the majority of whom were women, and in particular NESB women.

Unless companies and industry generally are willing to explore this further in their own workplaces and can exercise some imaginative and creative planning in the provision of work-based training, the data suggest that for many workers—and particularly for many NESB women workers—the opportunity to participate in skill enhancement in their workplaces will be nothing more than a mirage.