

Decent training for decent work

Strengthening Employment Outcomes

(Strategies to improve connections between Learn Local offerings and employment outcomes for learners)

A report for the Grampians ACFE Regional Council,
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

*“Each thing you do creates another opportunity for you”
(Focus group member, October 2014)*

Learn Local Organisations (LLOs) located in rural and regional communities provide a vital service in supporting the most vulnerable learners in their communities, yet the outcomes from strategies to assist disadvantaged learners into vocational training and employment are not improving. This is despite the best efforts of LLOs and their partners and the focus placed on achieving such outcomes.

Project Purpose

This is the final report for the Grampians Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Regional Council, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). It investigates the issues impacting on achieving strong employment outcomes for the most disadvantaged learners in rural locations. It reports on the findings and also makes recommendations for actions to support LLOs located in regional and rural areas to strengthen the connections between LLOs and industry in order to ensure that they are able to support the most vulnerable learners in their communities.

The key research questions

1. How can LLOs better understand the strategies and resources available to support at risk learners to help them re-engage with further education and employment?
2. How can the design and targeting of programs by LLOs be improved to ensure they meet industry needs?
3. What are the key best practice elements of sustainable partnership networks that work collaboratively to increase training and employment outcomes?

Project Methodology

This project contained a number of different data collection methods. These included a survey of LLO Executive Officers; a detailed regional labour market analysis; focus groups and individual interviews with stakeholders including learners; and desktop research of current literature, policies, case studies and existing practices in other locations state-wide, nationally and internationally.

Summary of key issues and findings

LLO Capacity

- Attracting suitable LLO Board members is an issue across the region, but is exacerbated in small communities.
- Competent governance is critical to ensure organisational viability.
- Continuous changes in funding arrangements are one of the key difficulties identified by Grampians LLOs. The lack of predictability for organisations that operate on knife-edge margins makes their position precarious and this has an ongoing deleterious effect on management and staff.
- Small LLOs are not RTOs, so partnerships must be developed or maintained with larger LLOs and other RTOs.
- RTO compliance was seen as a significant issue taking up scarce resources of money and time.
- LLOs are willing to participate in professional development but cost and location are barriers.
- Geography presents a challenge across all areas of an LLO's operation in the Grampians Region – for learners, Executive Officers and trainers to travel.

Engagement with employers

- There is a high level of engagement in partnerships by LLOs and they demonstrate good partnership skills.
- Partnerships tend to be project-based rather than strategic and capacity-building.
- Small LLOs in rural locations would like assistance in engaging with local government, business and industry.
- LLOs indicated a willingness to participate in more capacity-building, cross-sectoral networks that enhance engagement with employers.

Competition

- Competition from Private RTOs, especially 'fly-in/fly-out' providers, is a serious issue that impacts on market share.
- Preferencing of JSAs in some localities is locking LLOs out of a training market in which they have strong capability.
- Neither learners nor non-LLO organisations have an appreciation of the value of pre-accredited learning. Marketing of what Learn Local is and its value to the community needs to be improved.

Learners

- The learners who participate in LLO classes are often challenging, coming from disadvantaged and disengaged backgrounds. No allowance in the funding structures is made for the LLO to provide the support that is needed by people from these backgrounds to successfully engage in education.
- Blended learning could be better used if technology was enhanced. However, the on-line component of blended learning can be challenging for learners who have poor or no access to the Internet, or who have poor digital literacy.

Data and planning

- The skilled use of labour market data to plan programs is uneven in the region.
- LLOs are receptive to better use of data related to labour market opportunities for planning.

In summary

The small, rural LLOs in Grampians are not operating on a level playing field. They do not have the infrastructure or training resources of private RTOs, TAFE or industry, yet they play a vital role in reaching and supporting vulnerable learners and provide a critical pathway to accredited training and future employment. As such, it is vital that these organisations are more appropriately resourced and supported to ensure that vulnerable learners in rural communities do not lose this valuable resource.

The recommended Grampians ACFE Region Strategy

This strategy is based on conclusions drawn from the data gathering process. The strong engagement of Providers with the survey and the consultation process indicates that Grampians Regional Council has accurately identified a key issue for LLOs in the Grampians Region.

Improve the outcomes for the most vulnerable learners by strengthening the connections of LLOs with industry through:

1. Building the understanding of the local labour market;
2. Promoting, developing and supporting sustainable partnership networks;
3. Expanding service delivery models that support the most vulnerable learners and take thin markets into account;
4. Building ongoing professional development into the fabric of LLO operations;
5. Stabilising the funding environment.