

The Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework)
Opinions and Opportunities
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Abstract

The Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework) provides the vocational education and training (VET) system with e-learning skills, professional development opportunities, products, resources and support networks to meet today's increasingly technology-driven learning environment.

The national strategy collaboratively funded by the Australian Government and all states and territories at AUD\$15 million annually aims to meet the e-learning needs of students and communities, business and industry, Indigenous learners and people with disabilities.

The 2008 - 2011 strategy under development will include a new and exciting range of projects, once again focussing on meeting the e-learning needs of students and communities, business and industry, Indigenous learners and people with disabilities. Leura will explore past successes and provide an insight into future opportunities for VET providers to become involved.

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Background

The Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework) provides the vocational education and training (VET) system with the essential e-learning infrastructure and expertise needed to respond to the challenges of a modern economy and the training needs of Australian businesses and workers.

The Framework is a national strategy collaboratively funded by the Australian Government and all states and territories at AUD\$15 million annually. This model of national collaboration delivers returns that multiply investment made by state and territory governments. The Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG) provides strategic direction and support to the Framework. It is made up of a strategically-focused group of senior vocational education and training (VET) personnel advising:

- the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST)
- the Australian Information and Communications Technology in Education Committee (AICTEC)

The Framework commenced in 2000 with the 2000-2004 strategy aimed at raising awareness of the potential of e-learning and built capacity across the sector. The second strategy, 2005-2007, was to engage directly with clients from key policy groups; youth, mature-age workers, industry, Indigenous communities, and learners with disabilities.

A New Direction

A new four-year strategy the **2008-2011 Framework Strategy** has been approved by FLAG and has now gone to the National Seniors Officers Committee (NSOC) for endorsement.

This strategy is focused on integrating and embedding e-learning in training and businesses through:

- Building on the national investment in essential e-learning infrastructure
- Investing strategically in business-provider partnerships between registered training organisations (RTOs) and business or industries
- Investing in empowering learners to take control of their own learning.

It will contribute to a system equipped to respond to the challenges of a modern economy and the training needs of Australian businesses and workers by focusing on embedding e-learning in training providers and businesses. It has been developed in the context of the demands and priorities facing the VET sector in 2008-2011, summarised as follows:

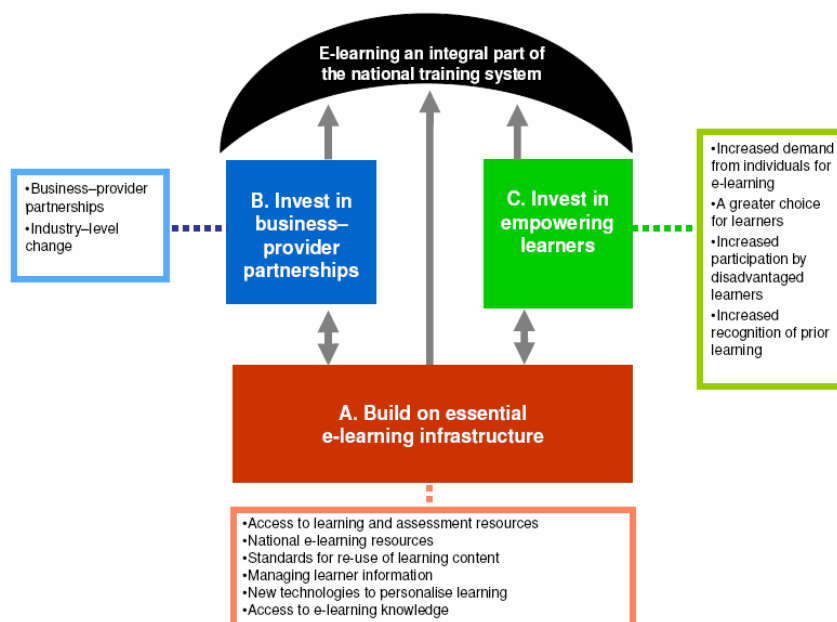
- Increased expectations that training providers will be flexible and responsive to client needs
- Employers and individuals expecting greater choice and control over the time, place and content of training
- Changing demographics in the labour market with older workers staying longer in the workforce and the education and training needs of young workers becoming an even stronger focus in government policy responses

- Increasing expectations that technology will form a significant part of training delivery
- Expectation that more training will be delivered to address the demands of economic growth, critical skill shortages and rapid changes in the workplace
- Pressures to maximise efficiencies and manage cost.

It is acknowledged that the demands of the sector require multi-faceted solutions embracing the wider education sector and e-learning is an important component of those solutions.

Strategic Priorities

The Framework has three strategic priorities:



These priorities will be implemented through two interconnected programs. The 'Build on essential e-learning infrastructure' priority will be implemented through the **Leadership Program**, while the 'Invest strategically in business-provider partnerships between RTOs and business or industries' and 'Invest in empowering learners' strategic priorities' will be implemented through the **Innovation Program**.

The Leadership Program consolidates the essential infrastructure, knowledge creation and support services which underpin the benefits of national collaboration in the e-learning arena.

The Innovative Program focuses on embedding e-learning within business and registered training organisations; and stimulating demand for individual learners.

Future Directions

The *2008-2011 Framework Strategy* will continue to build and capitalise on the current investment in e-learning infrastructure, making use of the pool of knowledge and expertise that has been built through past Framework activities. The Framework is unique in that it continues to achieve through a model of national collaboration to deliver returns that multiply investment by state and territory governments. The strategy is to make e-learning an integral part of the national training system. To

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

- A focus on investment funds where there is the greatest potential for achieving results – with a sound business case within a registered training organisation (RTO) or business/industry
- Less focus on experimentation and one-off projects, and more on embedding and integrating e-learning
- Scope for multi-year projects with sustained impact beyond the life of the funding
- Integration of professional development within other activities, rather than as a stand-alone activity.

This positive approach to embedding e-learning will ensure that by the end of 2011, the *2008-2011 Framework Strategy* will have contributed to a future in which learning is tailored to learners and they are able to take control of their own learning. Teachers in the future will be effective “managers of learning” supported by a sustainable e-learning infrastructure with businesses committed to e-learning acknowledging the benefits of flexible responsive VET delivery.