



**More than just a number: delivering Work for the Dole programs at TAFE.**

**By**

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## Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Background and Practitioner Research.....	7
Active Labour Market Policies.....	9
What is Work for the Dole?.....	10
What does the literature say about Work for the Dole?.....	12
Research methodology and research design.....	16
Results.....	19
Transformation.....	19
Frustrations.....	21
Supervisor skills.....	22
Assessment.....	23
Discussion and Innovation.....	25
Establishing the frame.....	25
Clarifying roles.....	26
Focusing on learning vocational skills.....	26
Creating opportunities for assessment and transition.....	27
Conclusion.....	28
Reference List.....	30

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## **Abstract**

This research examines the delivery of Work for the Dole in a TAFE setting. Mandatory Work for the Dole was re-introduced by the Australian government in 2015. As an Active Labour Market Policy (ALMP), the efficacy of Work for the Dole is contested. As an exercise in education, there is relatively little research into its use. This study examines the literature on Work for the Dole in Australia. I argue that the majority of findings are concerned with the economic efficacy of Work for the Dole. I also argue there is a lack of research into the features of successful interventions. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research examines VET practitioner perspectives of Work for the Dole. Using semi-structured interviews, the reflections of five TAFE teachers in different industry areas are explored. The findings show that Work for the Dole delivered within a TAFE is generally considered to have a positive impact. There are difficulties in delivering programs, particularly program administration. This research suggests that there is a role for TAFEs in the delivery of specialised ALMPs like Work for the Dole as they can impart high-value technical skills to jobseekers. The research makes a series of suggestions for improvement that can be used by policy makers when designing Work for the Dole programs for delivery in a TAFE setting.

## Introduction

This research looks at the delivery of Work for the Dole activities in a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) College environment. Work for the Dole is a feature of Australia's employment programs and involves the placement of jobseekers in an activity for up to six months. These activities are traditionally run by a variety of community and not-for-profit providers.

TAFE Colleges have not generally been the site for Work for the Dole activities. This is despite TAFEs possessing a range of facilities and resources that make them suitable as places to provide activities and training to the long term unemployed. This research uses a case study approach that focuses on a TAFE College that does provide Work for the Dole activities in a range of industry areas.

There are a number of aims of the research:

- To gain a better understanding of Work for the Dole activities delivered in a TAFE environment.
- To identify the different strengths and weaknesses of Work for the Dole programs delivered within a TAFE.
- To provide recommendations that can be used by policy makers when designing programs like Work for the Dole.

The research includes an overview of the policy context and a brief literature review of Work for the Dole programs. The policy context used in this instance is Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs). ALMPs are the various government funded interventions designed to assist jobseekers find work. They are a broad range of schemes of which Work for the Dole is one. There is an overlap in the purpose ALMPs and the vocational education and training (VET) sector.

Much of the research literature on ALMPs is focused on examining employment outcomes using quantitative data. The research shows that where labour market interventions have been successful, it is usually small-scale programs that are locally based, and ideally result in the award of a formal certificate or qualification (Borland, 2014).

TAFE Colleges are a unique setting for the delivery of ALMPs like Work for the Dole. They have facilities, resources and links to industry that can provide a transformative experience for jobseekers. By focusing on the observations of teachers in delivering Work for the Dole programs, the research aims to provide insight into the practical elements of program delivery.

There are four main findings of the research. The first is that Work for the Dole programs would benefit from improved administration. The research found that participants would begin the program in a negative state of mind and that the lack of appropriate administration affected the ability to set up an effective learning program.

The second finding is that clarifying the roles of teachers that supervise Work for the Dole activities would enhance their ability to deliver the programs.

The third and fourth findings are related. TAFEs offer a unique learning environment for the acquisition of technical and specialised skills. The third finding is that focusing on creating activities that utilise technical and specialised areas taught in TAFEs would complement the aims of the Work for the Dole program. Finally, creating opportunities to assess participants may increase the quality of the programs and align Work for the Dole closer to what the research literature suggests is best-practice.

There is significant overlap in the aims of the VET sector and the employment services sector. TAFE Colleges have the resources and capability to provide high value programs to jobseekers. This research shows that there exists the ability to deliver programs within the current policy and funding environment. This research also suggests that with further improvements and understanding, TAFE Colleges can provide unique, high value programs that deliver training in occupational areas that benefit the jobseeker and assist the government in meeting its employment services policy objectives.

## **Background and Practitioner Research**

This research detailed in this paper was jointly funded by the TAFE Directors Association (TDA) and the Australian Vocational Education Research Association (AVETRA). The purpose of the funding is to enhance research and innovation capacity within TAFEs. Recipients of the scholarship investigate innovative ways to meet new and emerging skill needs through research projects undertaken in industry or community settings. The outcomes will inform new practices and/or partnerships models for TAFE and specific industry/community sectors.

TAFEs within Australia play a very important role in the VET sector. They are publically owned institutions that deliver a range of vocational education and training services, usually to some of the most disadvantaged groups within society. Traditionally TAFEs are associated with apprenticeship training, short courses and English language training, however their activities are very broad. Recently TAFEs have been subject to a series of reforms. The introduction of contestable markets, the opening of access to private providers to public funding, and the federal government VET FEE-HELP initiatives have been a challenge to TAFEs. TAFEs traditional business models have been disrupted and their funding base eroded.

The TAFE College that serves as the site for the study has a long history of delivering employment programs. These include retraining schemes for redundant workers, apprenticeship support, and working with employment service providers to place jobseekers in training. The TAFE College also has a long history of engagement with delivering Work for the Dole programs.

A distinctive feature of Work for the Dole programs is that they sit outside of normal TAFE delivery. The programs are usually managed by employment service providers in conjunction with not for profit providers. They do, however, share a series of features that makes them suitable for delivery within a TAFE College such as; they are intended to provide a work based experience; they can be conducted in a group setting; a supervisor or trainer is involved to impart skills and knowledge; they are conducted over a period like a course.

The nexus between employment services and TAFE is complex. It is also one that is under researched. The TDA/AVETRA scholarship aims to “foster innovation in workforce development programs for enterprises” (TDA, 2016). The scope of the research does not allow for a full exposition of the varied

link between employment programs and vocational education and training. Instead, the research will focus on a number of areas including the policy settings that TAFE must engage with in order to be involved in labour market programs, and also the experience of practitioners with Work for the Dole programs. The aim is not to provide a definitive account but to better understand the role of TAFE, how its role can be strengthened, and to make suggestions for further research.

## Active Labour Market Policies

The policy context for this research are Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs). ALMPs refer to the different types of government policy interventions to assist unemployed people integrate or re-integrate into the workplace. They differ from ‘passive’ labour market policies in a number of ways. ‘Passive’ labour market policies usually refer to providing replacement income during periods of unemployment or to early retirement schemes. ALMPs have a more interventionist focus and can take a range of forms including training, job creation measures, jobseeker support, hiring and payroll subsidies, and support for new enterprise creation. Within Australia, these policies are usually managed by the federal Department of Employment. The most noticeable face of ALMPs in Australia are Centrelink and *jobactive* providers.

ALMPs can be categorised into the seven areas (Meager, 2009) listed below.

1. **Education and Training schemes:** These are the classic elements of ALMPs and include training or re-training to cover either general skills or vocationally specific skills. The underlying argument is that employability and job-finding chances are increased through the acquisition of skills.
2. **Information and job—broking activities:** These are the activities undertaken by organisations such as Centrelink and *jobactive* providers whose role is to register and provide job-matching and vacancy information to jobseekers, and to provide information on jobseekers to employers
3. **Work experience, coaching and volunteering:** This is the more involved services usually involving coaching, mentoring and motivational activities
4. **Sanctions and Incentives:** These approaches are used to ‘activate’ unemployed people such as through the threat of benefit withdrawal for non-compliance or through financial incentives such as a monetary bonus on acceptance of an offer.
5. **Self-employment subsidies:** Payment to individuals to encourage them to enter self-employment and start their own enterprise.
6. **Employer subsidies:** Subsidies paid to employers to hire jobseekers such as through bonuses or a reduction in payroll tax.
7. **Job creation schemes:** Traditional make work schemes, often in the public or not-for-profit sector which provide job opportunities to the unemployed.

The definition of an ALMP can be arbitrary and what is classed as an ALMP program differs internationally. Different aspects of the education and training sector, particularly vocational education

and training, can be classed as ALMPs. In Australia, the spending on vocational education and training, such as within TAFEs, is largely not included in the total amount calculated for the spending on ALMPs. This is despite a significant overlap in terms of purposes.

It could be argued, that in one sense, vocational education and training in Australia is a highly complementary aspect of ALMPs. Even when training does not involve unemployed people, vocational education and training in Australia acts as a preventative and sustenance measure to the functioning of the economy by ensuring an active trained professional workforce is available. Indeed, there have been some policy measures around the world aimed at better aligning the role of training and skills development in ALMPs (Meager, 2009).

### **What is Work for the Dole?**

Work for the Dole is a federal government initiative that is a community based work experience program premised on the principle of mutual obligation. In the Work for the Dole program, certain recipients of unemployment payments are required to participate in approved projects that benefit the community. Projects can include environmental work, construction projects, maintenance of community facilities and work in the not for profit sector. The mutual obligation refers to the responsibility of jobseekers to contribute to the wider community as payment for the taxpayer's financial support during their time of unemployment.

The Australian government first introduced Work for the Dole in 1998. It was a compulsory feature of Australia's employment assistance program, requiring certain recipients of welfare payments to undertake the program in order to continue receiving financial support. During the Labour government of 2007 to 2013 Work for the Dole remained, however, the emphasis was shifted and it became voluntary. In 2015, the federal government again scaled up the program, vastly increasing the number of welfare recipients who were required to undertake a Work for the Dole activity.

There are other international examples of programs like Work for the Dole. These include the 'New Deal for Young Unemployed' in the United Kingdom (Van Reenen, 2001; Blundell et al., 2004); the 'UVG' programme in Sweden (Carling & Larsson, 2005); and 'Active Social Policy' in Denmark (Bolvig et al., 2003). As a policy response, Work for the Dole and other community work based compulsory activity sit across a number of the types of ALMPs that were outlined previously. They can

be viewed as an education and training measure in that they aim to provide a participant with skills and knowledge to help them gain employment. They can also be viewed as a sanction and incentive in that failure to participate will result in a cut to the jobseeker's payments. In some instances, participant in Work for the Dole also receive a small additional financial incentive for engaging in an activity.

In reality, the type of programs undertaken in Work for the Dole vary enormously. Traditional examples include working in a charity shop and undertaking gardening (Kellard, 2015). All programs within Work for The Dole can be seen to have the following features: they involve a placement of up to six months; they involve one to four days of attendance per week; they are conducted in a work setting, or work-like setting; they are in the community and not-for-profit sector.

## **What does the literature say about Work for the Dole?**

The literature on Work for the Dole is mixed, with most studies suggesting that Work for the Dole is not an effective program that supports transition into employment.

Perhaps the most prominent study in Australia on Work for the Dole was completed by Borland and Tsing (2011). The study used a quasi-experimental exact matching methodology. The data was drawn from a government dataset that compared participants in Work for the Dole against a control group who did not undertake an activity. The data is from 1997 and 1998. The study examined the effect of Work for the Dole on transitions out of unemployment. The measures used were whether a participant was in employment, and not receiving welfare payments, after six and twelve months. The study also examined time on welfare payments. The study involved 1600 participants, both in the Work for the Dole group and the control group.

Borland and Tsing's findings did not support the efficacy of Work for the Dole. The study found that rather than being better off, those that participated in Work for the Dole were worse off than the control group. Participants in Work for the Dole were more likely to be receiving payments at 9 months and 15 months after starting an activity and less likely to be off payments at six months and twelve months after starting an activity. In effect, the six months on the program delayed an employment outcome for participants.

If the measure for the success of a program is whether a participant finds employment and exits welfare, then this study suggests that Work for the Dole is ineffective. The main conclusion from the study is that there appears to be "quite large and significant adverse effects of participation in Work for the Dole" (Borland, 2011, p. 4364). One potential explanation for the statistical findings is the 'lock in' or 'attachment' factor. This is where a jobseeker views participation in a Work for the Dole activity as work and does not look for other employment. The authors suggest that this phenomenon is reflected within the international literature on the subject. Evidence of 'lock in' effects have also been found for job search counselling programme in Netherlands, wage subsidy schemes and public job creation in the Slovak Republic and Germany, for training programmes in Denmark, and a 'mutual obligation' type programme in Sweden (Carling & Larson, 2005, Bolvig *et al.*, 2003).

The Borland and Tsing (2011) study takes a quantitative and economic approach to Work for the Dole. The value of Work for the Dole is measured on employment outcomes and the welfare payment status. Also the data used is relatively old, from 1997 and 1998. There is no examination of the quality or type of programs within Work for the Dole. Furthermore, the study is limited to outcomes over a fifteen month period. Whether there are positive impacts on participants over a longer period is not measured.

Nevile and Nevile (2006, p. 81) critique the analysis of Borland and Tseng, describing the methodology used as “flawed” and providing “further evidence suggesting that the conclusions of Borland and Tseng are incorrect”. Nevile and Nevile (2006) argue that the data set used by Borland and Tsing (2011) is not representative and that the selection of an appropriate control group for comparison is not possible. Furthermore, the Work for the Dole program has evolved since the study was first undertaken and changes are not included in the analysis from 1997 and 1998 data.

Nevile and Nevile (2006) state there are other facets of Work for the Dole that make it worthwhile aside from the measure of employment. Using a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach, Nevile and Nevile (2006) trace the evolution of Work for the Dole. They focus on some of the ‘soft outcomes’, such as employability and participant well-being. They state “Work for the Dole does well with respect to soft outcomes” and that “80 per cent of participants believe that their self-confidence has increased as a result of participation” (Nevile & Nevile, 2006, p. 85) in a Work for the Dole activity. Nevile and Nevile (2006, p. 84) also state some of the features of a program that participants have noted as worthwhile.

“Because most participants are looking for work experience that will help them get a job, those working in group projects appreciate work sites and projects that resemble real work environments.”

In Nevile and Nevile’s (2006, p. 83) interviews, they state that “what made Work for the Dole worthwhile was not getting a job at the end – that was the jackpot – but the experience was worthwhile if one learnt something”.

The ethics and efficacy of Work for the Dole are much debated. While Nevile and Nevile (2006) suggests its worth, there is a significant literature that contradicts these claims. Bessant (2000) critiques the economic underpinning of Work for the Dole and suggests that it contravenes human rights of participants and acts in a similar way to conscription. Other labour economists (Hawke, 1998) have speculated that Work for the Dole acts as a cheap labour market program. Carson et al (2003) found

that a preliminary evaluation of the effect of the Work for the Dole pilot program on participants found that the program failed the most disadvantaged jobseekers because it did not respond adequately to the varying personal circumstances of participants. They found that although there were some positive aspects of participation, particularly for voluntary participants, the program did not build employment skills or increase employment commitment and self-esteem.

Since the reintroduction of compulsory Work for the Dole in 2015, there have been few studies published. The efficacy, ethics and motives of a compulsory Work for the Dole scheme remain contested. There have been comparatively few studies on what aspects of Work for the Dole can be considered to be effective. There are fewer studies about the use of Work for the Dole as an exercise in education and training. Benefits that have been noted within the literature normally reference increases in personal well-being, as opposed to an increase in skills attributable to specific occupational capabilities.

There are studies focusing on the role of education in active labour market policies. If Work for the Dole is to be an effective exercise in education, it would be expected that it would mirror some aspects of other education and work-based based ALMPs. There is a wealth of international research evidence which throws more light on the relative effectiveness of training and skills interventions in ALMPs. The evidence suggests a mixed efficacy of education and training interventions. Early studies in the 1990s formed a negative view surmised by Meager and Evans (1998, p. 49) that “it is rapidly becoming conventional wisdom in the policy evaluation literature that labour market training and re-training schemes for the unemployed have not lived up to expectations”. Later studies from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000 produced more mixed results with some studies able to demonstrate a more long-term benefit for those jobseekers that were provided with education and training (Meager, 2009).

Despite the large research literature on the subject, the efficacy of education programs as ALMP's remains inconclusive. One of the aspects of the literature is that when training and education programs are successful, there is not much evidence to suggest why this is the case. There are certain generalisations that can be made. For instance, Borland (2014) states that “small-scale programs, targeted at the needs of local unemployed and employers, and where ideally an unemployed person obtains a formal certificate or qualification, are more regularly found to have positive effects. Trying to incorporate these features into programs for the unemployed would therefore be a good place to start on policy design.”

The significant gaps in the literature on the educative aspects of Work for the Dole is one of the launching points for this study. The approach is to better understand the experience of Work for the Dole within an institutional setting. If small scale, locally targeted programs that results in a formal certificate are the most likely to be successful, then how do Work for the Dole Programs within TAFE meet these criteria? The research literature suggests this is a complex, and even highly politicised, area.

## Research methodology and research design

A methodology is defined as “a theory and analysis of how research should proceed” (Harding, 1987, p. 2), “analysis of the assumptions, principles, and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 161), or “the study—the description, the explanation, and the justification—of methods, and not the methods themselves” (Kaplan, 1973, p. 18). This research uses a qualitative, case study approach. According to Schwandt (2007), qualitative research is a diverse term covering an array of techniques seeking to describe, decode, translate, and somehow come to terms with the meaning, rather than the measurement or frequency of phenomena in the social world. A qualitative case study methodological approach has been selected because it allows the evidence collected to be analysed and understood in terms of the use of Work for the Dole in a TAFE setting.

As outlined previously, much of the previous research literature focuses on the economic outcomes of Work for the Dole and ALMP interventions. There is relatively little information on how programs should be constructed or may be improved. This research will focus on the features of a single site that delivers numerous Work for the Dole programs to determine what can be learnt from those who have experience with the programs.

There were numerous stakeholders that could have been selected as the target to gather evidence, such as students, managers, *jobactive* providers and teachers. For this study, teachers have been selected as the main evidence source. Teachers have been selected because of their unique operational role. Teachers have direct experience with the running of activities and are involved closely with all other stakeholders. Teachers are also able to compare the Work for the Dole program with other courses they may have been involved with.

All teachers participating in the study were employed by a TAFE based in Melbourne. The TAFE has an established department which provides Work for the Dole programs. The department works with external companies and organisations, usually not for profits, in order to create programs where jobseekers can participate. The TAFE then works with *jobactive* providers to place jobseekers in relevant projects.

In 2015 the department had 15 Work for the Dole projects and programs. These projects and programs are organised across a range of industry areas. They are classed as ongoing programs and project based. The department works with teachers across the TAFE to provide teachers. Five different projects and

programs were selected for the case study. They were selected in order to gather a cross-section across a range of industry areas. An overview of the programs is provided in the table below.

Name	Industry area	Overview
Pixel8	IT and graphic design	Pixel8 is an ongoing program that provides graphic design solutions to not-for-profits and community providers. Organisations engage with Pixel8 to update their branding and graphic design. Examples include local sports organisation and museums. The participants learn how to use design software and gain computer skills as well as interacting with clients.
Upcycling	Fashion and retail	Upcycling was a project that involved the collection of second hand clothes and their upcycling into new fashion products. Participants learned fashion and retail skills including how to use sewing machines. A fashion parade was held to present the results. The products were sold at op-shops.
Build a trailer and pushcar	Automotive manufacturing	These projects involved the building a pushcar and a trailer. The participants learned automotive manufacturing skills such as welding, panel beating, spraying and electrical wiring. The pushcar was given to a charity for auctioning. The trailer was given to a social enterprise that runs bike maintenance programs.
Recycled bikes	Bike and bike maintenance	This project involved repairing old bikes. Participants learnt all aspects of bike maintenance and repair. The final products were given to local primary schools for distribution.
The canteen	Hospitality and retail	In this ongoing program, participants are placed inside a canteen. They learn basic food handling skills, how to make a coffee and how to use a register. They also learned customer service skills.

Table 1: Overview of projects which interviewees were involved in delivering Work for the Dole programs to jobseekers.

A sample of five teachers was selected to undertake the research. Each teacher was involved in a different Work for the Dole activity. The main form of data collection was semi-structured interviews. All teachers agreed to participate in an hour long interview to talk about their experience. The interview focused on aspects of Work for the Dole including learning materials; their experience; the participant experience; barriers to the program; and areas of possible improvement. Information provided by the interviewees that required clarification was checked at a later date. The interviews were conducted over a two-week period in March 2016.

Following the interviews, the audio was transcribed. The script from the interviews was then coded according to a range of criteria and themes. Where clarification was required, interviewees were contacted. The data was analysed to determine similarities between each interviewee and to arguments within the research literature. Some of the results are provided below.

## Results

There were a number of responses that were common to all interviewees. When presenting the results, individual interviewees have not been identified. Because the results are presented in common themes, different industry areas have not been specified. Where possible, direct quotes from the interviewees have been used.

The responses can be grouped under the headings of transformation, frustration, supervisor skills and assessment.

### Transformation

“believe it or not they loved coming, the feedback that I got was they wanted to be here and actually do it, that was a positive thing.”

“I had people thanking me towards the end because it was something that they could actually get up in the morning and come to.”

“I would say it’s a very positive thing, I think I was really quite surprised at the way my views of it changed over time.”

As per previous studies (Neville, 2003), teachers reported that jobseekers had a positive experience of the Work for the Dole. This was true of the teachers as well. Many of the teachers reported ambivalence at the start of the program. One teacher reported that she was “quite sceptical” and “I thought ‘oh gosh’ we are interrupting these people’s lives when they need to have their own autonomy and it seemed to me to be quite paternalistic and not a great idea”. An aspect of the responses from the interviews was not just that they were reporting a positive experience, but they were reporting a transformative experience.

Jobseekers would start out in the program in a negative frame of mind. As one teacher said, “it is always negative to start”. Following the course of the program the change was almost always positive: “the transformation of seeing what they can achieve and what they achieved solely on their own was remarkable”. Each project required an outcome and the product was something that could be shared as an achievement. The most reported positive aspect was the increase in self-esteem and purpose. Words

and phrases such as “taking people out of isolation”, “re-engaging”, “enthusiasm” and “enjoyment” were all used to describe a lift in jobseeker’s attitudes.

What seemed crucial to this change was engagement. Some of the positive aspects reported referred to being supported and being part of a group that shared similar circumstances. This is represented in the following statement.

“I had people thanking me towards the end because it was something that they could actually get up in the morning and come to and that was just a one of the things that was probably good being in a group activity, is that they were able to coach each other. Get to know each other and support each other if they had an interview we would help each other in rehearsing interview techniques, what to wear and that confidence booster for each of them was fantastic. And also they had an essence that they weren’t on their own. They weren’t the only person on the dole and seeking employment and going through the same hardship, there was another 19 people with them in the same boat.”

A statement like that above was emblematic of the responses from the teachers. What was reported was a transition from a largely negative perspective to begin with, through a period of consolidation to finally a positive outcome, however that outcome is defined. Working within groups was crucial to this. As another teacher said, “the group aspect of being able to interact with other people was fantastic. Taking them out of isolation.” When there were challenges to the program they often came in the form of disruptive students, who threatened the working atmosphere. One teacher reported a jobseeker who started half way through the six-month program and who seemed determined to disrupt the group. The challenge became to restrict the negativity so that others could retain their own positive experience.



Fig 1: An example of a product produced in a work for the Dole activity. This is a pushcar produced by students using welding and fabrication skills.

## **Frustrations**

“It becomes a numbers game. The people are just a number.”

Where there were challenges, it was universally reported that they emanated from before participants entered the program. Being treated like a number was a theme of many responses. Prior to being placed with the TAFE in a Work for the Dole program, jobseekers are case managed by a *jobactive* provider. A *jobactive* provider delivers information and job-broking services through a contract with the federal Department of Employment. After a period of unemployment, the *jobactive* provider is obliged to find the jobseeker a placement with a Work for the Dole provider. The transition and information provision was criticised by all the teachers.

One impact of being treated as “just a number” is that jobseekers turned up to the programs primed with a negative attitude. Another problem was that *jobactive* providers were unable to send jobseekers at

regular times. Teachers were unsure when people would turn up for their programs. It disrupted the program and was “very frustrating”. Another problem was that *jobactive* providers were not undertaking appropriate screening. As one teacher said, “I think the agencies were trying to tick boxes in some ways and I suspect probably put people in there who weren’t entirely suited to doing it because there was nowhere else they could see that they could put them”.

## **Supervisor skills**

In order to overcome some of these barriers at the start of the program the strength of the teacher was stressed. An example is in the statement below where an interviewee commented on the skills of a colleague in engaging with jobseekers.

“He took the time to listen to them, he took the time because they were complaining my provider has done this to me, and my provider has done that to me, and they send me a letter and they're going to cut my payments and I don't understand, so he would take on all this information, be a bit of a sounding board”.

One interviewee placed supervisor skills as the most important aspect of the program.

“For a work for the dole activity, a supervisor makes or breaks a project. It must be someone who not only knows the skills that they are imparting onto the jobseekers but they need to be able to work with people who are sometimes quite difficult, people who don't want to be there.”

An interesting aspect of the findings was the blurring of roles between teacher and supervisor. Sometimes the word teacher was used and sometimes the word supervisor was used. The interviewees were TAFE teachers and used to providing training in a TAFE environment. The language of whether they were a trainer, teacher or supervisor seems to reflect a lack of clarity about their role and function. It also seems to be linked to an uncertainty regarding whether they were to consider themselves as imparting a learning experience or whether they were minders.

The blurring of roles was also reflected in the participants. They were variously described as students, jobseekers and participants.

## Assessment

Assessment is a fundamental part of formal training and of the vocational education and training sector. Assessment is used for a variety of purposes within a training program. Its use in Work for the Dole programs was problematic for a number of reasons. One issue was the effect that assessment would have on the participant's view of the program.

“If I was ... basically told you need to show up here and then told by the way you're going to be assessed at the end of this that might be an issue.”

The priority of the teachers was the creation of a program that was enjoyable and where the participants were engaged. The inclusion of assessment would impact on the ability to build a rapport with the student.

“there was a core that loved coming in because they knew I'm going to do something different, I'm going to create this, I've had input on what it looks like, all those sorts of things it was fantastic.... I think it would be different [with an] assessment.”

Because of the irregularity in the way that participants started the program, it was felt that assessments would not be possible. It was felt that “they all would have to start at the one point” and that the duration would “have to be longer”.



Fig 2: An example of the different types of graphic design produced as part of the Pizel8 activity. Participants worked with community clients to produce logos, designs, and other communication material

## **Discussion and Innovation.**

Educational innovation can be described as “change in an educational context that is introduced with the aim of improving the operation of education systems, their performance, the perceived satisfaction of the main stakeholders, or all of them at the same time” (OECD, 2007). Innovation involves a change that results in some form of improvement. This next section outlines a discussion of some of the findings, suggests areas for possible further research and makes recommendations that may improve delivery.

### **Establishing the frame**

The frame in this context refers to the different ways in which the structure of the learning program is established. It refers to the various methods used to create the boundaries and conditions that are necessary for learning to occur. This includes resources and materials. The frame also includes less tangible aspects of a learning program such as the schedule and student expectations.

Many of the difficulties and challenges expressed by the interviewees in the research can be described as difficulties in establishing a frame for the learning. The program was under constant threat of change. There was difficulty in determining when and which participants would be turning up. Participants were given conflicting information about the program by their *jobactive* provider and often arrived with a negative attitude. These are only some of the issues identified. However, they all point to the difficulty in establishing an experience for the participant that is useful and where the skills and knowledge set out in training packages could be acquired. The conditions have to be right for learning, and often it seems with the Work for the Dole programs that the conditions for learning were difficult to establish, particularly in a way evident in other learning programs provided in TAFE.

Nevile and Nevile (2006, p 83) commented that participants felt that “the [Work for the Dole] experience was worthwhile if one learnt something”. Certainly TAFE can provide learning experiences and also learning experiences in specific occupational areas. If this is to occur effectively, however, there needs to be an ability to establish a frame so that a program can be run effectively. From the feedback with the interviewees it does not seem like this is possible in the current situation.

To improve the delivery of the program, it is recommended that there is closer organisation between the *jobactive* providers and the TAFE, along with more targeted screening of possible participants.

### **Clarifying roles**

Teacher or supervisor? Student or jobseeker? The lack of clarity around the roles of those involved in the Work for the Dole programs was evident. It reveals some of the problems with using a TAFE setting to deliver ALMPs. The teachers were never quite sure whether they were there to impart skills and knowledge or whether they were there as part of a compliance regime. Clarifying the roles of teachers and learners is important. It is vital for a program to stay focused. It also is crucial to ensure that the aims of a program are met. The introduction of training or an induction programme for TAFE teachers would be of assistance in their delivery of Work for the Dole programs.

### **Focusing on learning vocational skills**

The programs researched were ostensibly based around the acquisition of technical and job related skills. These include areas such as automotive manufacturing, welding, fashion, hospitality and graphic design. One of the values in using TAFEs in ALMPs is that they are able to provide simulated work like experiences in occupational areas which other organisations cannot. For instance, welding and automotive are areas that the TAFE in the study have advanced facilities that other organisations lack. One of the values in utilising TAFEs in ALMPs like Work for the Dole is the access to the considerable technical skills and resources available.

TAFEs, like other organisations, can provide an environment where a learner can increase self-esteem and general employability skills. These are the soft skills identified by others (Nevile & Nevile, 2006) as valuable in Work for the Dole programs. These type of skills and experiences are not to be devalued; they are fundamental to any ability to operate effectively in the workplace.

However, one of the point of differences with TAFEs, as opposed to other providers of ALMPs, is their ability to provide technical and vocational skills in specific occupational areas. Employability skills, decreasing isolation, increasing self-esteem, and promoting exposure to the workplace are all objectives that organisations other than TAFEs can provide. An environment that enables access to specialised

technical skills in a learning environment with highly-trained teachers is something that is uniquely available to TAFEs. Furthermore, it has recognisable value. The aim of most ALMPs is to enable the jobseeker to gain employment and to exit welfare support. The acquisition of technical skills is one method that increases the overall employability of the jobseeker and makes them more attractive to an employer. An example can be seen in the teacher who stated how a number of participants had found employment after learning welding skills.

An obstacle teachers expressed about their experience in Work for the Dole programs is that they did not feel able to focus on technical skills development. Rather, teachers reported an increase in personal wellbeing and engagement of the job-seekers. While this is beneficial, an ability to focus on technical skills acquisition would increase the attractiveness of TAFEs as a location to run ALMPs. Further research in this area would be beneficial. For instance, research that focuses on how programs for the unemployed can be structured in TAFE to increase technical skill attainment can be used to inform policy decisions regarding funding.

### **Creating opportunities for assessment and transition**

Borland (2014) writes of ALMPs like Work for the Dole that “small-scale programs, targeted at the needs of local unemployed and employers, and where ideally an unemployed person obtains a formal certificate or qualification, are more regularly found to have positive effects”. A formal certificate or qualification suggests that a learning program has been undertaken that involves a verification of the achievement of a range of skills. Formal qualifications are able to be used within the labour market as a signifier of achievement to potential employers. They also enable access to various educational pathways that exists within the education sector.

Obtaining a formal certificate or qualification requires an assessment. One of the findings of this research refers to the barriers to undertaking assessment that teachers perceived. The nature of the programs precluded the ability to include formal assessment. There were some instances of assessment in the form of OH&S training and some units of competency. However, overall, assessment was avoided because it was felt that it would threaten the ability to provide a program suitable to the Work for the Dole requirements. Despite this, units of competency in training packages were generally followed. The structure of training packages and units of competency lend themselves to being utilised in a work simulation environment. The ways to construct a program that enables an assessment and the provision of a formal certificate or qualification is an area that would be benefit from further research.

## Conclusion

The literature on ALMPs and Work for the Dole shows that there is a role for education providers, and TAFE particularly, in the delivery of programs that assist jobseekers find work. The aims of both ALMPs and vocational education and training are similar in that they aim to increase the overall employability and skills of the population.

The literature also suggests there is conjecture on what constitutes a successful program. There remains controversy around the ethics of programs like Work for the Dole and also the ability for Work for the Dole to enable participants to gain employment.

This research focused on one aspect of the vast Work for the Dole activity within Australia. It used a case study approach to analyse the experience of Work for the Dole in a TAFE setting. TAFE teachers were the primary target group for collecting evidence and their observations were collected through a series of semi-structured interviews.

The findings showed that the experience of most of those involved in Work for the Dole was positive. Many participants and teachers and participants began in a negative state of mind. Through the course of the of the program, it was almost always reported that a shift to a positive experience occurred.

The cause of many frustrations were the administrative barriers. Every teacher expressed frustration at having to deal with the vagaries of the *jobactive* system. Participants entered the programs feeling like “just a number”. The difficulties in the organisational aspects of the Work for the Dole program are relevant because they impact on the ability to provide an appropriate learning environment. The conditions have to be right for learning, and the conditions for learning were threatened by the administrative obstacles and frustrations.

One of the unique offerings of TAFE for Work for the Dole, and ALMPs in general, is the ability to provide experience in specific occupational areas. These can include occupations traditionally aligned to trades such as building and construction, automotive, metals and engineering, and cookery. Furthermore, TAFEs can have access to high-grade facilities and links to industry. The ability to create programs that enable the acquisition of technical skills and knowledge in a simulated work environment

would significantly increase the attractiveness of TAFE as a setting for Work for the Dole and other ALMPs.

One way to achieve this would be to include an assessment process. Assessment acts a way of verifying the skills and knowledge that participants have obtained. It also acts a quality assurance mechanism. Techers in this research study suggested that an assessment would not be appropriate. Assessment would change the nature of the program and also the way they related to the jobseekers. However, if a situation could be created where assessment was involved, and that jobseekers voluntarily participated in the assessment, it would create a valuable program. It would suggest that training was occurring in a work like environment where policy makers, potential employers and jobseekers could be confident had some credence in the employment market.

Overall, there were many positive reports about Work for the Dole operating in a TAFE setting. TAFEs, like the wider employment services sector, have as their mission to provide services to some of the most disadvantaged groups within society. TAFEs are well placed to assist in the creation of the type of programs, those that are smaller scale and locally targeted, that have been found more regularly to have positive effects.

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