Vocational education and training issues for people from a non-English speaking background (NESB).

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Vocational Education and Training Issues for People from a Non-English Speaking Background (NESB)

Australian National Training Authority

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Introduction

The non-English speaking background client group is diverse and complex in its construction. This paper will examine the nature of the non-English speaking background client experience of migration, education, training and employment so that the position of this client group in vocational education and training is better understood. The paper will also provide a platform for the discussion of any actions necessary to improve the vocational education and training experience of clients from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Chapter 1, *Context of Migration Experience*, outlines the development and change to Australia's multicultural profile during the post-war period.

Against this background Chapter 2, *Employment Experience*, outlines the non-English speaking background clients' experience of employment and draws some preliminary conclusions on factors of influence.

Chapter 3, *Vocational Education and Training Experience*, discusses the participation and attainment rates of non-English speaking background clients in vocational education and training. Both contracts of training and overall participation are considered within the context of broader post-secondary participation.

Chapter 4, *Barriers to Equity: Constraints on Access, Participation and Outcomes*, outlines the four primary barriers which constrain the access, participation and outcomes of non-English speaking background clients in vocational education and training. These are: English language skills; the recognition of existing qualifications and skills; access to information about training; and appropriate delivery.

It must be noted that some of the barriers identified in this paper require policy solutions which fall outside ANTA's immediate sphere of influence. While ANTA cannot directly influence these areas, the Authority can promote the interests of NESB clients through the maintenance of a systemic framework which is inclusive of all VET clients, regardless of background.
Chapter 1: Context of Migration Experience

Since 1945, the Australian population has increased from 7 million people to over 18 million people. A significant proportion of this growth is a direct result of the Australian experience of migration. In the 50 years of post-war planned migration there has been:

- approximately one million new arrivals in each of the four decades
- more than 500,000 people arriving under humanitarian programs, initially as displaced persons and more recently as refugees.

Today, nearly one in four of Australia’s 18.5 million people were born overseas.

**Settler Migration Experience**

The source countries for settler arrivals\(^1\) in Australia has changed dramatically during the post-war period. Whilst Britain has remained the largest single source country of migrants, other regions have become increasingly significant.

The non-English speaking client group today represent a far greater percentage of settler arrivals than was the case 30 years ago. Although the United Kingdom and New Zealand remain our two biggest sources of settler arrivals, the proportion of people arriving from “English speaking countries” has decreased steadily in this period.

**Figure 1: Settler Arrivals by Country of Birth, 1965-66 and 1995-96**

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\(^1\) Settler arrivals are all those persons, both visaed and non-visaed, arriving with the intention to settle in Australia. These data are based on statistics obtained from incoming passenger cards and supplemented from visa information (DIMA 1997a, p. vii).
In respect of non-English speaking migrants, there has been a shift from European to Asian regions. This is reflected in a change in the source countries that have the highest ranking. The table below demonstrates this regional shift in source countries in the period 1965-95.

**Table 1: Top Five Source Countries of Birth for Settler Arrivals from Non-English Speaking Countries in Australia, 1965 and 1995**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1965</th>
<th>1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yugloslavia</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Bosnia-Herzegovina</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DIMA 1997b, unpublished.

**Migration and Humanitarian Programs**

Australian immigration consists of two programs: Migration (which has skilled and family streams) and Humanitarian (which caters for refugee or refugee-like situations).

People accepted under the Migration Program, if applying as skilled migrants, must satisfy a points test, have particular work skills, be nominated by particular employers or have successful business skills or significant capital. In addition, family members of migrants are admitted who meet a ‘balance of family’ test. In 1995/96 Australia admitted 82,500 people under the Migration Program. The vocational education and training needs of people admitted through the Migration Program are varied. It can not be assumed that acceptance under the program negates needs for further or specific training, nor that members granted admission as ‘preferential family’ may not have a range of vocational education and training needs.

People accepted under the Humanitarian Program may apply as refugees if they have left their countries to escape persecution and if they meet UN protocols relating to the
status of refugees. Australia has one of the highest per capita refugee resettlement programs in the world. In addition, Australia offers a small number of places to asylum seekers already in Australia who meet the UN protocols. In 1995/96 Australia provided 15,050 places under the Humanitarian Program.

The proportion of migrants under the Humanitarian Programs to Australia has been gradually increasing over the past decade, from around 8.5 per cent in 1987/1988 to 15.4 per cent of all migrants in 1995/1996. While the actual numbers of migrants admitted under the Humanitarian Program remain relatively small (15,050 in 1995/1996) this group often arrive in Australia with very special needs (DIMA, 1997b). Refugees may face greater problems than other migrants in terms of lower levels of English literacy, fewer prior skills or qualifications and lower levels of family or community support on arrival in Australia.

The composition of the Humanitarian Program is constantly changing. In the 1970s the majority of refugees arriving in Australia came from Southeast Asia, in the 1980s the majority were from Central America, and in the 1990s Australia’s refugees are predominantly from the Middle East (following the Gulf War) the former Yugoslav republics, Asia and Africa (DIMA, 1997b). The source countries for refugee arrivals to Australia will continue to change. In 1995/96, those admitted under the Humanitarian Program came from the regions shown below in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Humanitarian Arrivals in Australia by Region of Birth, 1995/96

```
Europe 49.5%
(incl former YR & USSR)

ME & Nth Africa 24.7%

SE Asia 10.2%

Ctl & Sth America 1.6%

Sth Asia 6.7%

Africa (excl Nth Africa) 6.8%

Other 0.5%
```

Source: DIMA, 1997a
Chapter 2: Employment Experience

Labour Force Participation

The labour force participation rates shown below in Table 2 indicate that people born in a non-English speaking (NES) country have a lower rate of labour force participation (53.6 per cent) than either people born overseas in a main English speaking country (64.9 per cent) or people born in Australia (66.7 per cent). In addition, people born in an NES country also have a significantly higher rate of unemployment (10.4 per cent), than people born in a main English speaking country (6.5 per cent) or in Australia (7.7 per cent). These figures of labour force participation reflect a trend that has been in place over the last two decades, particularly for men born in a NES country (DEETYA, 1995).

Table 2: Labour Force Participation Rates by Country of Birth, November 1997, All Ages, (Per Cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation rate</th>
<th>Unemployment rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Born in Australia</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in a main English speaking country</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in a non-English speaking country</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

People born in an NES country also remain unemployed for significantly longer periods than do other labour force participants, although this was not always the case. In the late 1970s, the average period of unemployment for Australian-born persons was 23.6 weeks and 24.8 weeks for NESB persons. By 1995, however, these figures had increased to an average period of 51.8 weeks unemployment for Australian born persons, 73.9 weeks for NESB persons, and 82 weeks for NESB men(O'Loughlin and Watson, 1997).

A closer look at the labour force participation rates for people from specific non-English speaking countries shows that there are wide variations in both participation and unemployment rates. Table 3 indicates, for example, that people born in Lebanon and Greece have low levels of labour force participation and high levels of unemployment, while people born in the Philippines have high levels of labour force participation and relatively low levels of unemployment.
The conditions which contribute to these differences between Australian-born and NESB persons in terms of unemployment rates and length of unemployment are complex and are influenced by a number of factors (DIMA 1997a; O’Loughlin and Watson 1997). It has been noted that NESB unemployment rates often have a close connection with English language proficiency, period of residence in Australia, category of migration, and skills and qualifications. The most important of these is English language proficiency. NESB clients who do not speak any English or who do not speak English well have significantly higher rates of unemployment than those more proficient in English (DIMA 1997a, p. 30).

Research indicates that employment opportunities for well-educated migrants are strongly influenced by the source country of the qualification. This finding is equally applicable to higher education and vocational education and training qualifications (Birrell and Hawthorne 1997; O’Loughlin and Watson 1997).

In a study released in 1997, *Immigrants and the Professions in Australia*, Birrell and Hawthorne found that new migrants with degrees from overseas universities are more likely to be unemployed than to work in their areas of expertise. Whilst restrictive recognition practices play a role, the study found that the primary contributing factor to this labour market outcome was the preference of Australian employers for younger graduates with local qualifications (Birrell and Hawthorne 1997).

The study found that recently arrived migrants with degrees from overseas universities experienced significant difficulty in the labour market due to contracting employment opportunities and relatively poor language skills. Some NESB people also experienced difficulty in having their qualifications recognised by local universities and professional bodies (Birrell and Hawthorne 1997). In contrast, the study found that those migrants who arrived before 1981 and had gained qualifications from Australian universities, had been extremely successful in finding well-paid, professional jobs (Birrell and Hawthorne 1997).

### Table 3: Labour Force Participation by Specific Country of Birth, November 1997, All Ages (Per Cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Participation rate in Labour Force</th>
<th>Unemployment rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FYR*</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*FYR: Former Yugoslav Republics
Source: ABS *Labour Force, November 1997b*
It seems that employers do not generally discriminate against migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds if they hold qualifications from an Australian university. In fact, nearly one third of Australian residents with university degrees were born overseas. The study concluded that concerns about the employment prospects of overseas-born professionals were only justified \textit{in relation to recent arrivals} (Birrell and Hawthorne 1997).
Chapter 3: Vocational Education and Training

Experience

There exists significant variation in the participation and attainment of NESB people in vocational education and training. Variation is the natural corollary of the diversity of the group itself, and denotes the experience of both high achievement and disadvantage within the client group. Low vocational education and training participation rates should not necessarily be construed as negative. In some instances, low vocational education and training participation may be explained by higher university participation. For example, 18.8 per cent of males with Greek-born fathers and 13.1 per cent of males with Italian-born fathers aged between 25 and 34 hold degrees, compared with 10.8 per cent of those with Australian-born fathers and 11.8 per cent of those with German-born fathers (Birrell and Khoo, 1995).

The experience of the second generation of NESB clients differs markedly from the experience of the first generation. Indeed, the children of NESB migrants have been found to be more successful both at school and at work than children with Australian-born fathers. A study completed in conjunction with the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research found that children from non-English speaking backgrounds were more likely to complete secondary school and more likely to gain higher education qualifications and more likely to gain professional jobs than children with Australian-born fathers (Birrell and Khoo, 1995).

Overall Participation

In general, NESB students are well represented in vocational education and training. Students who reported speaking a language other than English at home comprise 13.1 per cent of the vocational education and training population compared with 13.9 per cent of the general population, see Table 4. Of some concern is the large variation across States in the proportion of students who did not provide details of the language they spoke at home. For example, more than 80 per cent of Tasmanian students did not report their language background.
Table 4: VET Participation Rates by Language Spoken at Home by State/Territory, All Ages, 1996 (Per Cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students who reported speaking a language other than English at home</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who reported only English at home</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>58.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with client group not reported</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Persons who spoke a language other than English at home as a proportion of total population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Derived from NCVER Australian VET Statistics 1996 and ABS 1996 Census

The vocational education and training participation rate for students born in an NES country is also in accord with their proportion of the general population. Table 5 shows that persons born in an NES country make up 13.2 per cent of the Australian population, while their corresponding VET participation rate is 12.9 per cent. Again there are wide variations across States and Territories in the proportion of students who did not indicate their country of birth.

Table 5: VET Participation Rates by Country of Birth (Non-English Speaking or Otherwise) by State/Territory, All Ages, 1996 (Per Cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students who reported being born in a non-English speaking country</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who reported being born in a main English speaking country</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>92.0</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>65.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with client group not reported</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Persons born in a non-English speaking country as a proportion of total population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Derived from NCVER Australian VET Statistics 1996 and ABS 1996 Census

Given that people who speak a language other than English at home and those who were born in an NES country are not a homogeneous group, a closer look at the participation data of these groups is essential to ensure that the complexity of this area is more fully understood. The complexity occurs at two levels: the type of training undertaken by NESB students, and vocational education and training participation by country of birth and language spoken at home. These areas are explored in further detail below.
Participation in Contracts of Training

Again due to State/Territory level differences in the information available, it is difficult to determine the participation rates in contracts of training of students speaking a language other than English at home. Neither Victoria nor Tasmania provided differentiated data in this area, meaning that the total participation rate of 4.4 per cent should be interpreted with caution. Of those States that did supply data however, the participation of students speaking a language other than English at home appears to be considerably lower than their proportion of the total population, see Table 6.

Table 6: Participation in Contracts of Training by Language Spoken at Home by State/Territory, All Ages, (Per Cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>41.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Persons speaking a language other than English as a proportion of total population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 7 shows that participation in contracts of training by students born in an NES country is also considerably lower than their proportion of the total population. Only 3.3 per cent of students in a contract of training reported being born in an NES country, compared with their proportion of the total population at 13.2 per cent.

Table 7: Participation in Contracts of Training by Country of Birth, All Ages, (Per Cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-English Speaking</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English speaking*</td>
<td>88.3</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>99.3</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>85.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Persons born in a non-English speaking country as a proportion of total population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Including Australia

Participation in Vocational Education and Training by Country of Birth and Language Spoken at Home

Figure 3 shows the VET participation rates for people from particular NES countries. The countries shown are those with the highest and lowest rates of VET participation as a proportion of their population in Australia. Clearly people from the Former Yugoslav Republics have the highest rate of VET participation at 17 per cent. Also well-represented in vocational education and training are people from Northeast and Southeast Asia, in particular those from China and Indonesia with a participation rate of 13.2 per cent, and from Hong Kong and Viet Nam with a participation rate of 11.2 per cent. The lowest rates of VET participation (as a proportion of population) were recorded by people born in Italy (2.3 per cent) and Greece (2.7 per cent).

Figure 3: VET Participation Rates by Specific Country of Birth as a Proportion of Population, 1996, (Per Cent)

![Diagram showing VET participation rates by specific country of birth.]

*FYR: Former Yugoslav Republics
Source: Derived from NCVER Australian VET Statistics 1996 and ABS 1996 Census
Note: The total VET participation rate is based on the entire population, not the more commonly used 15 to 64 years cohort.

An examination of VET participation rates by language spoken at home reveals that people who speak Spanish (12.7 per cent) and Vietnamese (10.6 per cent) at home are well-represented in vocational education and training. In fact these groups have a much higher rate of participation in VET than does the total population, with a VET participation rate of 7.2 per cent. By contrast people who speak Italian or Greek at home are under-represented in VET, with participation rates of 3.2 per cent and 4.1 per cent respectively, see Figure 4. The picture is complicated by overall differences in the age groups of the various NES communities. For example the average age of Latin American or Vietnamese born people in Australia is less than the average age of Italian and Greek born people in Australia.
Figure 4: VET Participation by Language Spoken at Home as a Proportion of Population, 1996, All Ages, (Per Cent)

Note: The total VET participation rate is based on the entire population, not the more commonly used 15 to 64 years cohort.

Vocational Education and Training Participation and Labour Force Participation

Figure 5 (overleaf) shows the relationship between unemployment rates and VET participation rates of people born in specific NES countries. Whilst it is known that vocational education and training qualifications have a positive affect on unemployment, the chart suggests that high unemployment can occur within communities with higher levels of vocational education and training participation.

Figure 5: Comparison of VET Participation and Unemployment Rates as a Proportion of Population by Specific Country of Birth

*FYR: Former Yugoslav Republics
Source: NCVER 1996 Selected VET Statistics;
It should be noted from Figure 5 that the relationship between the unemployment and vocational education and training need is problematic. Take people born in Viet Nam for example. If this group is benchmarked against VET participation alone, it appears that this group is well-serviced by the vocational education and training sector. However, when this group is also benchmarked against unemployment rates, current participation levels would appear necessary given their poor labour market outcomes.

It is not possible to categorically determine vocational education and training needs of people from non-English speaking countries from this analysis alone. Other factors that need to be considered include:

- **Type of training undertaken**: the analysis outlined above provides information on the extent of vocational education and training participation but no indication has been given as to the appropriateness of the training. It may well be the case that the groups which have high levels of vocational education and training participation are predominantly undertaking preparatory level qualifications which do not lead directly to employment.

- **Age profile**: this analysis has been based on total student population data and no account has been taken for younger people generally needing more training than mature people. This issue is particularly pertinent to people born in Europe since the majority have lived in Australia for a significant period of time.

- **Qualification Profile**: it may be the case that people from some non-English speaking background groups have low levels of participation within the vocational education and training sector but are well represented through higher education. By contrast, other ethnic groups in Australia may have higher numbers of persons without post-school qualifications who could benefit from increased training in the vocational education and training sector.

This analysis demonstrates that vocational education and training participation rates should not be used as the sole benchmark of relative vocational education and training need. Benchmarks can only be set when other factors (such as the unemployment rate and higher education participation) are taken into account.
While the NESB client group has VET participation rates which are equal to their population share, there are some barriers which continue to restrict the access, participation and employment outcomes of particular NESB clients. The following analysis of the barriers experienced by NESB people is based on two important research projects: the 1997 study by O'Loughlin and Watson, *Loyalty is a One Way Street: NESB Immigrants and Long-Term Unemployment*, and the ANTA publication, *Stocktake of Equity Reports and Literature in Vocational Education and Training* (1997, commonly referred to as the Stocktake Report). The latter publication incorporates an analysis of vocational education and training studies generated between 1990-95 on equity groups.

An analysis of these two research projects reveals four barriers of particular importance to the access, participation and outcomes of particular NESB clients in vocational education and training and the labour force: English language skills; recognition of existing qualifications/skills; access to information about training; and training delivery. Of these, the first two barriers represent the greatest constraint on the participation and outcomes of potential and existing NESB clients.

It should be noted that much of the research dates from 1995 and is therefore probably based on research undertaken in 1994. The impact of recent reforms to vocational education and training is not, therefore, included.

**Difficulties with English Language Skills**

The chief constraint on general NESB client participation in training and employment is difficulty with English language skills (Stephens and Bertone 1995; O'Loughlin and Watson 1997). For both men and women, low English language proficiency and recency of arrival are the most important influences on the probability of being unemployed. For men, in particular, simply coming from an NES country is significantly associated with increased odds of being unemployed (O'Loughlin and Watson 1997, p. 65).

English language difficulties, which are also acute for women, are matters of both perception and reality. There is, for instance, a perception held by many NESB women that vocational education and training demands a level of English literacy skill that they would be unable to satisfy (Bertone 1995, p. 12; see also Vanden Heuvel and Wooden 1995). Regardless of its veracity, the prevalence of this perception acts as a constraint on participation as much as any genuine literacy difficulty that NESB clients may encounter.
The participation of some NESB clients is also constrained by the fact that a significant number of older NESB clients have low levels of literacy in their own language. On this basis, it is particularly difficult for these clients to deal with literacy and other classes in English (SEET 1997, p. 59).

**Lack of Recognition of Existing Qualifications/Skills**

A lack of recognition of existing qualifications remains a significant barrier for the NESB client group. O'Loughlin and Watson (1997, p. 59) note that a central determining element in labour market outcomes for NESB clients who have a qualification is the source country of the qualification. The pattern of NESB labour market advantage strengthens considerably if the qualification was obtained in Australia. In terms of qualifications obtained overseas, patterns of restriction are often entrenched. Responsibility for recognition is spread between the administration of the Tradesman’s Rights Regulation Act (currently under review, ANTA has made a submission), the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition and various arrangements within States and Territories.

As well as some concerns regarding the scope and application of recognition, there is a concern that NESB workers’ bilingual and inter-cultural skills are neither valued nor recognised (Bertone 1995, p. 13). Recognition of Prior Learning is an initiative which should have much to offer this group, and the introduction of flexible Training Packages and specialised assessment only arrangements should also be of benefit. Mawer and Field (1995, cited in ANTA 1997) found that RPL processes were not able to meet the needs of NESB people, although progress since 1995 is to be expected.

The NESB Senate report (1995) identified a tendency for both employers and trainers to focus on those skills absent in the client’s skill profile, rather than on capitalising on what unique skills and talents they may possess. This failure to identify and value the unique skills of NESB clients contributes to their difficulties in both the labour force and the training market.

**Inadequate Access to Information about Training**

A study by NSW TAFE (1995) found that the perceptions of potential NESB students and their parents generally reflect a low opinion and appreciation of vocational education and training. TAFE qualifications are generally not valued by NESB communities, and there is a negative perception of the employment value of VET, which is seen as training for the unemployed (NSW TAFE 1995, p. 28). NESB parents are particularly important in influencing the career decisions of their children, yet their knowledge of VET, in general, is limited (NSW TAFE 1995, p. 28). The ANTA Stocktake Report (1997) noted that several authors identified a lack of comprehensive and appropriate information about training availability, content and delivery to potential trainees from a non-English speaking background (NESB 1995, p. 28; Bertone 1995, p. 67). The development of the VET equity communication strategy is thus an important initiative.
Training Delivery

Inflexible modes of training delivery have, in the past, represented a barrier for NESB clients. A number of researchers have reported that existing delivery modes and methods are inappropriate for women in particular, whose personal circumstances and preferences may be at odds with day long intensives, detached lecture modes, and large groups with mixed abilities (Mawer and Field 1995, p. 67). Institutional or workplace learning is often perceived to be "too long" and to require a commitment over a very lengthy period of time. Recent reforms which stress flexibility and achievement of competency are thus important.

A recurrent issue raised in the literature concerns the nature and effects of monoculturalism on the NESB client group, particularly women. The chief area of concern is with the level of priority that is accorded to issues such as language, culture, gender and a lack of access to education by managers and policy makers in vocational education and training (Mawer and Field 1995).
Appendix 1: Problems of Methodology and Definition

Acquiring an accurate picture of the training needs of NESB clients is made difficult by a number of methodological problems associated with their definition. NESB clients in vocational education and training have been defined in several ways. The Stocktake Report notes that all definitions include, “speaking a language other than English at home”. Methodologies which extend beyond this vary considerably in both content and scope.

The corollary of this inconsistent use of methodology is that the comparability of statistical analyses cannot be guaranteed. Further, the diversity of the group itself ensures that universalised statements of disadvantage, need and achievement cannot be made. Against this background, the methodologies employed to identify the scope and diversity of NESB training needs must possess some filtering and linking mechanisms so that the different sub-sections of the NESB client group can be effectively identified, and linked with employment patterns and the education and training needs of the individual and industry.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics is in the process of recasting its NESB reporting methodology. Current methods of identifying cultural diversity in Australia have proven to be inadequate. An explication of current reporting mechanisms will demonstrate the difficulties associated with the system.

Historically, the ABS has used two methods to identify and measure the multicultural profile of Australia. The primary profiling method involved the categorisation of people as being of non-English speaking background if they were born overseas and had a first language other than English, or one of their parents had those characteristics. This categorisation was aimed at identifying those Australians who may experience disadvantage because of an inability to speak English, a lack of familiarity with Australian institutions, or because of prejudice associated with their social, cultural or ethnic background (ABS 1997a).

The second method of profiling used by the ABS was to categorise people on the basis of their country of birth. People born in countries not designated as main English-speaking countries were considered to be potentially disadvantaged in Australian society for linguistic and cultural reasons (ABS 1997a).

There has been growing concern about the suitability of NESB as a measure of cultural diversity and a decision to discontinue its official use was made in May 1996 by a Ministerial Council of the Australian and State Governments.
The decision was predicated on the belief that NESB was an inappropriate measure of disadvantage. Chief difficulties associated with its use included:

- conflicting definitions of the term;
- its oversimplification as an indicator of disadvantage and appropriate service provision for individuals;
- its neglect of issues of culture, linguistic diversity, and identity; and
- its interpretation by many as a negative term (ABS 1997a).

Also under review is the use of “Country of Birth” and its thematic link with the category of “Main English Speaking Countries”. The notion of “Main English Speaking Countries” is now regarded as an imprecise and outmoded measuring instrument. However, the category of “Country of Birth” itself remains one of the most important multicultural designators (ABS 1997a).

The ABS is pursuing a two-pronged approach:

- a key measure based either on First Language Spoken or Main Language Spoken at Home; and
- a range of other measures of potential disadvantage based on ABS statistical standards (1997a).

It is expected that the new measurement standards will improve filtering mechanisms for the determination of disadvantage and need in Australia. These refinements should further enhance ANTA’s capacity to identify the education, training and employment needs of NESB clients.
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