Policy Making and
the Ministerial Review of
Post-compulsory Education Pathways
in Victoria 2000–2004

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Candidate’s Declaration

I certify that the dissertation submitted for examination for the Degree Doctor of Education entitled — Policy Making and the Ministerial Review of Post-compulsory Education Pathways in Victoria 2000–2004 — is the result of my own research, except where due acknowledgment has been made.

The work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award and the content of the dissertation is the result of work carried out since enrolment into the course.

Signed: _________________________________ Date: / 2006

Alan John Montague
Dedication

This work is dedicated to the many people whose talents were not, or will not, be recognised and developed by an education system that is fraught with exclusionary practices and curricula that is too frequently flawed. The damage that occurs when education fails countless numbers of capable students, who sadly may remain unrecognised for undiscovered talents by inefficient and outdated teaching rather than learning systems, is immeasurable.
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I have had two great supervisors. My initial supervisor and friend Associate Professor Peter Kell was a great support and encouraged me all the way whilst at RMIT and then at the University of Wollongong — despite the many twists I took in the research that were no doubt a definite frustration to him.

To my final supervisor and friend Professor Rob Watts; I cannot thank you enough for pulling me out of the tangential holes I like to dig when researching the unbelievably complex terrain of post compulsory education and training. Your brilliance in understanding social policy in context with education and guiding me to focus the research into the shape that has resulted in this final thesis has me permanently indebted to you for your astonishing guile.

Thank you for what I have learnt from you both within the research and from the overall experience.
Glossary of Terms

AAB  Apprenticeship Administration Branch
ACE  Adult and Community Education
ABS  Australian Bureau of Statistics
ANTA  Australian National Training Authority
AQF  Australian Qualifications Framework
AQTF  Australian Quality Training Framework
ATTP  Apprenticeship Traineeship Training Program.
DET  Department of Education & Training
DEST  Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training
ECEF  The Enterprise and Career Education Foundation
ENTER  Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank
GTC or GTO  Group Training Company or Group Training Organisation
HECs  Higher Education Contributions
ITAB  Industry Training Advisory Board (industry advisory body - formerly referred to as industry training advisory body or ITAB)
LLENs  Local Learning and Employment Networks
MCEETYA  Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
MIPs  Managed Individual Pathways
NAC  New Apprenticeship Centre
NCVER  National Centre for Vocational Education and Research Ltd
NTF  National Training Framework
OTTE  Office of Training and Tertiary Education
OECD  Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RTO  Registered Training Organisation
STA  State Training Authority
TAFE  Technical and Further Education
VCAL  Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCAA  Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
VCE  Victorian Certificate of Education (Years 11 and 12)
VET  Vocational Education and Training
VETiS  Vocational Education and Training in Schools
VLESC  Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission
VQA  Victorian Qualifications Authority
VTA  Victorian TAFE Association Inc
VTAC  Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre
Abstract

In January 2000 the Victorian government established a ‘Ministerial Review of Post-compulsory Education Pathways in Victoria’. This explores the work of this Ministerial Review using an organisational discourse approach to the policy-making process. The study examines how the initial problem was represented that required policy intervention. I ask what the Brack’s Victorian State Government defined, understood and represented the ‘problem’ to be regarding young people’s participation in post-compulsory education. The research then focuses on establishing how the Ministerial Review set out to validate the initial representation of the problem. The research then concentrates on how the Ministerial Review came to develop its policy recommendations to address the policy problems it had identified. This involves establishing what solutions to the ‘problem’ were proposed by the Ministerial Review panel and why they were recommended as policies. Finally this study evaluates the value of the Ministerial Review process.
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INTRODUCTION

In January 2000, just months after winning an election that no-one — including its leadership — had expected them to win, the Bracks Labor government announced its intention to review post-compulsory education in Victoria. In the coming months the Victorian Government established a review panel of experts to carry out what became known as the ‘Ministerial Review of Post-compulsory Education Pathways in Victoria’.

The then Minister for Post-compulsory Education, Training and Employment in Victoria, Lynne Kosky, MLA, appointed a panel chaired by Mr. Peter Kirby AO, to review ‘participation and outcomes’ for young people in post-compulsory education and training in Victoria. (As my thesis indicates because I am reliant on the vocabulary of the contemporary policy community I will be required to use a large number of what Don Watson (2004) has rightly called ‘weasel words’ — like ‘outcomes’. One of the consequences of managerialism is the inability to use words that mean anything). The panel was asked to review the post-compulsory ‘educational needs’ of young people aged 15–24 and to examine patterns of labour market participation from an educational, employment and training perspective. This Review Panel was also asked to investigate the structure and efficacy of post-compulsory level education for young Victorians. Other issues for review included funding and administrative co-ordination between the State and Federal governments, and the provision of advisory, guidance and support services for young people within Victoria’s post-compulsory education and training programs. Finally the review panel was asked to assess the responsibilities and structures of the Victorian Board of Studies and the State Training Board (Kirby 2000a, p. 165).

The Ministerial Review was to carry out extensive research including consultation with numerous formal and informal ‘stakeholders’ connected to post-compulsory education (Keating ECEF 2001). The ‘stakeholders’ included the State Government, the education sector itself including secondary schools, Tertiary and Further Education colleges (TAFE), Adult and Community Education (ACE), universities, employers, unions and local government and the broader community.
This research process was seen as necessary particularly by Kirby, as an integral basis for developing policies that he hoped would lead to young people in Victoria getting access to better education, training and employment and thereby benefit both the young people themselves as well as the broader community (Kirby, 2000a).

As will be seen the Ministerial Review panel made a number of recommendations like its proposal to establish Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs). The LLENs were to comprise a ‘consortia’ of the key stakeholders referred to above and were designed to develop an integrated approach to developing Vocational and Education (VET) strategies to address major problems like the poor education and training participation rates among young people in Victorian communities. Thirty-one LLENs were subsequently formed in Victoria during 2001 and 2002.

In this thesis I address the work of the Ministerial Review panel its contribution to public policy-making and offer an assessment of the achievements of its recommendations to date (i.e. 2004).

I decided to carry out some research into the way the Ministerial Review worked as a policy-making process for reasons that had a good deal to do with both my professional background and my long-standing interest in post-compulsory education.

When the Victorian government announced its intention to carry out this review, I recall feeling a mixture of cynicism -prompted partly by a sense of déjà vu, given the history of similar reviews- and a small amount of optimism that perhaps this time, it might be different. These ambivalent responses proved to be enough of a stimulus for me to embark on a doctoral thesis research project that took as its object this Ministerial review process.

Then, as now, I work as the Manager of Apprenticeships and Traineeships for RMIT University, a dual-sector university comprising higher education and Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE) divisions.

On a daily basis I am involved in discussions relating to issues of employment, education and training, or communication via email with students, teachers, career
advisers, industry associations, unions, employers, parents, aunts, uncles, welfare staff, Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) staff, government employees, Job Network (employment agency) staff, Centrelink staff, New Apprenticeship Centre (NAC) staff and jobseekers. Discussions about school experiences, vocational choice, and alignment of potential skills within apprenticeships and traineeships, and shaping programs to better suit post-compulsory students are key features of my work. I am also asked frequently to speak about these issues at seminars, schools, and LLEN functions. I also comment on education policy and research issues, such as occupation and skill shortages at meetings of employer and industry associations and to the electronic and print media.

Set against this background I can now identify four reasons why I undertook this study. Firstly I believe passionately in the need to improve education and its role in linking young people to work, education or training. This will require considerable systemic improvements to increase equity and social justice in education. Secondly the vocational role I perform daily is connected intimately to the ways post-compulsory education is linked to workforce participation outcomes. I have long been puzzled by the ways the links between employment and training or education actually work or more often do not work all that well. The third reason I have undertaken this study is my concern about the lives of those young people who enter an education system that in my view too often prepares them inadequately for their adult vocational lives, thus leading to ongoing disadvantage (Kirby 2000). My final reason has to do with a long-standing interest in policy-making processes and the role that might be played by a research process that as Clarke puts it, ‘ascertain[s] the effects of some form of planned change’ (Clarke 2001).

It was considerations such as these that moved me to construct a research project that took as its centre piece the ways in which the Ministerial Review worked as a policy-making process. As I was to discover in the course of doing this research and as I hope to validate here, the Ministerial Review policy process has amply rewarded my curiosity.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As all researchers and writers of doctoral theses soon discover, what typically began as a vague and often aimless curiosity, needs sooner or later to be disciplined
by the formulation of some precise research questions. In my case my supervisor soon made it clear that without a careful framing of the key research questions my research project would lack clarity of both design and purpose.

In a sense all researchers confront two initial and quite fundamental questions that are closely connected, namely what is the object of my research and how best am I to understand, interpret or explain it? It is not possible to come to a research process, however empirically it is intended to be, without relying on certain theoretical presuppositions and traditions of enquiry. Apart from the practical consequences of education policy this thesis works out from a number of theoretical frameworks that conceptualise the Ministerial Review as a policy-making process (Bessant, Watts, Dalton & Smyth 2006). My approach to policy and the policy-making process is fundamental to the way I have carried out the research and to the way I have represented the policy process. Accordingly I want briefly to outline this approach before I proceed to identify the key research questions.

The initial questions I confronted were these: What is policy, and more precisely what is the policy-making process, and how is it best understood? As I discuss in more detail later in Chapter One, there is a long-standing tendency in the field of policy studies to treat the policy process itself as an entirely rational and/empirical process. As writers like Watts (2000, 2001), Fairclough (1996) and Bacchi (1999) have argued, much mainstream policy research has practised a 'double empiricism' which insists firstly that whatever is 'real' compels governments or policy-makers via some process usually represented as a process of ‘discovery’ to react in a predetermined ways. That is, this empiricism underwrites a determinist view of politics and policy undergirded by empiricist methodologies which render ‘the state’ or government as ‘empirical’ agents of governance and policy-making, reliant on empirical processes of problem-discovery, especially those produced by social scientists, and public servants. Secondly there is a tendency to think of the state as a policy-making organization employing policy actors who work in policy networks whose history, processes and institutions can be understood in simply and empirically.

This broadly-defined 'empiricism' sets loose an inability to think about the processes of policy-making as both historical processes and constructivist processes which tend to ignore the possibility that the 'discovery' of problems
addressed by policy makers requires eg., the discursive constitution or representation of the problems which policy makers seek to address (Bacchi (1999). Like Clarke (2001, p. 33) I do not share the kinds of philosophical assumptions that have long defined a range of positivist and empiricist research frameworks:

Qualitative research within the interpretativist tradition is based on a different set of philosophical assumptions concerning the nature of reality and the role of the researcher. First the positivist notion that there exists a single, objective reality or ‘truth’, which can be discovered by investigation, is roundly rejected. According to the interpretativist framework, ‘truth’ is a much more elusive concept. Individuals and groups construct their own version of reality. In short, the social world consists of multiple, subjective realities. Secondly, a central theme in the qualitative perspective is the emphasis placed upon ‘naturalism’. In its widest sense naturalism maintains that social phenomenon is a distinct form of physical phenomena in such fundamental ways that they cannot be understood by applying scientific methods and methodologies from the physical sciences. Consequently the qualitative researcher uses methods such as participant and non-participant observation and non-standardised interviews as a way of getting close to the data and studying social interaction in its natural surroundings. This is in marked contrast to the quantitative approach where the rules of scientific method exhort the researcher to adopt a position of scientific detachment.

In this thesis I will work within this broadly defined interpretativist framework. In particular I want to treat the policy-making process set up by the Ministerial Review as both a discursive and a practical political activity. In effect my research tests the value of recasting policy theory and research in terms of what is referred to in Australia as 'the politics of discourse' (Yeatman, 1989: Bacchi 1999; Marston, 2000, 2002, 2004) or elsewhere as the 'organisational discourse' paradigm (Fairclough 1996; Grant et al 2001, p.8).

The theoretical perspective I have adopted begins with the proposition that the policy-making process involves policy actors using 'constructive schemes' in various kinds of organisational discourse. This is done to firstly represent policy problems, (Bacchi 1999), then to set the policy agenda, generate and use policy related ‘data’ and finally to produce policy solutions (Bessant, Watts et al 2006).
Organisational discourse matters because it is both a ‘mode of thinking’ and has practical political significance. The organisational discourse framework understands that policy-making is thought-filled work. Policy-making is only possible because policy actors interpret their world by using conceptual categories and metaphors (Schon 1980) in what Bohme (1975) calls 'constructive schemes' or what Lakoff (2001) calls 'frames'. Secondly there is always a ‘politics of discourse' at work in the making of organisational discourse. This perspective assumes that politics and policy-making are simultaneously ‘theoretical’ and ‘practical’ activities which mean that we begin with the premise that all policy-making activities are interpretative, contested and contingent. To this extent the use of power is a constant factor. Politically, organisational discourse matters because it involves the ability to control discourse i.e., ‘the power to sustain particular discursive practices with particular discursive investments in dominance over other alternative (including oppositional) practices’ (Fairclough 1996, p. 2). Policy choices and decisions are made, like any other political actions by the largely unconscious use of discursive frames and metaphors which constitute the problem, help to establish a policy agenda and elucidate possible solutions in a context where 'reality' itself is being defined and interpreted and changed. Policy makers working in complex organisational arrangements understand they have some choice and do actually make choices in policy making. Policy actors using 'constructive schemes' in their policy-making communities develop understandings and accounts of the constraints that limit their choices.

This is not a 'discourse-invents-reality' argument, as much as an argument that recognizes that the relationship between social relations and practices and our language practices are inextricably inter-linked. They should properly be regarded as Watts (1994, p. 102) puts it as ‘mutually determinative of and yet not reducible to, one another’. This is an approach that explores the dialectical relationship between material, institutional and discursive practices. The 'politics of discourse' takes Nancy Fraser's (1997) theoretical contention seriously: in order to intervene effectively we need to re-connect the symbolic order and the political-economy of policy-making.

As Dolas (2004, p. 444) suggests, the organisational discourse perspective assumes that we may be able to search backwards for a ‘first mover’ situation in order to locate the ‘origins’ of what are now taken-for-granted or conventional policy frameworks or discourses. It assumes too that we can trace both the movements and
roles of key policy actors as they move within various policy communities. It assumes that organisational discourse succeeds because it is a long-term practice with policy actors repeating a given policy formulation iteratively over a long period of time.

Central to the organisational discourse approach is the constructivist premise that to understand social problems and policy responses to them, attention needs to be given to the processes of discovery being used by a policy making community and by asking ‘in whose interests’ is the research and policy being done? This premise is closely aligned with the use of a case study method.

My thesis addresses several substantive research questions. As I have indicated Bacchi (1999) argues that a study of policy should have as its starting point an examination of how the problem has been represented. I ask firstly, what did the Brack’s Victorian State Government understand as and therefore represent the policy problem regarding young people’s participation in post-compulsory education that required a policy response? Secondly given that political process of representation, I am interested in establishing how the Ministerial Review set out to validate the initial representation of the problem that the Victorian government used to frame the Review. Thirdly I ask how the Ministerial Review came to develop its policy recommendations so as to address the policy problems it had identified. This involves establishing what solutions to the ‘problem’ were proposed by the Ministerial Review panel and why they were recommended as policies. In the ordinary way of things and if I had had more time and a larger scale of thesis in which to work, I would also have wanted to establish what steps were taken by the Bracks’ government to implement the policy recommendations of the review panel. However this would have entailed a much larger research framework and a far wider interview schedule involving my getting access to a significant number of bureaucrats to elicit their account of how the Review panel’s recommendations were dealt with. For this reason I did not address the implementation process. Rather I was interested to evaluate the value of the Ministerial review process accepting that any comments about this must acknowledge that at the time of completing the research and writing of this thesis (i.e. 2004-05) it was still ‘early days’.

METHODOLOGY
As I have indicated I am persuaded of the validity of arguments by Watts (1994), Fairclough (1996) and Bacchi (1999) that the policy-making process is best treated as a constitutive process in which a variety of techniques of discursive representation and persuasion play a central role. Given my interest in making sense of the Ministerial Review as a policy-making process, it became clear that it would best be shaped within a case study methodology that worked within a broadly defined qualitative interpretivist frame.

In developing this thesis I faced the fundamental problem confronting any researcher namely getting the kind of evidence with which to develop a well-informed argument. To both describe and understand the Ministerial Review as a policy-making process I needed to discover how this had happened.

My research methodology incorporated a number of ‘interconnected and interpretive practices’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3) to develop an understanding of the Ministerial Review’s formulation of policies.

The main data for this research came from a series of in-depth interviews with key informants associated with the Ministerial Review panel and/or from key figures working in the educational field. In selecting the people I wanted to interview I was mindful of the need to capture both the voices of the key players as well as the voices of less important figures in the policy community. The elite voices I ’captured’ provided a rich array of data that provided a picture of the policy-making process. Yet as Marston (2002) has also noted:

… meanings are produced in the interpretation of a text and therefore they are open to diverse readings, which may differ in their ideological import, hence the importance of capturing the voices of those that negotiate the policy field.

The collection of data for this research included recorded interviews with four ‘elite’ policy makers i.e., members of the Ministerial Review policy formulation panel. These included Peter Kirby (Chairperson of the Ministerial Review) and Howard Kelly (the then-General Manager of the Cross Sectoral Policy and Projects Division, DET, and the Project Director on behalf of DET for the Ministerial Review Panel) and Dr. John Spierings and Professor Jack Keating. The last two elite informants are also prominent academic researchers in the field. John Spierings had been involved in research concerning young people since 1994 and
has extended his research since 1998 with the Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF) as a key strategist and researcher. Keating was the Executive Officer for the Ministerial Review and has extensive work experience within three sectors of education and training being schools, VET/TAFE and higher education. Keating now works at Melbourne University as the Deputy Director of the Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning.

The research data and analysis also included recorded and transcribed interviews with another five practitioners actually working on a day-to-day basis in the field of post-compulsory education. For ethical reasons these five people are anonymous. Each was working in key management positions within LLENs. They were interviewed to gain a clearer view of the policy from their perspective, and responded concentrating on the merit of the polices and the complexities faced at the implementation stage as they worked close to the coal face on initiatives to actually increase young people’s participation. Effectively these five people were working in the field as LLEN managers when the interviews were recorded. Their task was attempting to implement the State Government policies as a result of the Ministerial Review. The LLEN managers interviewed were interested and knowledgeable about the policy processes undertaken by the Ministerial Review panel; they were not players in the formulation of policy. They were, however well placed to provide valuable comments. These LLEN managers who all worked in the Melbourne metropolitan region were recruited on a random basis in that they were known to me and were agreeable to being interviewed. Regional managers were not contacted as time was a limitation. However in the course of my work many informal discussions have occurred with regionally-based LLEN managers.

These informal discussions were undertaken along with a number of activities that could best be described as ‘fieldwork’. This fieldwork involved going to seminars and conferences, discussing what I was discovering from my interviews with people I work with as part of my professional work, taking account of a range of official statistics concerning young people’s education participation levels, and analysing and contextualizing a range of documentary material like newspapers and transcripts from radio.

Qualitative researchers emphasise the ‘socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between (the researcher) and what is being studied’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000. p. 8). The ‘net that contains the researcher’s epistemological,
ontological and methodological premises may be termed a paradigm or an interpreting framework’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 19). My study works within what has been called the ‘constructivist paradigm’ where there are multiple realities that surface in interviews, from observation, within field work, elite interviews, and within research already conducted within the area (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, Janesick in Denzin & Lincoln 2000, Lincoln and Guba in Denzin and Lincoln 2000, Minichiello et al 1995, Van Manen, 1990). Each adds to the process of attempting to reflect what is ‘real’ (ontology) by acknowledging diverse views and analysing the data to draw legitimate conclusions whilst acknowledging that a single interpretation of what is truth does not exist but the aim of research is to try to get as near to truth as possible through multiple forms of data collection and analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, Janesick in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, Lincoln and Guba, in Denzin &Lincoln, 2000, Minichiello et al, 1995, Stake 1995, Van Manen 1990).

This research aimed to capture the experiences and frameworks of knowledgeable individuals and enable their thoughts to be captured by in-depth interviews and discussions to elicit and record their experience of social reality through their interpretations (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, Janesick in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, Lincoln and Guba, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, Minichiello et al, 1995, Stake 1995, Van Manen 1990). Minichiello suggests, that case studies of this type involving in-depth interviews must develop theories that are grounded in the informant’s experience to avoid ‘the risk of reconstructing and imposing on that informant a fictional view of their reality’ (Minichiello et al, 1995, p. 69). When undertaking the formal interviews I made every effort not to let my views intrude into the interview process –intentionally. I asked the questions, did not comment to avoid any prospect of influencing informants inappropriately and corrupting the data.

Answers have been sought to questions that relate to how the policy problems like the needs of young people were constructed.

The questions asked of the nine persons formally interviewed were designed as ‘open-ended’ questions, enabling the informants to both answer these questions an/or to embellish their response with more wide-ranging comments about the range of issues related to the Ministerial Review, policies and post compulsory
education. The questions were derived from a consideration of the literature and discussion with colleagues and my supervisor.

The case study interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis in an environment where the respondent felt comfortable.

The questions for the ‘elite’ case study informants included:

1. How did you become involved in policy development regarding post-compulsory education and training?
2. What do you see as the major issues and challenges of the Kirby Review and its intentions?
3. What are your comments about the Review policies, and the associated politics of implementation?
4. Has the review had an impact on realigning a balance in education for students, staff and industry?
5. How do you think the review process accounted for the influence of various groups on the policy processes and implementation?
6. Can you describe instances of influence in the policy processes from various groups?
7. Who owns the problem?

I framed an almost identical set of questions for LLEN manager informants:

1. How did you become involved in the field of post-compulsory education and training?
2. Can you describe your experience working with the LLEN?
3. What do you see as major issues and challenges?
4. What have you noticed regarding the response of various parties to your LLEN?
5. Have there been major dilemmas around policy changes?
6. Has the review had an impact on realigning a balance in education for students, staff and industry?
7. What have been the advantages of the development of LLENs?

The research involves the documentation of critical observations concerning the ‘condition’ of post-compulsory education based on the analysis of information views and interpretations obtained from both formal and informal sources through
interviews and participant observation in the field, notes taken from seminars, and information gained from numerous players in my day-to-day working life. A range of other data was used to provide supplementary information to either confirm or question the data obtained from the field work. All data obtained from fieldwork and elite interviews was compared or contrasted with theoretical data where relevant. In summary this case study research aims to provide a disciplined interpretative approach to the incorporating information obtained from key players in the policy making process as well as ‘observers’ i.e., people connected to the education industry to formulate a rich array of qualitative data from various sources to crystallise a convincing account of ‘reality’ about the policy making process.

This study has its limitations. The data only reflects information from 2000-2004 due to limited resources and time. This reduced the scale and complexity of my commentary on the implementation and success and non-successes of the policies in 2005 and beyond. The case study informants were identified by focussing on formal interviews with metropolitan based informants due to the limitations of travelling to regional and country areas. However the informants remarked on issues related to the regional and rural areas of Victoria and my work also connected me to many people in outside the metropolitan area of Melbourne with direct contact in seminars, professional development activities or telephone and email contact. A further limitation of the study was that I did not undertake formal interviews with educators well placed in the independent and Catholic education sectors. This would have added new dimensions to the research but it would have involved significantly more research and resulted in a loss of prominence of the data obtained within the limitations of a dissertation of this size. Finally I did not address the quite critical process of policy implementation. If I had had more time and a larger scale of thesis to work with I would have wanted to establish what steps were taken by the Bracks’ government to implement the policy recommendations of the Review panel. For reasons already spelled out this was not practicable.

The ethical issues involved in this research involved a process of ‘advice and consent’ using the format developed at RMIT University to guide all social research involving ‘human subjects’. This involved advising prospective informants that the research was being undertaken in relation to the Ministerial Review as well as advice on the possibility eg. of offering conditions of confidentiality and disclosure. Relevant and appropriate advice was provided to
individuals when working in the field, explaining the type of the research I was undertaking.

There was one element of the ethical dimension of this research that regrettably I could not address. Greg Marston (2002) argues that it is important to ‘pay attention to’ and incorporate ‘the voices and perspectives of people who find themselves excluded from policy processes’ (Marston 2002, p.309). Marston (2002, p.309), drawing in part on the ideas of another theorist (he refers to Healey 1993, p. 28, not cited in this thesis), has pointed to the value of interpretative research when he writes:

In the interests of producing a richer and more politically informed account of policymaking we need to consider the interpretative accounts of policy actors, paying particular attention to which groups are able to access the production of policy discourses and the reasons others are marginalised. In a policy context, this involves empirically exploring the discursive and non-discursive components of policy implementation and the way meanings are made, used, conveyed, disseminated and translated

Marston (2002) sees this as an important aspect of what he calls ‘critical discourse analysis’ or ‘critical theory’. Marston has highlighted the challenge of using some of the basic interpretative approaches in ways that position the researcher in the field of policy making as someone who is not just observing but is in some sense also a participant:

… the theoretical tools developed in the ‘post’ literature – discourse, language, power/knowledge, subjectivity – need to be coupled with everyday struggles and practical concerns. As Mann (1998, p. 101) argues, it is the struggles of those who have to rely on public welfare that have done much to generate a more reflexive but distinctly critical social policy, and it is to these critical voices, these subject identities that we should pay much more attention. In other words, in social policy analysis, it is not enough to simply engage in academic discourse analyses of written policy texts. As Marston ‘a commitment to both text and practice is necessary to understand the policy process’ (Marston 2002 p.309).

Whilst I acknowledge the value of this insight there was insufficient time and space in this study to develop the research project in ways that would have incorporated the voices and perspectives of people who were excluded from the policy-making process.
I turn now to the structure and content of the five chapters that make up this thesis.

STRUCTURE OF THESIS

It should be noted initially that there is not a literature review chapter. Evans and Gruba (2002) argue that a literature review chapter is an outmoded convention in research dissertations. In this study the literature review is embedded in the text. Before leaping fully into this research I read a significant amount of the literature related to this particular field to find that I was in an area where I was unable to effectively comment on unjustifiable conclusions or disagreements drawn by theorists until I had undertaken my own research. This according to Evans and Gruba (2002) is a normal one. By avoiding an abstracted trawl through the literature and incorporating any theoretical observations on an as-needs basis in my case study I was better equipped to comment critically on related or connected research to this study and discount material that had not made a contribution to this study or had very limited relevance. Despite wide reading relating to literature in the area of education policy, the data collectively provided a valuable but often limited individual contribution to answer the four questions this study is addressing. Collectively the ‘multiple perspectives’ of the literature assisted in an understanding when combined with the other methods of focusing the study, such as recorded interviews, participant observation, attendance and or participation in numerous seminars. The contribution of various theorists is expanded upon extensively and interwoven within the study at the point of relevance.

Chapter One

It is important to provide an account of how I understood the policy making process and this required some discussion of what can be called policy theory. Chapter One was the logical place to do this. This discussion contextualises the following chapters and research overall in a better perspective as each chapter comments on the pedigree of the policies, meaning the degree that they were based on real problems. Policy as a concept has many meanings, connotations and distortions according to Bacchi (1999), Ozga (2002) and others. The standard commonsense view about policy is that it fixes a problem, but policy makers may construct a problem to match an intended policy thus politicising the whole process (Bacchi 1999, Bessant et al 2006). Policy can be based on ‘interpretations and
constructs’ of what is real according to Bacchi (1999, p.1). This chapter focuses on what the problem was purported to be that resulted in the policy that was developed. This according to Bacchi (1999) and Bessant et al (2006) is an essential aspect of the study of policy. Bacchi rightly proposes that establishing “What’s the problem” and ascertaining whether any ‘policy proposal contains within it an explicit (unambiguous) or implicit (understood) diagnosis of the problem’ (Bacchi 1999, p. 1) is seen by this researcher as a necessary starting point.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two addresses the first research question: How did the Brack’s Victorian State Government represent the policy problem regarding young people’s participation requiring policy responses?

This chapter addresses a number of critical contextual issues. First and foremost the major aspect covered is an evaluation of how the Bracks government initially framed or represented the policy problem. This aspect of the research according to Bacchi (1999) and Bessant et al 2006) is a key issue when researching policy. This chapter addresses the pedigree of the policies with reference to the initial representation of the policy problem. The context of the Ministerial Review was to develop policies to increase young people’s participation.

This chapter focuses on the representation of the policy problem by the government. To do this the chapter identifies the statements made publicly by the government on related issues and also comments made by informants on the government’s understanding and what influences came to bear on the decisions made in regard to the formation of the Ministerial Review and acceptance of the policies.

Chapter Three

This chapter flows on from the preceding chapter. The question that it addresses is: how did the Ministerial Review panel address the political framing of the policy problem and how did it represent the policy problems it set out to make recommendations on?
This chapter will argue that the Review panel was not inclined to challenge the government’s framing of the problem. The Review panel formulated and recommended the policies it did largely in the terms given to it by the Bracks government, and as I show in terms of the understandings of the various members of the panel developed over the course of their professional or research careers of the problems and issues they addressed.

Chapter Four

This chapter addresses the following question: What solutions to the ‘problem’ were proposed by the Ministerial Review panel and why were they recommended as policies?

This chapter comments on the development of the policies and provides a detailed commentary on the Ministerial Review panel’s recommendations including why and how they were formulated. I do this by drawing attention to the role played by the ideas of ‘Pathways’ and ‘social capital’.

Chapter Five

In this final chapter I briefly assess the achievements to date of the Ministerial review. I pay particular attention to the effects to date of reforms like the establishment of the LLENs and the VCAL project.

Conclusion

The conclusion outlines the significance of the main factors and observations that I argue have emerged from the analysis of the empirical data. It also makes recommendations for further research. It comments on the value or otherwise of enabling the policies to take their course emphasising the social, economic and political dimension, conducive or not, to improvements in human and social development.

Overall the research aims to comment on education reform policy using the Ministerial Review as the instrument that provides a distinct framework to focus the research inquiry and hopefully enable more informed discourse as a consequence
CHAPTER ONE: Policy communities and discourse in the policy making process.

Policy is a deceptively simple term which conceals some very complex activities.
(Considine 1994 in Bessant et al, 2006 p. 27)

In this thesis I am interested in understanding the work of the Ministerial Review of Post-compulsory Education Pathways in Victoria as a policy-making process. How are we to understand the idea of ‘policy’? ‘Policy’ like so many other key concepts in the social sciences —such as ‘community’, ‘power’ ‘poverty’ or ‘democracy’— is a simple yet protean concept which rarely gets treated with the care and respect it deserves. Apropos Considine’s observation (1994, p.2) that ‘policy’ is a ‘deceptively simple term’ Bessant et al (2006, p. 27) argue that it is all too frequently bandied about by politicians, bureaucrats, and senior managers without the benefit of definition or clarity. So to what kinds of activities or processes does the category ‘policy’ apply?

Considine (1994) drew attention to at least three different ways that ‘policy’ is used. The first definition-in-use is on display when governments make a statement on a social policy and claim ‘to have adopted a policy’ A second definition-in-use is suggested when public resources like money, staff and infrastructure, are committed by government officials to a certain program in education or health or some other social policy. Then there is the idea that ‘policy’ addresses occasions ‘when key institutions like Parliament or the High Court give legal force to the rights of some individuals and groups like affirmative action for women or Aboriginal land rights’ (see also Bessant et al, 2006 pp 27-28). The formation of policy however does not always reside with government bodies (Bessant et al 2006). Policy-making communities can and do reside in non-government organisations (NGOs) such as churches, trade unions or welfare bodies (Bessant et al 2006). As I will argue later the Dusseldorp Foundation, given its research focus on young Australians as a philanthropic NGO, arguably had an enormous impact on the formation of government policy related to the formation of the Ministerial
Review of Post-compulsory Education and Training and subsequent policy outcomes. Spierings (2003b) believed that the research conducted by the Dusseldorp Foundation, (and the organisation that employed him), had a degree of influence on the Ministerial Review (Kirby 2000, Spierings 2003b).

Yet even these three definitions-in-use do not exhaust the ways the concept of ‘policy’ is used or understood.

Hill (1997:5) maintains that policy is more than a decision and defines it as a ‘course of action’ although he also notes that this definition does not assist in the identification of policy (1997). Hill goes further, quoting ‘Cunningham, a former top British civil servant who argued that policy is rather like an elephant – you recognise it when you see it but cannot easily define it (Hill, 1997, p. 6).

Ozga (2000) refers to policy as text and policy as discourse. ‘Policy as text’ includes government white and green papers, or acts of parliament, that portray what is the intended outcome of the policy or what is to be achieved (Ozga 2000). ‘Policy as discourse’ involves the communication of policy – that which is communicated verbally (Ozga 2000). Ozga does not see these dimensions as totally separate (Ozga 2000). To Ozga (2000) policy texts are seen as a resource for analysis through examining what they convey, or seek to do so by taking into account the following three key issues such as the:

- **Source of the policy**: whose interests it serves; its relationship to global, national and local imperatives
- **Scope of the policy**: what is assumed it is able to do; how it frames the issue; the policy relationships embedded in it
- **Pattern of the policy**: what it builds on or alters in terms of relationships, what organisational and industrial changes and developments it requires (Ozga 2000, p. 95).

Heclos like the Oxford dictionary ‘emphasises action: a policy may be usefully considered as a course of action or inaction rather than specific decisions or actions’ thus taking into account a concept of sitting on ones hands as a policy response (cited Hill, 1997, p. 7). Along these lines Smith (cited in Hill 1997) also suggests that action and inaction are aspects of policy that are hard to identify but may inhibit or prevent change (Hill 1997).
Another definition relates to the ‘web of decisions and actions that allocate values’ (Hill 1997, p. 7). This reflects Ball’s (1990) view of policy as a process of contestation over values. Jenkins in Hill (1997) also agrees with Ball’s definition of policy: policy involves ‘interrelated decisions … concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them…’ (Hill 1997, p. 7).

Given even this brief review of some of the standard definitions of policy it is not surprising that Ozga (2000) argues that the concept of policy is inherently unclear and the term does not have a fixed definition. Trawling through the vast literature that now comprises the field of policy studies will not by itself resolve the many conceptual complexities that that literature contains.

In this thesis I propose to resolve this dilemma by showing how social policy is made using the Ministerial Review as my case study. To do this I want to pay attention to the way policy networks or what are sometimes called ‘policy-making communities’ help to define and represent social policy problems and their solutions and do so by using discourses.

POLICY MAKING COMMUNITIES

Like other important aspects of modern social life, it is easy to imagine that policy-making just happens somewhere else inside some kind of mysterious black box. At its simplest, the idea of ‘policy making communities’ identifies the fact that small groups of people work together to make policy. My intention in this thesis is to show how policy-making involves surprisingly small and often intimate groups of people talking, working and acting together.

Since the work of Heclo (1978) and Hall (1989) policy writers have acknowledged that policy-making is best understood as a process involving policy communities and networks. Policy-making is as Robert Rhodes (1997) has insisted, a complex set of activities that people do together inside ‘networks’ or policy-making communities.

Understanding that policy work involves a very wide array of work we can say that policy communities are networks of people drawn together and connected for the purpose of making policy.
Understanding the role played by policy communities in policy-making as it were ‘anthropologically’, can and should be understood whenever possible from both the insider’s point of view and from the points of view of as many of the participants in a policy community as we can get. At the moment given the state of policy research especially in Australia it is often easier to get one person’s point of view than the many.

Meredith Edwards (2001) offers one such insider’s account. Hers is an insider’s point of view of a number of important social policy developments over the past two decades. She does this by drawing on her diary entries describing her role as a leading policy-maker in the 1980s and 1990s.

For example she describes an exercise that began in 1987 to introduce a child support collection agency that would collect income support from fathers and pass on the money to their ex-spouse, typically a now single supporting mother. The exercise understood all too well the quip that ‘poverty for wives and mothers is just a husband away’.

Edwards’ entries point both to the roller-coaster nature of policy-making, even as it reminds us that policy making is a very human enterprise. Edward’s account points to the central role played by political talk, meetings and networking. Her diary records the processes involved including two crucial meetings. The first meeting, chaired by her boss Brian Howe, the then-Minister for Social Security, seemed to be successful in winning the support of relevant Ministers for her proposal:

7 February 1987: Monday was the meeting of ministers … I have not gone to a meeting of ministers before, so unsure of the likely result … Howe wanted to get in and out of the meeting as quickly as possible and achieve the recommendations that were already before ministers. Howe let all the ministers have a say and then succinctly summarized the decisions he wanted. Took about one and a half hours. Excellent result, given that we had already been prepared to compromise (Edwards 2001, p. 81).

Just one week later she discovered that certain senior ALP Ministers -like Lionel Bowen and Peter Walsh- did not like her idea and were working to kill it off by lobbying the Chief Justice of the Family Court, Elizabeth Evatt to intervene to that effect.
14 February 1987: Heard that Bowen saw Elizabeth Evatt and at that meeting he told her that he and Walsh were going to stop the child support project – to alter marginally the Family law Act and to hold off the collection agency until after the election! Tom told me and tears came to my eyes. For the first time I realized how you can slave your guts out for absolutely no result (Edwards 2001, p. 81).

In understanding how policy gets made, we need to understand how policy communities work. To start with there have been a number of views about how these policy communities work and who gets to be included in them. To simplify things I identify here only two broad ways of thinking.

One thing that can be said is that all too often there is a strong bias on view about who and what ‘properly’ constitutes the ‘policy makers’ and the policy-making process in the Australian policy literature. One view favors treating policy making as the work of a few people intimately connected to powerful state agencies.

**The Elite Model**

What has been called the ‘elite’ model is one broadly favoured approach to understanding or describing ‘policy making communities’. This perspective involves seeing policy-making processes as activities confined to the actions of select elite actors such as key or senior bureaucrats and politicians, often in leadership roles who work in and for the key agencies that make up a government. These are seen as distinct and separate from the interests of individuals and groups located outside that elite inner sanctum. For one mainstream tradition the proper object of the field of policy making are elites because as Jenkins (1993: 41) argues:

… the solution to patterns of political action can be found in the size and variation of political majorities or modes of elite control.

According to this account people and groups outside the elite network are treated as peripheral and as such are said to have little or no influence. Networks of people found for example in the media or what is often referred to as ‘public opinion’ are acknowledged to influence policy as eg., when ‘public opinion’ is said to ‘pressure’ or influence politicians who are sensitive about the prospect of remaining in office (Walker 1969; McClain 1993).
The value of elite model is that it focuses on the activities of often small groups of powerful people like key Ministers and senior bureaucrats directly involved in the policy making work of a major state agency like the Department of Education. In one sense those who work in this tradition are merely stating the obvious. This is because the production of legislation or the design and delivery of a complex system of social regulation involved e.g., in building and running a system of unemployment benefits is in the final instance the work of a few key government departments and some key people in them. Often there is not a lot of public scrutiny of how a particular policy process gets done or why it ends up with the kinds of legislation or service systems that evolve. Such a view is quite likely to be held by the policy-making bureaucrats themselves and again this is not an inaccurate view. Plainly a lot of the design and delivery of social policy is the work of small teams of elite bureaucrats. Unwittingly this view is on display in Edwards (2001).

However there are several key weaknesses with the elite model. The first is that it treats the policy-making elite as isolated from the wider social context. It requires that we imagine a small, introverted group of elite people who do not read newspapers, watch television or get out and about in their community. It proposes what really does amount to a black box model of policy making. The second weakness is that it may avoid asking how those people came to form the view that they did in regard to policy and assumed that a certain problem exists and needed to be addressed. Or it may involve ignoring the process whereby a clearly stated intention by a government or a Minister to ‘do something’ to fix problem X is then either thwarted completely or is changed by various kinds of opposition, lobbying or the expression of public opinion.

**Pluralist Approaches**

What are generally referred to as pluralist approaches make up a second set of perspectives on policy making. This pluralist perspective is a way of understanding policy-making that has been around for a long time in various incarnations. In his early work Robert Dahl for example used the term ‘pluralist’ to depict a forum in which competing interests battled it out for a say about how governments framed and prioritized policy.

Proponents of this model produce a different story about policy making from the elite model. They do so because they acknowledge the influence of the role of elite
public servants and politicians. But they also point to the effect of interest groups outside the ‘inner official sanctum’, such as networks of people in institutions like the media, universities or community groups and social movements like the unions, religious groups, or movements like the peace, women’s or environmental groups. The ‘pluralist approach’ incorporates the idea of ‘policy making communities’ and ‘policy networks’. Researchers use this approach track relationships and exchanges between the various members of policy network to calculate their influence and to map the policy making process (Lewis & Considine 1999, pp. 393-405).

A pluralist approach begins to make a lot more sense of some important aspects of the policy making process. Certainly the elite approach has some value too because a lot of policy-making is done by government agencies and employees. In effect we need to identify those networks operating inside the agencies and offices of government as well as the more extended policy community. In this sense a given policy network inside a key government agency like a Department of Education frequently involves a well-defined group of people and sometimes quite small groups.

This group may know each other very well because they work together on a daily basis. Some of these people will also be connected into other networks inside the government as they build working relationships with policy makers in other government agencies.

And it is vital that we also acknowledge that many people who belong to networks will be working for organisations outside government workplaces.

Finally there is one point of clarification needed here framed by a simple question: how do we know who is inside –or outside- one of these policy communities?

There are several ways people can identify who is in and who is out of a particular community. Each draws on some well established ways anthropologists carry out research. The researcher can ask the people with whom they make initial contact to tell the researcher who are the people who make up the important people of the tribe. To start with, those people who are well informed can usually identify the key people and organizations who are part of a given policy network. Typically people who are well connected can identify the key policy-makers beginning with the
politicians, advisers and bureaucrats who work inside the key agencies of the state and who matter.

Another of the ways we can trace out the contours of a policy-making community is to listen carefully to the kinds of language games or discourses that people inside the community use. Using this approach recognizes that making policy involves a lot of talking. Sometimes as was the case with the Edwards example, the process of talking is a political process designed to ‘win friends and influence people’. Talk also plays an even more vital role such as when talk or what Ozga calls ‘discourse’ is used to construct both the policy community and the kinds of problems that policy makers address.

DISCOURSE

Much of the mainstream policy literature relies on two simple but absolutely fundamental theoretical even philosophical assumptions.

One is the assumption that the ‘world’ or ‘reality’ just is the way it is, and that ‘knowing’ reality provides a rock solid basis for intervening in that reality.

Running closely in parallel is another assumption (or a theory of knowledge) that says that all human knowledge is made secure or credible when we rely on our senses. Sometimes it is argued that we can strengthen what our senses tell us if we add to what our senses tell us by using something called ‘scientific method’. This is what Leo Strauss (1963, pp. 1-13) called ‘scientism’, an attitude that confers the same kind of certainty that religious belief is believed to confer on the person who holds this belief. There are large, longstanding and very difficulty questions that have not been properly addressed by the proponents of the ‘naturalist’ and ‘scientistic’ traditions.

One consequence of people holding to both ‘naturalist’ and ‘scientistic’ traditions is the proposition that if we get a proper alignment between a reality that is just naturally there and our knowledge of that reality then we have achieved a correspondence the reality and our knowledge that warrants the use of the word ‘truth’. This correspondence idea of truth gives rise to statements like ‘It is true that x is the case’, or ‘It is a fact that X’, where X refers to something said to be real.
It is easy enough to see that this proposition that ‘such and such is true’ -or is a fact- is vulnerable to the kind of annoying questions that young children ask like, ‘…but how do you know that it is so?’ This childlike objection is difficult to overcome as is clear when we consider the claims made on behalf of empiricism.

Empiricism is an old idea about how humans come to know their world. From great philosophers like John Locke (1632-1704) on has come the basic argument that all we know about the world, or reality, is gained through our senses. If for example we have an idea like ‘chair’ that is because an object we call a ‘chair’ sends out sense impressions which our eyes, or the other four sense organs, detect on and store away in our brain. Our mind is what Locke called a tabula rasae -or ‘blank sheet’. All that we can know about the world is whatever is there to be seen, touched, smelt, heard and thus known. In order to know reality, it is important that we do not do anything that distorts the impressions we receive from the world. This refers to the idea of objectivity or impartiality when we research or ‘describe’ reality. In the field of policy proponents of this approach argue that what is 'real' compels governments or policy-makers via some process usually represented as a process of ‘discovery’, to react in certain ways.

It would be very clean and straightforward, if people’s ideas about problems, including policy-maker’s ideas, simply reflected ‘reality’. If accounts of social problems were straightforward records of what is the reality, then there would no disagreements about what the problem is, or how we should deal with it, nor would there be any political or ethical controversies. (The fact that there is so much controversy highlights just one of many problems with empiricism).

One problem is that too often policy has been defined as an empirical process based on the premise that whatever is real is graspable as such by empirical means.

Such an assumption however breaks down quite dramatically in the face of the abundant evidence that governments in the twentieth century have all too frequently pursued very irrational and injurious policies based on terrible fantasies. Irving Janis (1983) brilliantly illuminates the consequences of the quite irrational beliefs that generate what he calls ‘policy fiascoes’ that can cause incredible levels of human tragedy and suffering. The Nazi racial state after 1933 e.g., arbitrarily defined the very existence of the Jewish people as a major policy problem to which after 1942 the Nazi state devoted considerable resources to producing a genocidal
‘final solution’ that killed nearly six million Jews and upwards of 20 million other ‘undesirables’. In 2002-03 the US government along with the UK and Australian governments presented ‘empirical evidence’ that there were weapons of mass destruction. These WMD did not exist: 100,000 Iraqis many of them unarmed civilians have been killed in the ensuing invasion undertaken to prevent their use.

Another problem is that many people often assume that the relationship between ‘language’ and ‘reality’ is a simple and straightforward. According to empiricists words only exist for the purpose of naming the ‘facts’ or ‘things’ that make up the world. According to this approach, those facts/reality exist prior to the words we use to name them/it. Charles Taylor (1971, p. 24) highlighted the limitations with this commonsense approach, when he wrote:

Our activities cannot be identified in abstraction from the language we use to describe them or invoke them or to carry them out. The situation we have here is one in which the vocabulary of a given social dimension is grounded in the shape of the social practice in this dimension: that is the vocabulary wouldn’t make sense, couldn’t be applied seriously where the range of practices didn’t prevail. And yet this range of practices couldn’t exist without the prevalence of this or some related vocabulary. The language is constitutive of the reality is essential to it being the kinds of reality it is.

Taylor points to the role of ‘discourse’.

DISCOURSES AND ‘DISCOVERING’ POLICY PROBLEMS

Discourse refers to the patterns of language use and beliefs we use to understand and talk about reality. It has become a major theme in modern policy studies (eg. Yeatman, 1989; Fairclough 1996; Bacchi 1999; Marston, 2000, 2002, 2004; Grant et al 2001).

Discourses can take the form of common-sense ideas and stories. In the commonsense world non-experts describe for example how a work place operates, why relationships fail or why particular weather pattern is holding. Discourses are also produced by experts like economists, sociologists or medical scientists. Experts produce schemes of classification. Experts in medicine, physics, social policy or economics for example also produce specialist discourses to classify types
of people (‘schizophrenic’ ‘delinquent’ or ‘the poor’) or to describe and explain events or explain phenomenon.

Taking this idea of discourse seriously entails by-passing the ‘realist accounts’ that assume how words exist simply to name the pre-existing ‘facts’ or ‘things’ of the world. This thesis owes a great deal to Ian Hacking (1995; 1998) and his exploration of how ‘transient mental illnesses’ like ‘mad walkers’ and ‘multiple personality’ come into being as ‘illnesses’ with attendant professional or expert diagnoses and treatments and then disappears. Such an approach suggests the problems with any simple empiricism. Hacking in effect suggests we only ‘see’ what we already ‘know’.

And how do policy makers think about the problems and solutions that they need to address at particular points in time? How for example given that policy makers have ‘discovered ‘that there is a particular problem do they then go on to make that problem worthy of being fixed by some kind of policy process? This is where the idea of policy-makers working to set an agenda or constitute a problem comes into play.

AGENDA SETTING

There is now an increasing recognition in modern policy theory that social problems are ‘constructed’ as such by definite social actors using specifiable discourses to present their claim that ‘such and such is a problem’. As Spector and Kitsuse (1987, p. 79) observe:

> The emergence of a social problem is contingent upon the organization of activities asserting the need for eradicating, ameliorating or otherwise changing some condition. The central problem for a theory of social problems is to account for the emergence, nature and maintenance of claims making and responding activities.

‘Agenda setting’ usually refers to the initial and creative part of the policy-making process which happens before other elements in the policy making process begin to happen. ‘Agenda setting’ can refer to processes involved in running a committee meeting as the chairperson sets the order of discussion for that meeting. It can also be a metaphor used to help us imagine how policy is made.
As a metaphor it invites us to think in a literal way of an ‘agenda’ - that is, a list of items or issues or a prioritized schedule with the most urgent and important issues in descending order from the top down. This meaning is here transferred to the policy-making process as policy-makers struggle to have their particular ideas about what really matters are represented and given priority. The ‘setting’ part of the metaphor refers to processes of placing, ordering and securing issues in a priority list.

The idea of agenda-setting invites us to see policy-making as a process involving groups and individuals who talk over, argue and struggle with each other to decide whose interests will be heard and served by politicians and state bureaucrats.

Lewis and Considine (1999, p. 393) describe this activity well:

An important part of policy-making is the pre-decision stage at which a large range of issues and preferences are fashioned into a prioritized government policy agenda. This early stage provides a window through which to observe the organization of power within the policy process. The actual means used to develop policy agenda is far more than simply a story of setting by governments, but a critical vantage point from which to observe and explain some important aspects of the nature of power and influence in government, by contemplating the movement from a large array of issues to the ‘short list’ of a government’s decision agenda.

The key strength of thinking about the role of policy making communities especially one that works within a pluralist frame, and allows for an adequate account of the role played by discourses, is that it can help us understand better how key policy makers came to form the view that a certain problem exists and needs to be addressed. Examining the discourses, and tracing policy networks provide direct insights into how and why a given policy process evolves in the way it does. This involves asking how and why the problems that become the object of policy-making become an issue. How ‘real’ are those social problems? How and why do successful policy solutions become successful? These questions can best be addressed by investigating the discourses, the agenda-setting activities of member of relevant policy networks as they work to identify problems and create and implement policy. It is to that task that I turn in the next chapter.

It is an indictment on our society that over two decades we have grown to accept as normal that a large percentage of our young people will be excluded from employment and a livelihood. Despite a decade of economic growth, the percentage of young people who are unemployed or underemployed has not improved. (Kirby Interim Report, 2000b, p.11)

Bacchi (1999) states that when researching policy an obvious starting point is to attempt to assess how the policy problem has been represented. Bacchi maintains that a fundamental aspect of the study of policy requires identifying or ‘representing the ‘problem’. In this chapter I ask how did the Bracks’ government represent the problem it gave to the Ministerial Review to develop some policy responses?

I will argue that the Brack’s government defined or ‘represented’ the initial or ‘presenting’ problem as low participation levels of young Victorians in work, education and training, treating these low participation rates as a result of a poorly performing post-compulsory education system (Kosky 2000). It is clear that the new Government of Victoria went on the public record soon after it had won office expressing concern about the poor performance and ‘overall level of educational attainment and literacy levels in Victoria’ and the need ‘to increase the level of participation and achievement in education and training in rural and regional Victoria and among groups where’ the performance was very low (VLESC see Annual report - 2000/2001 p.6).

There are numerous examples of the new Bracks’ government outlining their understanding of the problem and making statements in the public domain reflecting not only an understanding of the problem, but also using a range of evidence to illustrate or represent the problem.
The new Minister for Post-compulsory Education and Training, Lynne Kosky, released a background statement in January 2000 that explicitly identified the problem of poor participation levels among young people. ‘The ministerial statement noted that school retention rates to Year 12 in Victoria had fallen from 86 per cent in February 1992 to 81 per cent in February 1999’ (Moodie 2000). The reference to the 1992-1999 period refers to the era when a ‘radical’ neo-liberal government headed by Premier Jeff Kennett had formed Government in Victoria.

Steve Bracks as the new Premier of Victoria also early and repeatedly expressed the view that the post-compulsory education system had not only failed to respond to major social and economic changes with appropriate curricula, but had also failed to develop support structures to address the needs of young people (Bracks 2000).

Bracks (Speech 23 October 2000) frequently expressed distinct unhappiness about the plight of young people and the inequitable configurations of participation levels and education achievement across Victoria. Bracks referred e.g., to the poor performance given the high level of school non-completers and poor achievement by certain groups within various Victorian Regions (Bracks, 2000):

There are high numbers of school dropouts and low levels of achievement amongst certain groups and within certain regions. Fewer than 1 in 10 young people leave school early in many parts of Melbourne. In poorer regions and in some country areas, as many as 3 in 10 girls and 4 in 10 boys leave school early. This is not acceptable in a society that believes all should have a fair chance in life (Bracks, Speech 23 October 2000)

The Bracks’ government could also draw on media reports to make its case. One Ministerial background statement used a Herald Sun (3 August 2000) report on the alarming state of affairs in the Mornington Peninsula and in Gippsland. These are an outer suburban south east suburban/semi rural area of greater Melbourne, and an eastern rural regional area of Victoria respectively:

As revealed in the Herald Sun this year, male dropout rates have soared to 45 per cent on the Mornington Peninsula and 43 per cent in Gippsland.

(Edmunds 3 August 2000).

The Ministerial background statement reported that the attrition rate for senior secondary school males was ‘more than 40 per cent in the Mornington Peninsula on
the fringes of Melbourne and in the Goulburn-Ovens-Murray and Gippsland in regional Victoria’ (Moodie 2000). Minister Kosky is on record as advising that in ‘some regions one in every two boys dropped out of school’ (Murray 2000).

Kosky’s Ministerial statement also identified regions where ‘girls and boys were dropping out of school at higher rates in Mornington and the Goulburn-Ovens Murray regions, with girls also leaving more frequently in north-west Melbourne’ (Murray 2000)

Problems for young people were exacerbated by a wide disparity in school and ‘tertiary education participation rates’ (Moodie 2000). The government isolated additional factors by stating that the provision of education in regional Victoria was fraught with inadequate planning and fragmentation among ministries (Moodie 2000).

Kosky expressed the need for a ‘whole of government approach’ to address the needs of young people (Kosky, Monday, 23 October 2000). Kosky considered that barriers blocking the outcomes of young people existed within the “education and training sectors’ and the need for education to improve links with industry was also a problem needing rectification (Kosky, Monday, 23 October 2000):

In this information age, we all know that education is our most valuable commodity. More than ever before, education underpins the success of nations and the hopes of individuals and Victoria today has a government that understands this basic fact. The Government knows that we have to do more than reverse the cuts made by the Coalition — we have to work towards a whole new approach to the education system. The days of false savings — of ad hoc changes — the days of sliding towards zero government responsibility — those days are over (Bracks 23 October 2000 – public speech)

The Bracks Labor Government had come to office unexpectedly in 1999 (Bantick 2000). In the course of an election it was confidently expected it would not win, the ALP had nominated education as its number one policy priority. In making education a key element in its campaign this decision possibly reflected the judgement by the ALP as it prepared for an election in October 1999 that it could harness widespread concern in the electorate that the Kennett government had embarked on a reform agenda in regard to education that had gone too far. Equally
it is possible to treat the concern about a failing education system as expressions of deeply felt concerns and value commitments. This is especially likely given the background of key figures like Bracks and Kosky both of whom had worked as teachers before entering politics. It also reflected a level of real concern among academic researchers about the effects of some eight years of Kennett-style reform.

For education researchers like Blackmore (1998) and Melville (1998) the far-reaching changes that occurred under this government were harmful, not only to the students, but also to their community. During the Kennett era 370 state schools were closed in Victoria (Melville 1998). The Age (May 17, 2001 author unknown) reported that the previous Liberal government under Kennett had undertaken to reorganise school structures. In this process the Kennett government tightened its budget allocation to the government schools sector and in the process removed 8,000 teachers from the education system (The Age May 17, 2001, p.22, Melville 1998). The Age report claimed that ‘teachers were demoralised and the idea that teaching could be a rewarding and desirable career took a battering under the Kennett government with average class sizes increasing from 23.4 to 25.9’ (Age May 17, 2001, p.22). That this “battering” occurred under the “Schools of the Future” policy - which was an irony as many schools proved not to have much of a future under the Kennett government.

Given this the new Government astutely defined the problem as the result of an education system that had failed. ‘The background statement released by the Minister for Post-Compulsory Education, Training and Employment, Lynne Kosky, gives a detailed rationale for the review and foreshadows key issues for the Government.’ (Murray 2000):

These young people have been failed by Mr Kennett's educational system, and worse still, they're not picked up in either training or in employment,’” Ms Kosky told reporters.

‘The education system that Mr Kennett has left behind consigns these young people and others to the scrap heap’ (Murray 2000 again quoting Kosky).

Circumstances indicate that Kosky was making a sharply defined political point in regard to the previous government’s education policies.
In arriving at their judgement that Victorian education was in a mess the new Premier and his new Minister Kosky also had access to a body of research and statistics to buttress their view. As Bracks made clear:

> We know that by the standards of comparably developed countries we are no better than average — better than some for sure, but many others leave us behind in crucial areas. Too many Victorian children leave primary school with literacy and numeracy levels below international standards. The number completing secondary education is poor by international standards.

(Bracks 23 October 2000 – public speech)

Kosky and Bracks went repeatedly on the public record drawing attention to the problems of young Victorians’ education participation levels and the systemic problems of education compounding the problem.

Bracks e.g., acknowledged regions within Victoria ‘who have particular difficulties with early school leaving’ reflecting that in Victoria in the late 1990s, around ‘11,000 young people leave school without a recognised qualification. Many leave at the end of year 10 or earlier, others attempt the first year of the VCE and withdraw along the way. Retention rates to year 12 in Victorian government schools fell from 77.9 per cent to 69.1 per cent in 1998’ (Gauchi 2000).

Bracks however compared Victoria on an international basis and disclosed justifiable concerns thus demonstrating a deeper knowledge of the problems faced by young people.

> Our qualification levels are weak and projected to fall further behind those of most other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. Australia now ranks eleventh out of seventeen OECD countries on the OECD Innovation Index. Yet we know science, technology and innovation are the drivers of future prosperity.

(Bracks 23 October 2000 – public speech)

It helped that there were researchers in the wider policy community to support these arguments. Spierings (2003b) claimed that the “genesis” of the formulation of the Ministerial Review owed a lot to the research that was undertaken on ‘youth at risk’ in a Dusseldorp Skills Foundation paper the called the “Deepening Divide” (refer Dusseldorp 1999). For Spierings this ‘… opened up … an opportunity. It was revealing in terms of what stories it told, [and] created a back drop, a strong back
drop within which the Kirby report could operate’ (Spierings 2003b, Para. 30. The *Deepening Divide* (Dusseldorp 1999) is a collection of reports that provided comprehensive empirical and statistical data on issues pertaining to the work and learning circumstances of young Australians. It is a companion document to *Reality and Risk* (Dusseldorp 1998) and created the foundations for the need for a Ministerial Review with a focus on 15-19 year olds where the Deepening Divide (Dusseldorp 1999) concentrated more on 20-24 year olds but demonstrated a national and Victorian trend of real concern in terms of participation levels by young people. Spierings (2003b) was clear in his view that the research undertaken by Keating in conjunction with the Dusseldorp Foundation influenced the government’s understanding of the youth situation and the need to make significant changes given the plight of young people based particularly on the research reported in the *Deepening Divide* (Dusseldorp 1999) and *Youth Reality and Risk* (Dusseldorp 1998) reports.

Spierings also recalled that at a personal level policy advice had been offered to the new government. ‘In the lead up to the 1999 election … we were aware that a step like this was likely to happen if they won government and so we were supportive in informal ways to ensure that it was successful I guess’ (Spierings 2003b, Para. 30).

Part of the policy advice available to the ALP leadership in the election campaign of 1999 came from people like Jack Keating. (Keating was to be appointed Executive Officer to the Ministerial Review). Keating was well placed to provide expert advice through his extensive knowledge and research in the field combined with his close political connections. Keating had close connections to the new Premier Steve Bracks. It was Keating who recommended to Steve Bracks to relocate from Ballarat and run for a seat in parliament in an electorate in suburban Melbourne (Rollins 8 September 2000).

Given the political definition of the problem of participation in post-compulsory education and the advice coming from some key players in the education policy community like Keating it was not surprising that the new government saw value in carrying out a review.

In January 2000 barely two months after winning the ‘unwinnable’ election the Bracks government announced it would appoint a panel of ‘external experts’ to advise the government on ways to address the problem. ‘Ms Kosky said the review,
to be chaired by National Centre for Vocational Education Research chairman Peter Kirby, would tell the government how to fix the problem’ (Murray 2000). As Minister Kosky put it after the review had done its work:

These policies were framed in order to address the serious issue of participation in and outcomes of young people in post compulsory education and training in this State. Some major themes underlying this set of policies were that the levels of participation and outcomes were not optimal, that some regions of the State and some social groups have poor outcomes, and that there needs to be a greater level of accountability for education and training outcomes.

(Kosky, Monday, 23 October 2000)

The evidence clearly suggests that the problem of young people’s participation and the associated failings of post-compulsory education and training were comprehensively and effectively represented by the new Victorian government.

It seems that the leadership of the new government was influenced by research carried out by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum (Dusseldorp 2000) a high profile philanthropic organisation and ‘think-tank’ noted for research in this field. This research persuaded a government that probably needed little persuasion, that solutions to the problem of Victoria’s post-compulsory education system were desperately needed (Keating ECEF 2001).

This chapter has provided evidence that the Brack’s State Government were able to define and understand the problem of young people’s participation requiring significant policy responses.

In the next chapter I turn to the Ministerial Review panel’s definition and understanding of the problem of young people’s participation level in work education and training as a ‘real’ problem requiring an effective policy response.
CHAPTER THREE: What is the problem? The Ministerial Review Panel

There is great diversification of needs, programs and providers. It [post compulsory education] intersects with a very broad range of other social and economic issues and needs. Researchers must understand this if their research is to be applicable. Research in this area requires some understanding of a very broad range of fields. (Keating see ECEF, 2001).

Between March and September 2000 the Ministerial Review panel chaired by Peter Kirby worked quickly and efficiently to compete a far-reaching review of post-compulsory education in Victoria.

It undoubtedly helped that the Ministerial Review panel had been given a clear set of terms of reference. The panel was asked to review the post-compulsory educational needs of young people aged 15-24 in Victoria and to examine patterns of labour market participation from an educational, employment and training perspective. This panel was also asked to investigate the structure and efficacy of post-compulsory level education for young people. Other issues for review included funding and administrative co-ordination between the State and Federal governments, and the provision of advisory, guidance and support services for young people within Victoria’s post-compulsory education and training programs. Finally it was asked to review the responsibilities and structures of the Victorian Board of Studies and the State Training Board (Kirby 2000a, p. 165).

In this chapter I ask how did the Ministerial Review deal with the initial representation of the problem that the Victorian government used to frame the Review and by what means did it form a view about the policy problems that it would use to frame its recommendations?

It is clear that the Review panel accepted the Brack’s government representation of the policy problem. As its Chair Peter Kirby indicated in the Review panel’s final report:
This Report (The Ministerial Review) is not directed solely towards those young people who experience the poorest educational outcomes, and who correspondingly have the greatest risk of incomplete education and training and poor employment outcomes. It is concerned with overall education and training access and outcomes for young people in the State, and the link between these outcomes and the future of young people and the Victorian community. But the disparity in outcomes, within the national and international contexts that we (the panel) have described represents the most challenging of the issues that we have attempted to address (Kirby 2000a, p 29)

The speed with which the Review panel worked also pointed to the consequences of appointing Peter Kirby as the Review Panel Chair, as well Jack Keating and Howard Kelly to the panel. It was eg., never likely that Kirby as a very experienced advisor who had had decades of senior civil service experience would ever have been inclined to seriously challenge a government policy brief.

Peter Kirby’s experience in the field of education policy-making is best described as extremely comprehensive. Kirby had served in the British, Commonwealth and Victorian public services for forty years between 1956 and 1996. In that career he had held senior leadership roles in TAFE and higher education in Victoria and South Australia in the 1980s. In this role as Chair of the TAFE Board in Victoria he oversaw the implementation of the Kangan Report (1975) on ‘Needs in Technical and Further Education’. His most senior appointment had been as Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. He was a former Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Training. At the point when he took on the role as Chair of the Ministerial Review panel he was the chair of the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER).

He had also chaired or participated in many other important committees of review such as Karmel Committee of 1973. The first Karmel Report (1973) proposed devolution of responsibility to the people involved in ‘schooling,’ drawing the empowerment that can stem from the partnerships of schools and their communities. The Karmel Report (1973) like the Ministerial Review (Kirby 2000a) clearly acknowledged that education required significant improvement to address student needs and that many teachers were ‘inadequately trained’. The Karmel Report was committed to establishing increased equality by making the 'overall
circumstances of children's education as nearly equal as possible' (Karmel 1973, p.139). To establish a significantly heightened level of equality ‘required higher levels of resourcing [that] were therefore needed to address existing deficiencies in schools. The inadequate training and development of teachers, outdated curricula and teaching methods, a lack of shared decision-making within schools and in community involvement in school affairs needed to be addressed' (Welsh 1999, referring to Karmel 1973 p.139). ‘The Karmel Report (1973) resulted in a massive expansion of Commonwealth funding to schools. Within two years, Commonwealth spending on schools grew from $364 million to nearly $1.1 billion’ (Welsh 1999, quoting Marginson, 1997a, p.46) – but still the inequality persisted, (Curtain, 1999, 2002, 2003, Kirby, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, Teese 2000, Spierings 2003a, Dusseldorp 2002b). Kirby also chaired the Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs (Kirby 1985) that recommended ‘the expansion of the traditional apprenticeship program to other industry sectors within a traineeship form in areas such as hospitality, business, retail and travel in the initial stages’.

It was also never likely that Kirby would have accepted the role as Chair of the Review panel if he did not already share the Bracks’ government’s view of the problem. Kirby was well placed to appreciate the sensitivity of the Bracks’ government. He had a long public record of supporting the expansion of educational opportunities to deal with social problems like youth unemployment and social disadvantage. In his capacity as the First Assistant Secretary of the Department of Employment and Industrial relations, he spoke at the “First National Conference” on TAFE at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in August 1976. The speech was titled “When will they ever learn?” and referred mainly to the plight of the young unemployed. In the speech Kirby expressed significant concern at teenage unemployment as reported in the Australian Financial Review (Tuesday 24 August, 1976). Kirby cited unemployment levels for this group four times higher than persons aged over twenty years (Financial Review 1976). Kirby further revealed his real concern for young people at a time, according to the Financial Review, when the federal government was ‘relying on continuing high levels of unemployment as its anti-inflationary strategy’ and it was ‘not keen to reveal the real effects of Australia’s post-war unemployment’ (Financial Review 1976):

About 35 young people are registered as unemployed for every job vacancy, with the figure rising to an alarming ratio of 600:1 in non-metropolitan New
South Wales. Young unemployed people are taking longer to find jobs. Nearly 20 per cent of those out of work had been unemployed for more than six months. A special survey conducted by the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations showed, not unexpectedly, that the young unemployed were predominantly less educated, lower skilled and inexperienced. (*Financial Review* 24 August 1976)

The appointment of Jack Keating as Executive Officer to the Review panel likewise involved the appointment of someone with a long track record of support for expanded educational opportunities. (Keating currently works at Melbourne University as the Deputy Director of the Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning). The Bracks government simply referred to Keating as ‘an internationally renowned expert in post-compulsory education’ (Rollins 8 September 2000). Keating had had extensive experience in schools, VET/TAFE and higher education. He had been a senior lecturer at RMIT University and a Senior Research Associate with the Assessment Research Centre and also an Associate Professor with the Department of Industry, Professional and Adult Education at RMIT University. He also had international experience with the OECD who had seconded him to work in to Paris on two occasions to continue work on a project called ‘The Role of National Qualifications Systems in Promoting Lifelong Learning’.

Keating’s expertise in the area of vocational education and post-compulsory education is widely acknowledged. Like Kirby he held strong views about the value of expanding educational opportunities:

I guess it started long time ago with the teachers union VSTA (Victorian Secondary Teacher association), and we always had a view that upper secondary was too narrow and inaccessible to kids from lower income areas so there was a long history of campaigning and proposals for reform of the senior secondary certificate. The first direct involvement was with the development of the VCE I suppose and I just carried on from there. (Keating 2003, Para 2).

He also had excellent political connections into the new government. As one media report noted:

Documents released by the government last week showed that Mr Keating’s company Keating Gibson & Associates was engaged in March to provide
advice and support to the Kirby review set up by the Minister for Post-Compulsory Education Lynne Kosky to examine education, training and employment pathways for those in post-compulsory schooling. Premier Steve Bracks' former campaign director, Jack Keating, has been awarded a $95,000 consultancy by the Department of Education, prompting a fresh opposition attack on Education Minister Mary Delahunty. Mr Keating was Mr Bracks' campaign director in 1994 when Mr Bracks entered politics through a by-election for the seat of Williamstown.

(Rollins 8 September 2000)

Keating’s standing with key government figures in Bracks and Kosky surely enabled a clear transfer of information to provide a vivid, if not indisputable, picture of the problem(s) which that government believed justified the establishment of the review.

EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY

In a period when governments and their civil services have expressed their commitment to policy based on evidence (Bessant, Watts and Hil 2003) it is not surprising that the Review panel used a variety of ‘hard’ data to represent the policy problem. For Howard Kelly (2003) and John Spierings (2003) the work of the Ministerial Review panel underscored the value of solid research. The Ministerial Review panel in their three reports (Kirby 2000a, 2000b, 2000c) cited many examples of qualitative and quantitative data to demonstrate that there were significant problems in terms of young Victorian’s participation levels. The Review panel based its recommendations for policy change on a solid foundation of empirical research (Schools Commission 1980; Ainley, 1998; 1999; Hargreaves 1994; Peoples 1998; Curtain 2000; Curtain and Gook 2003; Dusseldorp 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, Sweet 1998; Teese 2000; VLESC 2003a).

The Ministerial Review panel accepted the Bracks government's representation of the policy problem that post-compulsory education was failing a large number of young people thereby affecting their employment status well beyond their adolescent years. This systemic failing was the prime factor that prompted the Ministerial Review to call for radical changes within post-compulsory education given the poor participation of Victorian and Australian young people (Kirby, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c). The Ministerial Review (Kirby, 2000a) panel was disposed
to accept Premier Bracks’ (Bracks Speech 23 October 2000) concern about the inequitable configurations of participation levels and education achievement across Victoria.

There are high numbers of school dropouts and low levels of achievement amongst certain groups and within certain regions. Fewer than 1 in 10 young people leave school early in many parts of Melbourne. In poorer regions and in some country areas, as many as 3 in 10 girls and 4 in 10 boys leave school early. This is not acceptable in a society that believes all should have a fair chance in life.

(Bracks Speech 23 October 2000)

The Review panel used a wide array of research to draw a picture showing that while unemployment had declined and average income levels had increased in real terms at the start of the 21st century, young people’s transition to employment and or further training was for many fraught with frustrations and problems (Kirby 2000a). The findings, from researchers in the field conducted over many years, provided considerable cause for concern about the ongoing inadequacy of education provision for young people.

The panel accepted evidence that showed some 300,000 young Australian adults (20 per cent) could be considered disadvantaged and that 500,000 of the total young people cohort (20 per cent) were considered to be in a precarious labour market situation (Kirby, 2000a, Dusseldorp 2002c, Teese, 2000).

The Panel found that the data pointed to a real problem of participation among young people in terms of employment, unemployment, retention in schools and university, educational outcomes and also shows Australia fares poorly when compared on an international though limited comparison (Kirby 2000a).

Data available to the Review panel suggested that thirty years ago, most Australian teenagers left school before completing year 12 and that the move to stable full-time employment was more or less made easily (Marks et al 2001). From the 1980s, however school retention rates had increased substantially thus increasing the average age at which many young people came into the labour market (Marks et al 2001). By the late 1990s the pathways to employment had become unclear or difficult to discern given the changes in the labour market (Marks et al 2001). Kirby (2000a, 2000b, 2000c) Marks et al (2001), Curtain (2003) and others express justifiable concerns that for young people, particularly those who do not complete
year 12, or an equivalent level, a demeaning experience of being marginalised in the labour market is one result (Curtain 2001, 2002, 2003, Curtain et al 2003, Kirby 2000a, Marks et al 2001). This marginalisation would be characterised by a transition period to the labour market with extended stages of unemployment, underemployment, and numerous short bursts of work in lower skilled, part time and or casual positions (Marks et al 2001).

Sweet (1998) argued that unemployment levels concealed at least an equal number of youths who were underemployed due to part-time and casual work. These persons experience increasing difficulty in the move from education to full-time employment (Sweet 1998). The numbers of young persons experiencing a lack of work and training has increased out of proportion to the labour force overall (Sweet 1998). ‘Furthermore, there has been a steady growth in the number of people who are unaccounted for as they are not employed or unemployed, or undertaking education and training’ (Kirby 2000b, p. 2).


The labour market environment in Victoria, particularly for young people who are first time jobseekers changed dramatically between 1990 and 2000 (VLESC 2003a). In 1990 84,000 Victorian teenagers worked in full time positions reducing to an estimated 52,000 (LLENStat 2003). Part time employment for this cohort has increased from an estimated 80,000 to 110,000. It is arguable that real earnings for young people in 2000 may be less than income received in 1990 (Wooden 1998). Wooden showed that between 1991 and 1997 276,600 full-time jobs were created in Australia (Wooden 1998). However, this coincided with a fall of 71,100 full-time jobs held by teenagers (Wooden 1998). The situation for teenagers is now indicating that the society, including the education system, is failing young people (Kirby, 2000b).
In the late 1990s it was becoming clear that large numbers of young people were exiting secondary education were undertaking increasing levels of part-time employment that did not involve training (Ainley 1998, Peoples 1998, Sweet 1998). An added disadvantage resulting from the increase in part-time employment for young people was the associated impact on their average incomes (Ainley 1998, Sweet 1998). Whilst many of these young people are no doubt highly motivated to work, the lack of training associated with many part-time positions inhibits their path to a career that is underpinned by industry and government approved qualifications, credentials or training pathways within the AQF or education system. Clearly students need more strings to their bow through a broadened curriculum, and greater involvement with the community resources.

In the eight years from 1995 to May 2003 full-time jobs for teenagers (15-19) and young adults (20-24) had declined by 6.9% and 15.2 per cent respectively (Curtain et al 2003). ‘Australians aged 15 to 24 years experience over two and a half times (2.7) the level of unemployment recorded by adults aged 25 to 54 years’ (Curtain et al 2003, p.4). In terms of young people (15-24 year olds) unemployment levels in Australia rank poorly among OECD countries at 18 out of 28 OECD countries (Curtain, 2003).

In Australia, May 2003 saw 14.9 per cent of all teenagers (14.0 per cent male, 16.1 female) in part-time work, looking for work or as defined by the ABS, 'not in the labour force' (Curtain et al 2003, p.7). This group accounts for an estimated 206,200 teenagers (Curtain et al 2003). The probability of them facing difficulty in gaining a foothold to an adult vocational life is likely in the long term as opposed to their ‘counterparts who are fully engaged in education or training’ (Curtain et al 2003, p.7). Curtain (2001) argued that people whose connection to the labour market in their first post-school year involved marginal activities such as part-time employment, unemployment, or being outside the labour force altogether and not registered and seeking work put them into a ‘high risk’ group. Such people he said were a great deal less likely over ‘their first seven post-school years in total to make a successful transition to full-time employment’ (Curtain, 2001, p. 32). To reduce the prospect of being marginalised from active participation in the labour market involvement in education, employment and training reduces the risks of remaining as a fringe participant for longer periods (Dusseldorp 1998).
The following table compares, on a percentage basis, teenagers not in full-time education or full-time work for each State & Territory from May 1999 to May 2003 (refer Curtain et al, 2003 p.10).

Table 1: Teenagers not in Full-time Education or Full-time Work for Each State & Territory from May 1999 to May 2003 Per Cent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State / Territory</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL AUSTRALIA</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
* Denotes cell sizes too small to be reliable.


“At risk” is an often-used term and its defining features concern the identification of young people who have a difficult task ahead given the reduced likelihood of obtaining ongoing and gratifying employment. ‘The Dusseldorp Skills Forum proposed a number of indicators in a report called Australia’s Youth: Reality and Risk (Dusseldorp 1998). One of these indicators was the proportion of the 15-19 year old population not in full-time education and not in full-time employment’ (LLENStat 2003). The same source indicated that proportion of Victorian teenagers in this grouping has changed significantly during the period from 1990 to 2000 with a decline from a peak in 1992 of just under 18 per cent to slightly over 12 per cent in 2000 (LLENStat 2003). Nevertheless, by any measure it has sustained a high level given that over one in ten 15 to 19 year olds in Victoria is not occupied in either a full time job or full time education and training (LLENStat 2003).

Victoria reflects the national pattern in the period 1990 to 2000: young people (15-24), have again and again faced more problems obtaining work than ‘people in the prime age group of 25 to 54’ (LLENStat 2004). The labour market environment in Victoria for young adults certainly changed dramatically in the ten years from 1990.
until 2000 (VLESC 2003a). In 1990 an estimated 240,000 Victorian people aged 20-24 years worked in full time positions reducing to approximately 194,000 in 2000 (LLENStat 2003). Part time employment for this cohort has increased from an estimated 46,000 persons to almost 72,000 (LLENStat, 2003).

This suggests that at the end of the 1990s young adults may have been receiving less income in real terms than in 1990 (Landt et al 1998).

Teenage unemployment has increased and the proportion of them with no income has also increased, as the eligibility criteria for government payments have become more stringent. For those unemployed 15 to 19 year olds receiving an income, real income levels have fallen slightly since 1982. (Landt et al 1998, p.2)

Young people were more likely to experience unemployment than people aged between 25 and 54 (Curtain et al 2003). In the past ten years, the unemployment rate for 15 to 24 year olds has been consistently higher than the unemployment rate for 25 to 54 year olds (Curtain et al 2003). The unemployment rate of Victorian teenagers has unfortunately sustained a prolonged ratio above two and a half times the unemployment rate for 25-54 year olds in the last ten years reaching over four times that rate during the early 1990s (Curtain et al 2003). In May 2003 the unemployment rate for young people was 2.7 times higher than for people aged 25-54 years (Curtain et al 2003).

While remaining below the national unemployment rate for teenagers over the last decade the unemployment rate for Victorian 20 to 24 year olds, ‘has ranged between one and a half and two and a half times the unemployment rate for 25-54 year olds’ (LLENStat 2004). Obviously, since 1990, the youth unemployment rate compared with their counterparts aged 25-54 suggests that unemployment and underemployment remained a persistent and critical problem for many young people (Curtain, 2000, 2002, 2003, Kirby 2000a, Spierings 2003a, Sweet 1998).

In May 2002 a significant number of young Victorian people were not engaged in either study or employment (VLESC 2003a). In numerical terms in May 2002 30,978 Victorian teenagers were unconnected to full time education, work or training (VLESC 203a). Of this group, 10,896 were classed as ‘unemployed and looking for work’, with 11,798 employed part time and 8,283 not in the labour force’ (VLESC 2003a, p.6). For young adults – 20 to 24 - 57.7% were neither
engaged in study nor employment with approaching a third of this group (66,123) not working full time and a further 15,108 looking for employment. A sizeable ‘27,186 were employed part time only and 23,830 were not in the labour force’ (VLESC 2003a, p.6).

The panel accepted the evidence that a traditional notion of linear pathways between schooling and an adult vocational life had ceased to make much sense in a system more like a maze with numerous entry and exit points (Kirby 2000a, Kirby 2003, VLESC 2003a).

Longitudinal research has shown that there are a sizeable number of young people who diverge from taking the ‘standard’ direct and uninterrupted route through secondary school, via further study or training, to employment. Many of these young people may reach a satisfactory destination, but by a multitude of pathways, not all of which are well defined or well supported. Studies undertaken during the 90s indicated that 29.5% of young people in the seven years immediately post school experienced either brief or extended periods of interruption from work or study, and a further 33.5% experienced a mix of part-time and full-time work and study (not including apprenticeships).

(VLESC 2003a, p.6)

Many young people who succeeded at secondary education level and progress to university also experienced problems and therefore this also needed to be addressed at an early stage to assess whether the student was ready for the rigors of higher education study in terms of maturity, financial support or accommodation. The hallmark of success culminating in university entrance for many is short lived.

Considering a different group, non-completion rates of those young people who move directly from school to higher education or other training are also significant. For those young people who have successfully completed Year 12 and gained entry to university, Australian data collected from 1992 to 1997 showed that 40% did not complete an award through the university they first enrolled in within five years, and the same study estimated that 18.4% would never complete an award. These young people do not necessarily have straightforward pathways.

(VLESC 2003a, p.6)
In 2000, Bracks (2000) and Minister Kosky (2003b) restated two key government targets aimed to improve the participation levels of youth. The first was that by the year 2010 ninety per cent of youths in Victoria will graduate at VCE level or its equivalent level and that by year 2005 the numbers of teenagers participating in education and training will increase by six per cent.

From 1999, the statistics in Victoria indicate modest improvements (Kosky 2003a, 2003c). ‘The Australian Bureau of Statistics Schools Australia 2002 report shows that the August Year 7 to 12 retention rates increased from 76.2 per cent in 1999 to 80.9 per cent last year’ meaning 2002 (Kosky 2003b).

In relation to the year 10 to year 12 retention rates in Victoria among all the Australian states is ‘the highest of all Australian states and have shown an increase from 78.7 per cent in 1999 to 82.9 per cent in 2002 (Kosky, 2003b).

In a speech Minister Kosky (2003B) quoted ‘unpublished data from the ABS Survey of Education and Work shows the percentage of 18-to 24-year-olds who have completed Year 12 or equivalent increased from 80 per cent in 1999 to 82.4 per cent in 2002.’ The latest figures available suggest that the proportion may have increased slightly given that ‘83.2 per cent of Victorians had finished year 12 by the age of 24’ (Gauchi, The Age, 15 December 2003 p.3).

Table 2: Proportion of Australian 20-24 year olds who have completed Year 12 (or equivalent highest level of secondary school) or have post school qualifications, 1994 to 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>74.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>80.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>78.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>83.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>83.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>81.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>78.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Curtain, 2003, p. 24)
Victoria achieved the highest level of participation in full-time education in Australia at 89 per cent as opposed to a national rate of 85 per cent (refer table 2 above) with participation in education and training by teenagers at more than 90 per cent (Kosky, 2003b).

Table 3: Proportion of 19-Year Olds Who Have Completed or Obtained Any Post-School Qualification, Australia and Selected States and Territory, 2000, Percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Performance measures for 2000, MCEETYA, National Report on Schooling 2000, Tasmania and NT omitted due to unacceptable standard errors as stated in the source).

Yet in spite of this kind of data the Panel (Kirby, 2000a) argued that the education sector charged with servicing young people’s needs was performing poorly. As the panel put it:

There is evidence that young people are not being provided with skills that they will need in the future. Recent survey results show that employers view most TAFE and University graduate job applicants as unsuitable because they do not have the capacity to think critically and problem solve. An international survey shows that Australia’s high school completers are not as proficient as other, similar OECD countries in demonstrating higher order
thinking and information processing skills. Another study reports a high drop out rate for University students. The students themselves report low levels of satisfaction with a range of aspects of post-compulsory education. (Kirby, 2000b p. 4)

The attainment of qualifications has an added impact on participation levels:

Employment status varies markedly by level of education attainment. The unemployment rate in May 1999 for persons who had not completed the highest level of secondary school was 10.8 per cent. This compared with 7.7 percent for those who had completed high school and 4.6 per cent for holders of a skilled vocational qualification and 3.1 per cent for bachelor degree graduates.

Most young people who leave secondary school at Year 10 and Year 11 do not do so to go on to further education. Data for Australia show that 64 per cent of 1998 Year 10 leavers and 55 per cent of Year 11 leavers were not attending another education institution in May 1999. Nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of these Year 10 and 11 early school leavers are not in work compared with 8 per cent of Year 12 leavers. (Kirby 2000b, p.5).

Given the statistics listed above it is important for students to remain in education or training, but it is equally important for students to benefit from a curriculum that identifies their capabilities and deficiencies to carefully develop a plan that has clear vocational or educational goals. The research shows that secondary education prepares students poorly for the labour market as well as tertiary study given that drop out rates in first year university were in some cases rising to 30 per cent (Kirby 2000a).

Of the 300,000 students who left school in 1999, 178 000 (59%) were employed the following May (either full time or part time), 44 000 (15%) were unemployed, and 80,000 (26%) were not in the labour force (that is, not seeking any form of employment). In addition, 167,000 (55%) were attending some form of recognised study, 14 000 (5%) were attending some form of non-recognised study and 121,000 (40%) were not attending any form of study (NCVER 2002 p. 23)
Part-time jobs held by 20-24 year olds had grown by 80% over the last decade in Victoria. Part time work provided nearly 30% of all jobs held by those aged 20-24 (NCVER 2002). Full-time work for 20-24 year olds had been reduced by over 20% during the 1990s with a 37% decline in full time work for persons aged 15-19 (LLENStat 2002).

While the proportion of full-time employment has decreased across all age groups in the last decade, this shift has been most notable amongst 15-24 year olds with 15-19 year olds experiencing the largest fall in full-time employment. Part time employment is a significant and increasing feature of employment for all young people. (LLENStat 2002)

The Review panel argued that monitoring the outcomes of students to determine the effectiveness of education programs within education structures was not being undertaken as an internal check by the education industry because the institutions were ‘self serving’ and lacked an ethic of responsibility for student clients (Allen Report 2001, Kirby 2000a, Teese 2000).

The Ministerial Review research (Kirby 2000a) claimed that the government education bureaucracy had demonstrated an inability to account for what happened to their exiting students and had shown a limited understanding of their clients’ needs.

Prior to the completion of the Ministerial Review Kirby spoke of resistance from a different perspective that was ‘akin to ostriches placing their heads in the sand’ (Kelly 2003). In the formal interview Kirby remarked that despite almost everyone being able to recognise the problems and the situation where nobody was disputing ‘the fact that there were youngsters falling though the cracks, but no-one saw it as their problem, everybody saw it as someone else’s problem’ (Kirby 2003, para. 23). The description about the problem of young people was pronounced and an understanding about what was going wrong was evident in the Ministerial Review consultations and also the notion of needed areas of improvement, but there remained no accountability. In Kirby’s words ‘there was no sense of responsibility to take corrective action, not even from the schools’ (Kirby 2003, para. 23).
In part this reflected the advice coming to the Review panel from within the bureaucracy. Kirby suggested that the Victorian Education department was influential in policy formulation as it was concerned ‘about the isolation, lack of coordination between the three major bodies which we had, the Victorian Board of Studies, ACFE, (Adult Community for Further Education) and the State Training Board as it was’ (Kirby, 2003 Para. 24). The bureaucracy advised Kirby that these structures were “fragmented” and “isolated” and in Kirby’s view were seen by the bureaucracy itself as not representative of the three musketeers (Kirby 2003). Kirby actually used the quote from Alexander Dumas stating that the triumvirate were not ‘all for one and one for all’ (Kirby, 2003 Para. 24).

Kirby (2003) was deeply dismayed by the information the Review panel gathered during the community consultation process. Kirby thought that the schools had considerable insight and knowledge about what occurred in the home but too many teachers said that they were unable to handle the situation in the school (Kirby 2003). Within the community consultation forums Kirby was witness to secondary school staff admitting they had helped some students leave school even though they thought this was ‘dreadful and risky’ for the young person as they were no longer involved with the post-compulsory education system (Kirby 2003). Kirby was stricken by this negativity and pessimism (Kirby 2003). Howard Kelly, who was a close observer of the community consultation process thought that Kirby, in particular, was so concerned about the ability of post-compulsory education to address the needs of young people that he came to the firm conviction that the need for reform the situation was ‘absolutely necessary' (Kelly, 2003). This view is supported by additional research conducted by the Allan Consulting Group Report (2001).

The Review panel claimed that one core problem was a post-compulsory curriculum that did not meet student’s needs (Teese 2000; Kirby 2000a). The panel pointed to the preoccupation on the part of those running the VCE system with designing a pathway to university education, and a failure to address the vocational, education and training (VET) needs of the majority of students in the post-compulsory age group (Curtain 2001, Dusseldorp 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, Kirby 2000a, Spierings 2003a, Teese, 2000).

The Panel took the view that the year 12 senior secondary qualification in Victoria known as the Victorian Certificate of Education had become a platform aligned to a
traditional education paradigm aimed at university entrance and that it had not changed sufficiently in context to meet students’ and society’s needs (Allen Consulting Group Report 2001, Kirby 2000a, Teese 2000). Universities, according to Teese, distort and inhibit the development of curricula that should be targeted to a much greater degree to the needs of the majority of post-compulsory aged people which are students who are not necessarily university bound (Teese, 2000). It is arguable that the system not only failed to respond with appropriate curricula but also failed to develop support structures to resolve the needs of young people (Bracks 2000, Kirby, 2000a, Keating 2003). Added to this students of a post-compulsory age (i.e., at year 12 level of post-compulsory education) had not been so numerous two or more decades ago (Teese 2000).

The Panel argued that secondary educators and the community had a responsibility to provide education, training and links to employment through various pathways (Kirby 2000b). However the ‘levels of participation in education and training are at best mediocre by the standards of other developed countries (Kirby 2000b, Sweet 1998). On current trends the levels of skills and intellectual capital required for an increasingly complex society and sophisticated economy are likely to be inadequate unless changes occur and young people are more successfully participating in work and training aimed at underpinning the needs of the broader community (Kirby 2000b). The problem of young people’s unemployment levels being ‘unacceptably high’ for thirty years by ‘international standards’ and makes an unsatisfactory ‘contribution towards our economic future’ when compared to other OECD countries (Kirby 2000b, p. 18).

Effectively the panel argued that there was a crisis in the secondary school curriculum combined with a crisis in post-compulsory education. As Keating (2004) put it:

We face two key policy problems. First, the way secondary education operates, possibly exacerbates social disadvantages. Secondary schooling has multiple forms of selection. There are high geographic concentrations of poverty, and there are even higher concentrations of poverty of families with school-age children. Then the schools that students attend are influenced by their academic results and their behaviours. High-fee schools, selective schools, specialist schools, and programs for advanced students are just some of the means by which students are selected, or rejected. Research by the Education Foundation in Victoria shows socially
disadvantaged students tend to be concentrated in schools that have poor results. These schools have declining enrolments, and have low expectations of students, and poor staff and student morale.

The second problem is the failure of governments to address the issue. This has been influenced by views that social background has little influence on outcomes, and that the main variable that influences outcomes is the quality of teaching.

(Keating 2004).

This chapter I have documented the way that the Ministerial Review panel both worked within and accepted the terms of the Bracks government’s representation of the policy problem. Drawing on a large body of research much of which was cited in the Ministerial Review Reports (Kirby 2000a, 2000b, 2000c), the Review panel demonstrated that a problem existed which it was determined would inform new policies for post-compulsory education and training. In the next chapter I turn to a consideration of how the Review panel developed a set of policy recommendations.
CHAPTER FOUR: ‘The worst bus service’: policy solutions

Can any bus service rival the fine Hanley to Bagnall route in Staffordshire? In 1976 it was reported that buses no longer stopped for passengers. This came to light when one of them, Mr Bill Hancock, complained that buses on the outward journey regularly sailed passed queues of up to thirty people. Councillor Arthur Chollerton then made transport history by stating that if these buses stopped to pick up passengers they would disrupt the timetable.

(Pile 1980, p. 20)

Throughout its deliberations in 2000 the Ministerial Review panel confirmed the view its members had doubtless already formed over a number of years that there was no longer a clear ‘pathway’ along which young people might progress smoothly from full-time study at school into full-time work (Kirby 2000a).

The need to adapt new programs for transition from school to work recognised that there was ‘no longer a single step: it is longer, more complex, non-linear, more varied, and more dynamic than we had thought’ (Keating ECEF, 2001). The Review panel argued that this implied a significant shift for all elements of the educational policy and program community:

Practitioners face a rapid expansion in the range of youth transition programs to deliver, pressure to adapt programs to meet local conditions and individual needs, and boundary-shifting and definitional difficulties across disciplines.

Researchers, practitioners and policy makers are beginning to understand the need to deal simultaneously with the many forces which play on young people as they make the transition from school to work – intra-familial difficulties, housing and health issues, the need to earn an income, and many other pressures may have a greater impact on work and career choice than specific school to work programs (Keating ECEF 2001).
The Review panel proposed in effect an ‘ideal’ post-compulsory educational system that delivered a flexible curriculum designed to link students, particularly those aged 15-24 to the needs of the labour market so as to achieve a number of key social and economic values and objectives. Kirby insisted that the need to make this link a strong one needed to be addressed as the consequences of unemployment, or underemployment were proving to be too costly to bear (Kirby 2000a Keating et al 2003).

What the Review panel believed it confronted was a sector that had to a disturbing degree failed to ‘connect’ young people either to the education system or to employment (Kirby, 2000a; see also: Ball in Flude et al 1999, Gleeson in Barton et al, 1984, Gleeson 1989).

In addressing this representation of its policy-problem the Review panel confronted a key initial problem: what kinds of policy recommendations could it make to the government especially ones which had some chance of being taken seriously? (The question of how the Bracks’ government might begin to implement any recommendations the Review panel might make is a separate but interconnected issue which I will briefly address in the following chapter).

In this chapter I ask what the Ministerial Review panel propose by way of policy solutions to address the policy problems it had identified. As I show here the idea of ‘pathways’ provided a central organising metaphor for its policy recommendations. Equally its deployment of the idea of ‘social capital’, another major contemporary metaphor represented as I will argue the panel’s attempt to resolve what its members saw as a contradiction between the move away from older styles of ‘bureaucratic’ governance and the imperatives for far-reaching change in post-compulsory education. Using the organising metaphor of ‘Pathways’ and the constitutive metaphor of ‘social capital’, the Review panel was to make a number of key policy recommendations.

One key recommendation was to develop Local learning and Employment Networks (LLENs). In effect these were a structure fashioned by many parts of the community to become a local policy formulating body to either influence, shape, lead or encourage the content of new curriculum, education practices and alliances with many parts of the community. The aim was to provide education programs that suited differing communities and economic labour markets within

Another policy recommendation included a broadened senior school curriculum, now known as the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL).

A third key policy outcome involved measuring the student outcomes (“On Track data”) from schools so that the productivity, or non-productivity, is known enabling local and central policy development and implementation to address issues of inequity. The On Track data measures the percentage year 12 school leavers who applied for university and/or TAFE, and were given an offer of a place in the tertiary sector as opposed to those who actually enrol in Higher Education or TAFE. This data also measures the percentage that enrolled, obtained work, or employment as an apprentice or trainee. The unemployment rate is also captured along with the proportion of students who deferred university.

The fourth involved a so-called Managed Individual Pathways initiative where links to the future vocational lives of students from years 10 to 12 with state secondary schools, TAFE and the ACE sector are involved in professionally guided planning to their adult vocational lives through combinations of training education and work.

Let me start with the central metaphor of ‘Pathways’.

THE IDEA OF PATHWAYS

As I showed in the previous chapter Teese (2000) and the Ministerial Review (Kirby 2000a, 2000b, 2000c) believed that the post-compulsory education and training system had failed to change sufficiently since the early 1970s in Victoria (and Australia overall) to address the needs of post-compulsory students. In the early 1970s young people unemployment was at a very low level in OECD countries (Varlaam 1984, Kell 2004a). This was undone by a series of economic crises. In the mid-1970s circumstances altered dramatically, when ‘in 1973/4 the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Companies (OPEC) raised the price of oil sharply’ (Varlaam 1984 p. 1). ‘The price increases were introduced with such speed that international balances and interrelationships between debtor and creditor countries fluctuated wildly’ (Varlaam 1984, p. 1). This threw the western
economies into crisis, defined by stagflation where inflation and stagnant economic growth occurred simultaneously. This led to big increases in unemployment, particularly amongst young people (Varlaam 1984, Kell 2004a).

One direct consequence was a rise in youth unemployment and a lot of anxiety about the disruption of the ‘transition’ process from adolescence to adulthood.

The increase in youth unemployment since the 1970s has long been treated conventionally as a major disruption to older processes which secured a transition to adulthood. If employment brings order, stability and security, then unemployment delivers disorder and insecurity. Throughout the twentieth century, full-time waged work structured the lives of many young Australians, while joblessness was widely recognised as disruptive to the predictable patterns and transition phases young people were expected or required to pass through on the ‘path to adulthood’. With the accomplishment of a regime of full employment between 1945-75 which seemed to secure full-time waged work for all who wanted it, the transition to adulthood has been seen as relatively secure and fixed. Without paid employment and financial independence, the various ‘stages’ and events that mark out one’s progress in becoming adult (like marriage, social autonomy) were seen as having been suspended and disrupted.

From the mid-1970s when evidence of the effects of youth unemployment began to gather, young people began to be represented as ‘victims’ of unemployment and restructuring. By the mid-1990s it had become fashionable to blame ‘globalisation’. This victim status heightened popular concern about ‘rising’ rates of juvenile crime, suicide, homelessness, and substance abuse. As well as being ‘casualties of change’ (Eckersley 1988; 1993) researchers and commentators have tirelessly promoted the idea that young unemployed people are graffiti artists, delinquents, gang members or young offenders and as such are a menace to social order. The combination of unemployment and criminality has sustained the use of the metaphor of the ‘juvenile underclass’ (White 1994 in Bessant 1995). (For a major critique of this whole conventional interpretative framework see Bessant, Hil & Watts 2003)

While the ‘at-risk’ category can be treated as a consequence of large-scale social transformations, it mostly functions as an index of deficit usually located in the ‘individual deemed to be ‘at risk’. For commentators like Eckersley ‘youth at risk’
are the ‘miner’s canaries’ of our society in crisis, highly vulnerable to the ‘hazards
of our time’. The ‘at risk’ category signifies the ‘crisis’ and apparently novel
hazards and problems that characterise our era as dangerous, difficult and crisis-
ridden. According to Eckersley (1992: 18) these include:

…pressures of increasing urbanisation, industrialisation, centralisation,
mechanisation, individualisation, of growing populations, increasing global
economic competition and accelerating change, of a strengthening material
and economic domination of our lives and a weakening spiritual and moral

As Kelly (1998, p. 22) points out, these features mirror Giddens’ (1990) ‘risk
profile of modernity’. The restructuring of the labor market and economy coincided
with the collapse of the full-time youth labor market that began in the 1980s
(Wooden 1998; Dryfoos 1990; Bell 1997; Langmore & Quiggin 1994; Quiggin
1996). The restructuring process has given rise to a range of specific anxieties
about youth homelessness, youth suicide, juvenile delinquency drug use and
addiction. The restructuring process has meant that ‘youth’ encounter ‘new
morbidities’ that present major obstacles to becoming adults. Batten and Russell’s
(1995, p. 1) position is typical:

The term ‘at risk’…is used to describe or identify young people who, beset
by particular difficulties and disadvantages, are thought likely to fail to
achieve the development in their adolescent years that would provide a sound
basis for a satisfying and fulfilling adult life.

Much of this at-risk literature depends on ‘popular’ and ‘social scientific’
discourses about adolescence as a period in the life-cycle that is inherently
agonistic and troublesome both for the young person and for the wider community.
It follows that the task of ‘society’ is to ensure that everyone makes a successful
transition from childhood to adulthood which is in itself said to be a risk-ridden
project. Within that framing the idea of a pathway takes on a certain weight.

Framing the problem of ‘risk’ in this way produces the figure of ‘youth at risk’
(Bessant 2001). It is an approach that is especially prevalent in the
education/training industry, especially in relation to secondary students threatening
not to complete Year 12 or its equivalent (see Australian Education Council
Review Committee 1991; Coopers, Lybrand Consultants & Ashden Milligan 1992;
Australian Curriculum Studies 1992; DEET 1992; Batten, Withers, Thomas &
McCurry 1991; Bradley 1992; Constable & Burton 1993; Batten & Russell 1995). For most of the period of economic crisis since 1975, an ‘incomplete education’ has been defined as the key factor that places the young person ‘at risk’ of unemployment (Ainley, Batten & Miller 1984; Dryfoos 1990, 1994, 1996; Bradley & Stock 1993; Dwyer 1997). For Meredith Edwards (2001, p. 25) the enormity of the problem of ‘youth at risk’ by their opting out of education is apparent:

A group of 20, perhaps 25 percent of young people are at risk, if you include those who might be in part-time education or part-time employment as well as those who are unemployed or out of the labour market.

An unfinished education is said to also place the young person ‘at risk’ of other social ills like psychological depression, juvenile crime, suicide, homelessness, drug abuse, etc. Those ‘at risk’ of unemployment are students who either leave the education system ‘too early’, or who show signs of leaving in the foreseeable future. From Freeland’s (1996) perspective for example, unemployment relies on an analysis of ABS Labour Force statistics which he argues can distinguish between those who are ‘gravely at risk’ and the simply ‘at risk’ young person. His analysis is based on various factors like whether or not the young person is in full-time schooling, or not, whether they are unemployed, in part time employment or not. The idea that young people ought to remain within the education system has become so normative to the extent that the category of ‘youth at risk unemployment’ has achieved near commonsense status in the sector. Preventing young people from becoming unemployed has affected in significant ways the very character of our education institutions, so much so that the primary objectives of most institutions’ ‘learning outcomes’ appear to be directed towards the demand of the labour market (Marginson 1997b).

Most of the at-risk literature depends on ‘popular’ and ‘social scientific’ discourses about adolescence as an inherently difficult time in the life-cycle. That is, adolescence involves making a transition from ‘childhood’ to ‘adulthood’ which is a risky project. Given this basic assumption it is not surprising to find that the empirical and social scientific work on risk factors appears to set loose the potential for an almost limitless field of discovery of risk factors. As Batten and Withers (1995:1) indicate ‘modern scientific understandings’ of the adolescent stage in the life-cycle means that the psychological, biological, economic and socio cultural factors are such that ‘all youths are in some sense at risk’ (my stress). Batten and Russell (1995) underscore the reach of the category:
there is not a ‘typical’ at risk student, but a wide variety of young people of different needs and capacities, each of them exposed to different combinations of risk factors (Batten and Russell 1995: vii).

As a cursory survey of the risk literature indicates, the risk factors are almost unlimited. The factors that allegedly constitute ‘at risk youth’ extend from indicators of specific disadvantage (like gender, aboriginality or physical disability) to indicators that appear to be common to all 14-25 year olds. Casting a net far enough to include all young people makes a corrective response not only a ‘necessity’, but also a responsible solution; it sanctions any interventions as long as that response is justified in terms of ‘reducing’ the risk factors. For a powerful critique of the whole ‘at risk’ framework and its use in ‘Pathways’ policy making see Bessant, Hil and Watts (2003). The truth or otherwise of the framing of the problem of ‘at risk youth’ is in respect of this thesis neither ‘here nor there’: it matters only that the Review panel, the Victorian government, key experts and important elements of ‘public opinion’ believed that this framework was true.

The Review panel working within the well defined conventions of the ‘youth at risk’ model tirelessly argued the need for new policies that developed ‘new pathways’ for young people deeming this crucial for the well-being of the community in social and economic terms (Dusseldorp 2002, Hargreaves et al 1996, Kirby 2000a, Teese, 2000).

The Ministerial Review defined ‘Pathways’ as constituting ‘the period during which young people move from compulsory schooling to occupations’ (Kirby 2000a, p 47). ‘Pathways’ was a frequently used even conventional term widely used in the literature relating to education and training for post-compulsory students over the past decade. Equally as the Review panel observed:

The Review has noted that the term lacks clarity, partly because of the diversity of its use. It is frequently used to designate the options that are available to young people in education, training and employment as they exit a stage of education and training. It is also used to describe planned routes through education and training into employment careers. Linear pathways do not apply to the actual experience of the majority of young people. Yet much of the structure of post-compulsory education is based upon the assumption of the validity of a meritocratic selection and choice process for linear pathways. These processes are reinforced by career guidance services. The
Review, therefore, has arrived at a different concept of pathways. The transitional journeys for many young people are diverse, dynamic and uncertain. For most, the essential ingredient for progress will be the knowledge and skills, and the associated qualifications, that will allow them to move to the next stage in the transition process. Pathways, therefore, are a series of learning platforms. This is a definition that is better suited to the concept of lifelong learning (Kirby 2000a, p 47)

As I now show the other core idea i.e., ‘social capital’ played a major part in the development of these policy recommendations and especially in one of the core recommendations calling for the establishment of LLENs.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

The other major conceptual frameworks underpinning the Ministerial Review was the concept of ‘social capital’. It played a key role in the policy-making process adopted by the Ministerial Review (Keating et al 2003, Keating 2003, Kirby 2000a, 2000b, 2000c). As the Ministerial Review concluded:

Research shows that communities endowed with a rich stock of social networks and civic associations are in a stronger position to confront poverty and personal vulnerability, resolve disputes, and/or take advantage of new opportunities.

(Kirby 2000a, p. 35)

It is arguable that the adoption of the idea of ‘social capital’ reflected a simple belief in its efficacy for the policy process. Equally it is arguable that one of the ways the Review panel sought to escape the conundrums posed by its acceptance of the need for major policy change while avoiding the evils of old style ‘top-down’ monolithic bureaucratic policy development lay in the Review panel’s acceptance and promotion of the idea of investing in ‘social capital’.

The Ministerial Review panel believed that it was faced with the complex task of developing policies to address needs that could no longer be addressed by the techniques of governance typical of a “centralised monolithic” bureaucracy (Keating et al 2003). The research that underpinned the Ministerial Review saw the panel members accept eg., that governments were:
… under increasing pressure to take account of regional difference and to make space in the policy process for the voices of the consumers of services, and of communities. Sectoral boundaries were becoming blurred, and new alliances are being formed. The possibility of single sector, centrally driven policy responses to problems is vanishing. The focus of decision-making is shifting, and the number of players is increasing’ (Keating ECEF, 2001).

To this extent we see here the effects of decades of neo-liberal arguments first framed by Friedrich Hayek (1944) about the problems of ‘big government’ that accompanied the rise of ‘economic liberal’ and ‘pro-market’ ideologies and the values of competition (Pusey 1991). Politicians and bureaucrats alike had come to accept the wisdom of Osborne and Graebler’s (1992) famous advice that they should ‘cease rowing and start steering’. It was widely accepted as a fact that there had been a ‘crisis of government’ manifested in policy overload since the 1980s especially in areas like in education including the post-compulsory phase (Dusseldorp, 2002b, Keating 1999, Kirby 2000a, 2000b, 2003, Spierings 2003b, Teese at al 2003, Teese 2000).

At the same time as it shared this diagnosis the Ministerial Review believed that policy making over the previous decade had created a policy vacuum leading to a series of socially inequitable outcomes for young people (Keating 2003) and Teese (2000). The Ministerial Review Panel recognised that the disturbing educational, vocational and social situation for young people called for major changes in education policies, strategies and practices. The Ministerial Review summarised its position as follows:

At present there is a policy vacuum for the structure of post-compulsory education and training. This is unfortunate in the context of a number of community discussions and activities directed towards potential reorganisation. A policy of community consensus is too vague and vulnerable to sectional interests. There is a need for Government leadership on the matter that is related to its overall vision for post-compulsory education and training in the State. This leadership should be based upon a number of principles that include:

• The need for young people to have access to a wide range of courses and more coherent post-compulsory education and training programs
• The need for post-compulsory schooling to be connected to industry and employment, other education and training providers, and other key government and community agencies
• The importance of more adult and diverse learning environments
• The need to minimise the impact of institutional transitions
• The need for young people to undertake a smooth transition from the preparatory phase or cycle to the VCE level at the appropriate time in their development
• Greater flexibility for providers in designing and delivering education and training programs and greater accountability for their outcomes
• The need for structures to suit local needs and circumstances
• The need to break down sectoral (education and training, government and non-government) boundaries and increase sectoral collaboration.

(Kirby 2000a, pp. 98-99)

It is clear that both the Bracks’ government and the Ministerial Review panel saw great merit in deploying the category of ‘social capital’ to deal with the issues facing governments. In their respective speeches endorsing the policy recommendations emanating from the Ministerial Review, both Minister Kosky and Premier Bracks concurred fully in their assessment of the value of investing in social capital (Bracks 23 October 2000, Kosky 23 October 2000).

Bracks displayed in his speech an understanding of the concept of ‘social capital’ - without actually using the term:

A great education system must provide the broad range of skills people will need for the complex and flexible workplaces of the future — and the global knowledge economy driven by science, technology and innovation. At the same time, our schools, colleges and universities must play their part in creating a culture of learning — a learning society. As they develop a broader approach to vocational training they must also help prepare people for social and civic responsibilities. We need partnerships between our educational institutions and all levels of government; with business and industry; with communities.

(Bracks, Speech 23 October 2000)

Minister Kosky likewise acknowledged that social capital was a key framework for understanding the import of the Ministerial Review policy recommendations:
So the links between the performance of education systems and the performance and future of economies is clear, and this is recognised by virtually all governments (our Commonwealth Government appears to be a bit of an exception). At the same time we also need to value the contribution of education and training to a more cohesive society. We want a society that is tolerant, inclusive and reflective. We want to build what some have called ‘social capital’.

(Kosky, Speech 23 October 2000)

The concept -or is it a metaphor?- of ‘social capital’ refers to the desirability of encouraging participation by people in communities with shared norms characterised by values like trust, reciprocity and co-operation which are designed to build community strength (Scanlon 2004).

If the concept of social capital is a major concept underpinning to the work of the Ministerial Review policies (Kirby 2000a, 2000b, 2000c), Jack Keating (2003) believed that it was not well understood by key sections within the education industry particularly the education bureaucracy nor accepted that investing in social capital would produce benefits that would flow to the broader community in economic and social terms. Keating (2003) argues that while the concept of social capital underpinned the Ministerial Review policy recommendations the bureaucracy failed to grasp its implicit importance, or recognise it as an intended outcome of the combined policy recommendations of the review.

Given its role in the Ministerial Review process the idea of social capital requires a brief elucidation.

The Ministerial Review contains explicit references to ‘social capital’ revealing just how important the concept for its approach to policy making. This was made quite clear when the Review panel argued the case:

… for education and training to contribute to building community values, or what has been called ‘social capital’, in an age where technological and social changes have threatened the social fabric…(Kirby 2000a, p.26)

The Ministerial Review also argues the combined needs of ‘industry skilling, social capital and social justice, are closely connected’ (Kirby 2000a p.26).
As the Ministerial Review argued education has long been and remains a key ‘driver’ of social well-being and economic growth (Keating 2003).

Provision of high-quality education helps to build up social capital — the sense of trust that goes beyond narrow, market-based, contractual relationships. Research shows that communities endowed with a rich stock of social networks and civic associations are in a stronger position to confront poverty and personal vulnerability, resolve disputes, and/or take advantage of new opportunities. (Kirby 2000a, p. 35).

Certainly as its many promoters since Putnam (2000) have argued, the idea has a compelling quality:

Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals — social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital. (Putnam 2000, p. 19)

Other more critically minded souls like Scanlon (2004) and Mowbray (2005) have treated it as an entirely empty idea adopted by governments who have surrendered any commitment to investing in services in favour of vacuous platitudes about ‘building community’ while avoiding a serious commitment to invest real resources in services and social infrastructure that begins to address social disadvantage.

Trans-national ‘think tanks’ and agencies like the OECD and World Bank who run an overtly neo-liberal policy line predictably have supported the idea. The World Bank (2004, p. 23) declares that:

The broadest and most encompassing view of social capital includes the social and political environment that shapes social structure and enables norms to develop. This analysis extends the importance of social capital to the most formalised institutional relationships and structures, such as government”
The World Bank (2004) considers that social capital is not just a concept but is, from a sociological perspective, the cohesive element that focuses not just on the number of institutions present in communities, but also on the quality of the relationships formed by individuals within those institutions and civil society. Social capital develops the norms that outline the worth and magnitude of a society's community (World Bank 2004). It extends to an accumulation of people connecting in communities with growing trust and understanding to address issues of mutual interest that emerge from shared values and a will to combine (Putnam 2000, World Bank 2004, Kell et al 2004b).

The World Bank (2004) contends that there is an abundance of evidence that communities with well developed social capital increases their likelihood to experience lower crime rates, increased health, improved education attainment and improved economic growth.

The World Bank (2004) warns that there ‘can also be a significant downside. Groups and organisations with high social capital have the means (and sometimes the motive) to work to exclude and subordinate others.’ This is an important issue and is returned to in Chapter Four in regard to implementation of policies and resistance.

The OECD (cited by Kearns 2004) enthuses that:

Social capital is networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups.

The core claim made about social capital is that networks of a social nature have intrinsic worth. The central concept of social capital is that there is a collective merit that emerges from "social networks" through the connection of people to people and who they “know.” Potential benefits emerge from such networks as people use their connections and do things for one another as a reciprocal norm (Putnam 2000). Basically elements of trust, reciprocal behaviour, information sharing and co-operation are at the core of social capital to make it work effectively. The Individual or the "I" frame of mind are juxtaposed by collective ("we") mentality to further the interests of individuals and the norms and aspirations of other formal and informal networks to which they belong (Kearns, 2004, Putnam 2000). Kearns neatly defines social capital (2004) in relation to its education:
…the three key elements: the networks which link people in communities for joint action, the norms and values that bind these networks, and the significance of these components for the culture of a community.

(Kearns 2004)

There are other aspects of social capital that Kearns (2004) has distilled that reflect the notion of social capital that are embodied in the Ministerial Review policies. For example Kearns maintains that the hallmarks of social capital are ‘bonding, bridging, and linking’ drawing together ‘a spectrum of economic, social and cultural benefits to a community [to combat] exclusion… and build inclusive and cohesive communities able to adapt to changing conditions’ (Kearns 2004). The links between ‘social capital’, ‘human capital’, and ‘economic outcomes’ are from Kearns’ (2004) perspective indelibly grounded in the vital role played by social capital. This notion is reflected in the Ministerial Review (Kirby 2000a), Keating et al (2003) and Keating (2003). (Again stepping back from the task of elucidating the perspectives of the Panel it might be asked how ideas of social capital as trust and reciprocity square with values like competitiveness, greed, egoism and good old fashioned thievery long identified with the making of modern economic systems e.g., Hirschman 1994)

‘Capacity building’ has a strong and integral connection to social capital. It is a process consisting of a range of interventions both from the state and the private sector which can guide the development of skills and capabilities of ‘individuals and groups and organisations, sectors or countries which can lead to sustained and self generating links” to ongoing ‘and self generating performance improvement’ (Kell et al 2004b, World Bank 2004).

Capacity building is a fundamental aspect of networking and in the context of social capital it is a core issue (Kell et al 2004b, Putnam 2000, World Bank 2004). To Kell et al (2004b) ‘capacity building is an ongoing process rather than an objective and is nurtured over time.’ Kirby (2003) expressed a concern that politicians may be impatient with policies going through lengthy cycles to gain a true evaluation of their merit and flagged this concern in relation to the Ministerial Review policies specifically.

To Putnam (2000) social capital permits people to both determine and resolve communal problems with greater ease if there is a demonstrated contribution by
group members and co-operation. Social capital is likely to be the lubricant that sets wheels in motion allowing communities to “advance smoothly” (Putnam 2000). ‘Where people are trusting and trustworthy, and where they are subject to repeated interactions with fellow citizens, everyday business and social transactions are less costly….’ (Putnam 2000, p 289).

A feature of social capital is that networking with other people on a regular basis provides a broader view of what is occurring in the community and this process develops an enhanced view to contribute to resolving various problems that face communities and individuals combined with greater knowledge due to the resources available to group members (Putnam 2000, World Bank 2004).

Putnam maintains that ‘social capital also operates through psychological and biological processes to improve the individual’s lives. Mounting evidence suggests that people whose lives are rich in social capital cope better with traumas and fight illness more effectively. … Community connectedness is not just about warm fuzzy tales of civic triumph. In measurable and well-documented ways, social capital makes an enormous difference to our lives’ (Putnam 2000, p. 290).

Purely from an education perspective The World Bank has undertaken research that provides statistics that demonstrate ‘the social and economic benefits of social capital’ (INFED 2004).

…they argue that there is evidence that schools are more effective when parents and local citizens are actively involved. Teachers are more committed, students achieve higher test scores, and better use is made of school facilities in those communities where parents and citizens take an active interest in children’s educational well-being. (INFED 2004)

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND LLENs

Social capital was not just a conceptual cornerstone of the Ministerial Review panels thinking. It also directly informed one of its key recommendations for structural innovation, namely a recommendation to establish ‘planning networks’ later referred to as LLENs. The idea of social capital was fleshed out as it were by the recommendation to establish LLENs.
In part the move to adopt this model of community-based input reflected disenchantment with the centralised bureaucratic model. Such networks that underpin social capital rely on stockpiles of communal trust with shared norms where members can plan collectively with the intention to resolve everyday problems that face the community. This is approached through co-operation for both mutual and overall gain. As I have argued the Ministerial Review panel believed that the responsibility for poor student outcomes resided not with the student, but with the educational bureaucracy and certain systemic deficiencies it had allowed to persist (Kirby 2000a, 2000b, 2000c). The Review panel likewise concluded that:

> At present there is a policy vacuum for the structure of post-compulsory education and training. This is unfortunate in the context of a number of community discussions and activities directed towards potential reorganisation. A policy of community consensus is too vague and vulnerable to sectional interests. (Kirby 2000a p.98)

The Ministerial Review panel therefore had little trouble in recommending that ‘planning networks’ - later to be referred to as LLENs – ought to be established across Victoria. To drive and implement the Ministerial policies the establishment of LLENs was believed to have significant potential for a number of reasons (Keating et al 2003). LLENs reflect network theory, which is ‘essentially characterised by the operation of formal and informal linkages and communications between key players’ (Keating et al 2003, p.2).

The establishment of LLENs would also formalise some local and regional partnerships that were already operative in some cases, while in other communities LLENs would provide a framework for these to develop (Keating et al 2003). In both cases the role of the LLENs was to implement processes and procedures that focussed on an improvement on outcomes for disadvantaged youth, connect education, training and industry to create underpinning structural credibility to the local economy and build a strengthened community (Keating et al 2003).

It was also expected that the formation of the LLENs would be a key factor in implementing the more contentious goals embedded in the Ministerial Review (Keating 2003, Keating et al 2003). Spierings believed that the policies emanating from the Ministerial Review panel were a result of ‘sound community consultation’ with a broad variety of stakeholders including young people (Spierings, 2003b).
The consultation enabled an ‘enhanced understanding of key issues’ (2003b). This process he thought was boosted by the research of Richard Teese and Richard Curtain (two prominent education researchers, quoted extensively in this research) who provided data that ‘were quite important in terms of looking at the regional elements of that disaggregated picture of what’s happening to youth’ (Spierings 2003b, Para. 8).

The search for ways to include communities in the process was seen as one way of ensuring that policy change became more than just a pipe dream. The research data provided by Teese and Curtain enabled the Ministerial Review committee to evaluate the contrasting opportunities for young people from differing socio economic backgrounds (Spierings 2003b). The research combined with community consultation resulted in a ‘coherent framework of analysis’ and ‘policy response’ (Spierings 2003b, Para. 8). Educators were isolated from the community and there was a need to develop an overarching framework to address the needs of young people through other measures beyond the VCE (Spierings 2003b). The policies formulated saw the need for a community effort to provide different options ‘recognising that the state did have a role in what happened beyond the school, not just in terms of TAFEs and university take up but in terms of what was happening in the labour market’ (Spierings 2003b, para. 8).

Kelly believed that Kirby had a comprehensive appreciation of the education sector in its many parts (Kelly 2003). Kirby’s understanding of education systems, structures and its ‘innate conservatism’ within the sector combined with an in-depth knowledge of the plight of young people led him to develop and manage the Ministerial Review to ‘in effect create a mandate for change’ (Kelly 2003, para. 6).

It was argued that LLENs would be pivotal in addressing the development of social capital by creating a meeting point to drive education and training with a sound impact on youth, by addressing their needs and the needs of employing structures that hold communities and societies together due to the capacity to distribute finance through employment with a knock-on effect to other vital sectors in communities (Keating et al, 2003, Kirby, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c). These would have the capacity to shape diverse programs within varying communities to address the needs of young people in their post-compulsory phase of education and/or training (Keating et al 2003). The Panel also saw importance in a range of other areas emanating from the social partnerships that might emerge from LLENs (Keating et
al 2003) plus ‘the need for better monitoring of outcomes at a regional level, and a more shared responsibility and accountability for these outcomes (Keating et al 2003, p. 6) and this was a key role of the networks. Other determining factors for recommending LLENs as a key policy initiative included the enhanced ability to focus government and civic resources and to support, utilise and nurture what was already occurring informally with a more robust structure (Kirby 2003).

The formulation of local planning networks had the aim of undertaking local research and then set about piloting and placing on trial various mixtures of education and training to resolve the needs of young people (Keating et al 2003, Kirby 2003).

Kirby (2003) and Kelly (2003) both noted in interviews with me that the proposal to establish LLENs did not initially envisage they would be set up on a Victoria-wide basis. The notion to develop the LLENs across the state eventually became a recommendation but Kirby expressed concerns that not all LLENs would prove to be as effective as others (Kirby 2003). Whilst Kirby (2003) was initially apprehensive about establishing more than two or three such structures initially as pilots, he did recommend establishing a large number of LLENs in rural, regional and urban Victoria.

THE REVIEW PANEL AND POLITICAL IMPLEMENTATION

Given the ambitions of the Ministerial Review panel and the possibly contentious nature of its assessment of the problems and the possible difficulties involved in implementing there is an irresistible temptation to explore the process of policy implementation. As Peter Kirby indicated:

… implementation is always the hardest thing you know. I come from a background with the British public service where the elite are the policy makers, they have better salary structures, better career prospects, they’re the “Yes Minister” characters that you see and the managers, and the clerical streams were the ones who had to implement. And having come from the managers and actually jumped at a very young age to the elite, I think I’ve always been scarred perhaps with the view that the easiest thing is policy. I mean the easiest thing is to have an idea and to set out how you can correct the world, how you can put things right. People do it in letters to the editors of the newspapers everyday; you know how you can put public transport
right or the health system and so on. The really hard thing is to actually implement it successfully…

(Kirby 2003, Para. 8)

For reasons which I spelled out in my Introduction I am not able to describe or comment on detail on the implementation of the Review panels recommendations. Yet it is noteworthy that the enabling legislation needed to put the recommendations into effect enjoyed a relatively smooth Parliamentary passage – and this points albeit implicitly to something of the skill, even finesse with which the Review panel had approached its task.

For the Education Department to be structurally revised and for the establishment of agencies and units like the VCAA (replacing the Board of Studies) and the VQA (replacing the State Training Board) and revision of the “qualification” regulation role of the Adult, Community and Further Education Board Parliamentary legislation was required. These were major changes that needed to be accepted by both Houses of Parliament. This might have been a problem given that the opposition Liberal and National parties held the balance of power in the Legislative Council.

Kelly (2003) recalled these changes ‘as a huge development’ and their successful adoption by the Parliament a strong indication of the acceptance of new policies not only by the government, but also by the political culture at large. For Howard Kelly:

… what’s interesting about the debate that took place in the (state) parliament was that the Nationals (meaning the National Party) supported it, and the Liberal party, while it formerly opposed it, didn’t really oppose it’ (Kelly 2003, para. 16).

As the Hansard record of Parliamentary debates shows it is on record that both the Liberal and National parties were quite supportive (Vic Hansard, 29 November 2000). The Honourable Andrew Brideson, Legislative Council Member for the Province of Waverley Victoria (Liberal Party) eg., was clearly supportive of the legislation to implement the Ministerial Review reforms and commented that the support was shared by his opposition colleagues (Hansard, 29 November 2000):

I intended to open with a comment that it was significant to participate in this education debate in the presence of some students and teachers, but I notice they have since departed the gallery. I intended saying that it is
important for students to see how Parliament works and to observe a situation where the government and the opposition are not in disagreement, as is the case with this legislation. However, I guess those students, who no doubt are from regional Victoria, have other activities to pursue in Melbourne. I wish them well in that regard. I also intended saying that with the successful implementation of both bills the educational and employment opportunities of those students will be significantly enhanced.

(Brideson, A. Victorian Hansard, speech in Legislative Council 29 Nov. 2000, p. 1789)

Brideson reaffirmed his strong support with a favourable comment regarding the Ministerial Review:

It gave me some heart to read in the executive summary of the Kirby report: The focus of provision must be on the needs of young people, not the institutions. It has been a long time since I have read an educational report that puts the needs of students ahead of all other needs.

(Brideson A, Victorian Hansard, speech in Legislative Council 29 Nov. 2000, p. 1793)

Brideson (2000) made an added comment that was extremely important and also corroborated Keating’s view that the Education Department had very limited impact on policy formulation (1999, and Keating et al, 2003). Brideson identified that the Education Department was not really involved in the formulation of education policy which symbolised that it was bordering on a type of laissez faire administration approach again reflecting Keating’s views (1999, and Keating et al, 2003).

One of the reasons the Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission will come into being may have been that as a result of considering submissions the Kirby panel was surprised to discover that the current State Training Board of Victoria had a limited role that had unfortunately been circumscribed by legislation and that its authority to provide broad policy advice to government was unclear and poorly linked to research. The establishment of the commission will be a very positive move and can only enhance outcomes for Victoria's students’ (Brideson A, Victorian Hansard, speech in Legislative Council 29 Nov. 2000, p. 1793)

Brideson was clear in his support for the legislation:

I wish the government every success in the implementation of the bills. These important measures will take today's students well and truly into the
21st century. The working world that they will participate in will be a vastly different one from the one we are experiencing today.

(Brideson A, Victorian Hansard, speech in Legislative Council 29 Nov. 2000, p. 1793)

So too did the Honourable Elizabeth Powell, Legislative Council Member for the Province of North Eastern (National Party) indicate her acceptance of the policies:

I put on record that I was pretty impressed by the Report. I congratulate not only the chairman of that review but also the review panel. The report goes into substantial issues concerning training pathways and the way the world of schools, training for work and the way education is viewed are changing, not just now but into the future. It looks at things such as school retention rates because it is important for governments of all types to ensure that young people remain in school and receive an education. It also looks at the transition from school to work, which is most important in ensuring that young people who leave school in year 10 do not fall through the gaps. The Kirby report goes a long way to dealing with most of those issues.

(Powell E. J. Victorian Hansard, speech in Legislative Council 29 Nov. 2000, pp. 1797-1798)

Powell contextualised understanding of the Ministerial Review policies by referring to her experience and actual involvement in the field (Vic. Hansard, 29 November 2000):

It is acknowledged that some students do not do well in mainstream schooling, so the question remains: if young people leave at year 10, what do we do with them? We have to find out how to engage those people in education. The Kirby report talks about that. If one system does not work for a person how do we get something else to engage a response in that person so he or she is encouraged by learning and continues it? … perhaps the Victorian certificate of education (VCE) could be taken into the technical and further education (TAFE) colleges, where young boys in particular would see that it was not school, that they could do their VCE in TAFE, subsequently continue with training or go on to do whatever course they wanted, whether it be in marketing, an apprenticeship, sales or whatever. The Kirby report has also picked up on those initiatives. Some of the functions of the authority are to develop policies, criteria and standards for
curriculum, and that includes courses that lead to recognised qualifications. It is also necessary to monitor the patterns of participation by school students in courses, including vocational education and training (VET) for school students, and the quality of those courses. I am pleased with the strong country focus in the recommendations and in the bills. I have much pleasure in indicating that the National Party does not oppose the bills.


This bi-partisan support to Kelly was ‘an extraordinary feat’ resulting in a number of complimentary comments that, as can be seen by the Hansard quoted above, resulted in the Liberal and National opposition parties supporting the recommendations of the Ministerial Review (Kelly, 2003). ‘But the National party formally endorsed the legislation. In that sense it is a part of the story that I think people ignore, just pretend it didn’t happen but … it was incredibly important’ (Kelly, 2003 para. 16).

Several points can be briefly made about the success with which the Review panel’s process seemed to work so well.

Understanding or describing a policy problem is only one part of the complex process of policy making (Kirby 2003). The panel understood that it also faced the problem of turning any policy recommendations it developed into policy. This involved a capacity to address the politics of bureaucratic processes to make change possible (Kirby 2003, Keating 2003). In effect there are three or more problems. The poor participation levels among young Victorians are the first and obvious problem. The complexity of developing policy to work on the problem within the conservative area of post-compulsory education, and the more obscure problem of formulating, implementing, policies that are sustained and continue to address the predicament faced by young people and their society are the added problems (Ball 1999, Kirby 2003, Ozga 2000). The Ministerial Review panel did understand the multiple problems beyond just poor participation rates among young people and how they approached to the more obscure problem:

Policy-makers, academics and politicians appear to think they can get by with media reports or statistical cubes of data purchased from the ABS {Australian Bureau of Statistics} to from a view about the world they are
trying to variously to regulate and improve. One of the clear implications of this is to hold out the prospect that, at some point, policy-oriented researchers will start to develop a kind of ethnographic approach to their work that seeks to elicit a kind of ‘thick description’ of the lives and experiences of the people who become the objects of policy-making. (Bessant et al 2006 p.338)

Bessant et al (2006) represent well the ‘hidden’ problem of policy-making that of which Kirby was only too well aware (Keating 2003, Kelly 2003, Kirby 2003). Kirby decided to hold a number of public forums and meet privately with numerous individuals and organisations “to elicit a kind of ‘thick description’” from the people in the community associated and concerned about post compulsory education to establish if the proposed policies had a measure of accuracy and whether the problems were real by speaking to people in a range of forums.

To Kirby (2003) a significant influence on the Ministerial Review Panel stemmed from the learning experiences that resulted from extensive community consultation. The panel held sixteen community consultations to gather information about the creative activities that were occurring in various communities aimed at resolving the problems youths faced with the intention to connect them to valid and relevant vocational pathways. Kirby and members of the panel witnessed collaborative activities within numerous communities (many were non-metropolitan) that reflected local leadership combined with community spirit (Kirby, 2003). Kirby was keen to support and legitimise the collaborative activities that both the community and Kirby saw as essential to young people (2003). The community consultation was an important function in the policy formulation. Kirby aimed to free up resources to enable communities to continue their work with accountability (permission) and Kirby’s aim was to use grassroots information to ‘change the policies at the centre’ meaning those driven by the DET bureaucracy (Kirby, 2003, Para. 23).

Kirby, like Ball (1990) and Ozga (2000), recognised that policy involved struggle and contestation. Clearly, Kirby’s aim was to enable groups who were doing valuable work with young people to be acknowledged formally through policy recommendations. The people Kirby witnessed doing outstanding supportive work for young people in places such as Whittlesea, Horsham, and Talangatta (Kirby 2003, and Kelly 2003), to name a few examples, were moved from being apart
from the formal machinery of policy making to an integrated status as a result of the government accepting the Ministerial Review policies. In other words Kirby particularly was alert to innovative practices that were already operating such as informal VCAL type activities, and associations of community people along similar though informal lines to LLENs and these became covered under policy initiatives.

Keating and Robinson (2003) suggested that the VET in schools program, now fully integrated into postcompulsory education as policy, is analogous to the formulation of LLENs as a policy initiative. ‘It is recognised that innovation in education and training, especially at the postcompulsory level, can most often be found to come from the field, as the history of school-industry programs and VET in schools illustrates’ (Keating et al 2003, pp. 8-9). Keating and Robinson claim that the growth within the program in the 1990s resulted from ‘centrally sourced funding and advice, including that provided by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum and the ASTF/ECEF1 (2003, p. 9). LLENs like the VET in Schools program were evolutionary, emerging from the field as a grass roots ‘development’ (2003). The driving forces behind the VET in schools were ‘local school-based efforts to enhance curriculum provision for students and to more directly link school and work, and were highly dependent on the personal networks of motivated teachers and others within their communities (Keating et al 2003, Malley et al 2001).

Keating (et al 2003), Kirby (2003), and Kelly (2003), all suggested that the community consultations conducted by the Ministerial Panel witnessed an array of local activities that provided the momentum for the Ministerial Review recommendations concerning the establishment of the LLENs. Again many of the LLENs ‘had been built around the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF) clusters. However others had their origins in TAFE institutes, group training companies, ACE {Adult Community Education} providers, local government, and universities. Taken together, these established and nascent networks displayed the common features of innovation - diversity, dynamism, and regionalism. The review committee, therefore, noted the opportunity of building on these organic developments within the state’ (Keating et al 2003, p.9). The issue here is that the advent of LLENs may hasten the development of policies that address the needs of young people with local initiatives rather than the pains of waiting for centralised bureaucracies to sanction common sense approaches from a
community structure in a position to focus the combined forces to help young people link to their path, their community and their society (Kirby 2003, Keating et al 2003).

Kirby was both moved by community actions, but concerned that there was no accountability for the problems youths faced. To Kirby the problems were evident. ‘Youngsters were falling through the gaps’ (Kirby 2003, Para. 23). Kirby said that the community consultations resulted in clear information about what was wrong and areas needing improvement, ‘but there was no accountability, there was no sense of responsibility to take corrective action, not even the schools’ (Kirby 2003, Para. 25). Kirby (2003) expressed concern at the lack of co-ordinated activity to focus education and community resources on the problems of young people. The negativity that Kirby witnessed in his community and organisational consultation was very influential in policy formulation and confirmed many aspects of the draft policies that were taking foothold from other research (Kirby 2003).

All people interviewed, and many that I have made contact with in the field, commented on the skilful manner Kirby chaired the community consultation stage of research to underpin the policy formulation stage. To Kirby the community consultation was added research in part to influence some, not all, of the policies he wanted the panel to recommend by double checking the soundness of the guiding principles of the Ministerial Review and their research at the coalface (Kirby, 2003). Kelly and Kirby both considered that the sixteen community research/consultation settings in the metropolitan, regional and rural settings were invaluable to the policy formation research stage (Kelly 2003, Kirby 2003).

Both Spierings (2003b) and Kelly (2003) observed that the value of the added research that Teese and Curtain provided to the Ministerial Review Panel placed the plight of young people in regional, rural and metropolitan settings in perspective, thus enabling the other data that surfaced from the public forums to provide balance. The second issue that Kelly noted was also reflected in the interviews conducted of a formal and informal nature. From the information gathered from all persons interviewed, and extensive notes taken in the field, it was evident that the community consultation also established a strong commitment ‘to

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1 Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF) - formerly the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF)
the need for change and reorienting…how we think about postcompulsory education and training’ (Kelly 2003 para. 6).

Kelly added that under the previous state government (Kennett government 1992-1999) it had been a ‘long while since people had had the opportunity to actually sit in front of a Ministerial Committee in an open hearing and say what they thought’ with encouragement (Kelly 2003 Para. 6).

Kelly (2003) offered an additional insight into Kirby’s approach to policy development. Kelly simply provided the example of Kirby saying to the Ministerial Review panel, and the Minister, Lynne Kosky (Post compulsory Education and Training) that the information that arose from community consultation, combined with the sophistication of the statistical research, substantiated that significant change was essential for Victoria to address severe problems among young people particularly and the system overall (Kelly 2003). In my fieldwork there have been prominent informants including Keating (2003) and Spierings (2003b) who advised that Kirby was insistent that community consultation should occur. Kelly commented that Kirby established a grass roots mandate throughout Victoria by travelling to Wodonga, Horsham, Portland, Ballarat, Bendigo, Latrobe Valley and Metropolitan Melbourne to consult with youth, industry the education and welfare sectors, and the broader community (Kelly 2003).

To most a change of government in 1999 was unexpected. The Brack’s government came to office adopting ‘reformist policies of economic and regional development, fiscal responsibility, and social justice. Similarities between this new Victorian Labor Government and the Blair Government in the UK can be noted, as both followed radical conservative Governments that had privatised much of the public infrastructure, and both adopted fiscally and economically conservative, but socially progressive, policy agendas’ (Keating et al, 2003, p.7). Similar to the Blair government’s approach, the Bracks government aimed to establish innovative approaches of working with ‘civil society’ (Keating et al 2003, p.7). The Brack’s Government ‘was also committed to fostering greater social cohesion through community building and the notion of social capital. The education and training policy domain was one of the first in which these new approaches could be tested’ (Keating et al, 2003, p7). Keating (2001) refers to overseas research that had an influence on the Ministerial Panel’s notion regarding proposing the development of the LLENs which signified a cornerstone in the policy framework to position a
community structure in place to work more effectively with civil society and build social and human capital, or in some cases – formalise and support the structures focussed on young people (Kirby, 2003).

The development or formation of policy had two other major influences. The first being that the incoming government faced a time of ‘profound economic, social and technological changes’ (Keating et al 2003, p. 1) and could no longer develop and sustain an appropriate policy framework to address the needs of regional, rural and metropolitan ‘diversity’ (Keating et al, 2003, Kelly, 2003, Spierings 2003b). ‘In such circumstances the old centralised corporatist approaches are seen to be no longer appropriate, because they are too monolithic, too slow to respond, and do not have the capacity to deal with local and regional diversity’ (Keating et al 2003, p. 1).

The second issue was the broader research concerning local planning networks undertaken by the Ministerial Review panel. This relates to the issue of network theory. There is insufficient space within this dissertation to cover this issue in great depth. Suffice to say network theory relates to the formation of structures embedded within communities with the intention of developing a new from of governance by drawing together the expertise within the local community in terms of economic, social, industry, training, education and in a sense political knowledge (Keating et al, 2003). The intention is to enable evolutionary forces to plug a noticeable gap ‘between more traditional approaches that locate power and decision making within centralist elites or power structures and more fluid and pluralistic approaches that accommodate shifting and highly distributed pressure groups. While it has a variety of forms in the literature, network theory is essentially characterised by the operation of formal and informal linkages and communications between key players’ (Keating et al 2003, p. 2). Network theory was extensively researched drawing on the international policy developments in the UK, Denmark, and Northern Europe (Keating et al 2003, Keating, 2001).

The knowledge emanating from research was crucial to strengthen the potential of the policies that needed to both be developed and successfully implemented (Keating ECEF 2001). In relation to the Ministerial Review the panel set about underpinning the policy formulation based on effective research that had a wide scope and examined broad dimensions within the field of post-compulsory education from a domestic and global perspective (Keating ECEF 2001):
These dimensions include: broad context, international comparisons, Victorian statistical data, policy field scan, regional consultations and submissions, international approaches to the issue, and theoretical approaches to the role of Government.

The research dimensions involved a significant level of consultation with bureaucrats, the community, educators, educational theorists, academics and industry and created a robust policy framework with the intention to impact on and rectify key aspects within post-compulsory education to significantly improve participation (Keating 2003, Kirby 2003, Kelly 2003, Spierings 2003b, Alex 2003, Briony 2003, Chris 2003, Daniel 2003, Eliza 2003). Policy formulation within the assorted field of post-compulsory education is extremely multifaceted given the considerable diversity of young people’s needs. Post-compulsory education to Keating often has an ad hoc connection to the broader community and economic well being of the society through a confusing myriad of detached programs conducted in a fragmented way by numerous providers (Keating, ECEF, 2001). Keating was of the view that researchers must understand the complexity of post-compulsory education and its many parts and programs for ‘their research to be applicable’ in terms of policy formulation and effective implementation (Keating ECEF 2001):

The lesson, then, is let the research speak for itself. Good research is that which is accurate and truthful, as well as relevant. But it must also speak to its audience. Most people will make good judgements when they are given a comprehensive, accurate and comprehendible picture – even those in government. (Keating, 2001)

The information gained in interviews reflects this observation made by Keating above as the research that the policies are based on has ‘a nearness to the truth’ that most research struggles to achieve when developing and implementing policy. The overwhelming support and belief in the research was evident in all the interviews conducted.

The calibre of the Ministerial Review panel members, the excellence of the research that underpinned the policy formulation and recommendations and the status and universal respect for Kirby and Keating, were all key reasons why the Ministerial Review was to become government policy.
But as an exercise in influencing and directing policy I think that so far it has got somewhere. I must acknowledge that much of this is due to the prestige, skill and wisdom of Peter Kirby. The approach that we took allowed us to build support: the use of the hearings, the use of an interim report, and the open access that groups had to the review panel.

(Keating ECEF 2001)

Kirby was unable to pinpoint exactly the extent that community consultation influenced either his or the Ministerial Review panel’s policy formulation.

It is a very interesting question about how much of a review of this kind is your own ideas sometimes lying dormant. Certainly your own prejudices, there’s no doubt about that and your own opinions and there’s a question about how much the participatory approach works. When you go and talk to people, actually do you listen only to those things that reinforce your views or whether you really do change some of our views? I think certainly some of the things, but I hope I am not being immodest, I think some of the things I saw and heard did change my view.

(Kirby 2003, Para. 18)

However Kirby (2003) when interviewed was quite clear that this was not the only consideration. For Kirby (2003) evidence about the problem of low educational and employment participation rates on the part of young people was only a part of the problem. As Kirby (2003) explained developing policy to address a complex problem is arguably reliant on more than a convincing use of empirical data. Kirby (2003) believed there were three problems. The first obviously was the poor education and employment participation rates among young Victorians. The second was the complexity of developing policy to work on the first problem within a conservative post-compulsory education policy domain. The third was the difficulties involved in creating and implementing policies that are sustainable and that will continue to address long term problems faced by young people and the wider community.

Teese, Keating, and others had long been critical of the lack of leadership and organisational response on the part of the education policy community responsible for post-compulsory education. These writers claimed that there had been an absence of coherent policy development for decades (Keating 1999, Teese 2000). Despite the longest period of economic growth and expansion in Australia’s history
from 1992 to 2004 (ABS 2004), the plight of young people over this time has deteriorated in terms of vocational and educational participation (Curtain 2001, Curtain et al 2003, Kirby 2000a). Australia is ‘the 14th largest economy in the world’ however the problems of unemployment for young people continue (DEST 2002b, p. 1). The ranking of Australia’s economic prowess has been achieved ‘through a decade of change and economic growth and a strong focus on productivity improvements’ (International Monetary Fund, 2001 cited in DEST 2002b p.1) but the degree to which young people participation has improved is not evident as young people have been largely left behind (Kirby 2000a, Curtain et al 2003).

In this chapter I have focussed on the role played by two key metaphors the idea of ‘pathways’ and the values said to inhere in ‘social capital’. I have showed how these two ideas played a major role in the key recommendation made by the Ministerial review panel that came out of the panel to establish LLENs.
CHAPTER FIVE: Evaluating the impact of the Ministerial Review Panel’s recommendations

Education policy change has long enjoyed a reputation in Australia as an intractable domain of policy-making. As Jack Keating (2001) observed there has been a lot of effort put into education research with little effect on the policy change process. As others have noted the evidence suggests that despite significant policy efforts, changes in education policy and program delivery on a global footing are all too likely to produce only marginal change at best (McNeil 2003, OECD 2001). Given the ambitions of the Ministerial Review panel and the possibly contentious nature of its assessment of the problems and the possible difficulties involved in implementing change there is an irresistible temptation to evaluate its achievements to date. Equally that temptation needed to be tempered by the recognition of the fact that when I began the research and writing of this thesis I was doing so within a relatively short time after the Ministerial Review panel had done its work. Nonetheless as I found especially in my field work there were many people like my informants, many of them actively involved in post-compulsory education and training in Victoria, who were eager to discuss and evaluate the new framework of post-compulsory education and training that is now evolving and its potential. So it is useful to ask, given that the policy framework that the Ministerial Review recommended be developed had the potential to undertake the complex task to address the needs of young people, how well has it succeeded to date?

NEW STRUCTURES/NEW PROCESSES?

Policy implementation always faces the risk of fragmentation and/or resistance to change given the diversity of bureaucratic agencies and interests that may be involved (Rist in Denzin et al 2000). Indeed change in education is not swift or easy to orchestrate through new policies (Ball et al 1992). Teese (2000) claims that education is too slow to change and steeped in a traditional approach that sees university enrolments as its biased and distorting mainstay. Whilst this study is intended to play a small part to assist and influence the process of needed change in
the education industry this may not be an easy process given the views expressed in the following citation that may have equal relevance to the Victorian situation.

Look at the critics of education, for example: many of these writers have pointed out that the past half-century of educational research has yielded little in the way of results. The public, members of congress, business executives and leaders in the field often point out that indeed schools are no better places today than they were, say fifty years ago…
(Janesick in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 396).

The intent of the Ministerial Review approach to policy change was to focus on developing strategic programs underpinned by the establishment of new structures in both the education bureaucracy and within the community to resolve participation levels of 15-19 year olds initially before extending them to young adults (Kelly, 2003). ‘So that was the intent of the Kirby report [Ministerial Review] and in that sense it was basically challenging the very core of delivery to date and that has been a real focus on the territory of the silos’ (Kelly 2003, para. 4).

Kirby (2003) believed that the lack of a ‘holistic focus on post-compulsory education and training’ in Victoria could only be addressed by a major bureaucratic restructure with well defined roles combined with other policy recommendations to reduce the didactic influence and domination from the centre. As stated earlier this led Kirby and his panel to make major policy recommendations involving the establishment of three new structures within the Education Department; the Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA), the Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission (VLESC), and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA). It also led to the recommendations to establish LLENs and a new senior secondary qualification being the VCAL.

As Kelly (2003) pointed out these initiatives led to immediate and significant changes: ‘Until the Review we had a State Training Board and a Board of Studies, that’s all we had. Now they in themselves typified the problem we had. I chaired the Board of Studies and I chaired the Victorian Curriculum Advisory Board (VCAB) and only once did the State Training Board and VCAB ever meet’ (Kelly 2003, para 16). Kelly (2003) considered that with the demographic changes that would become more apparent in the Australian community it is important to use
the ‘curriculum levers’ that are available, particularly the VCAL and hopefully the development of a matrix that the VQA is starting to consider and develop to create a framework where credit is identified and awarded from one education program to another. This initiative is designed to enable people to progress more swiftly to obtain qualifications that they are entitled to and removes the subjectivity to an extent among persons known as selection officers in tertiary institutions (VQA 2005).

Learners generally relate to the three education and training sectors separately. A learner commonly moves from school, to vocational education and training or higher education, then between those sectors. As the learner passes from sector to sector, it is often unclear how their past learning (and qualification) relates to their next learning. The picture is often one of fragmented learning and only partially connected pathways, organised not around individual learners but around the mechanics and requirements of providers and sectors. (VQA 2005)

According to Kirby (2003) the implementation of the Ministerial Review policies would in theory have been easier if only one main bureaucracy had been involved rather than sections within the Department that were effectively disconnected not to mention the possibility that multiple government departments would merely add further complexities.

The Ministerial Review recommended a remodelled bureaucracy, and new community-based, government-sponsored structures (LLENs) to carry out the intended changes recommended in the Review panels’ recommendations. As this has proved to be one of the major changes it is the first aspect of the Review panel’s policy making that I want to assess.

LOCAL LEARNING AND EMPLOYMENT NETWORKS (LLENs)

Prior to the Ministerial Review Kirby believed that the ‘education policy landscape’ was dominated by poor policies that signalled an inappropriate interest in the problems of ensuring that young people had real opportunities to make the school to work transition (Kirby, 2003). Problems in young people’s community were characterised by a lack of effective focus on education and training issues and this required significant change (Kirby 2003). Community building was required to bring ‘all young people into a civil society and help them belong’ (Kirby, 2003
Para. 33). To offset the dominating characteristics of uncaring education institutions that are too disconnected to the needs of young people an ‘exogenous shock’ was required to contribute to reversing the dominating culture within the sector (Kirby, 2003). An exogenous shock means an irritant that is external to the organism and this was to be the LLEN.

The Review panel believed that the educational bureaucracy could not be trusted to drive the changes the Ministerial Review identified as necessary to major reform (Keating 2003, Kirby 2003).

Kirby (2003) believed that the LLENs enabled a freeing up of resources and support allowing people to undertake some of the active work they had previously embarked on and were now able to so with support and accountability for young people. The adoption of the policy particularly of the LLEN could be used to change the policies of the centre (Kirby 2003). The intention was, as Kirby related, for the centre to become a changed entity with increased listening and decreased directing – ‘more facilitating rather than managing’ (Kirby 2003, para. 23).

Change to Kelly (2003) was necessary to sustain the reforms combined with the need to listen to new players in the field around Victoria. This was crucial to continue to breathe ongoing life into the platform of reforms provided by the Ministerial Review and reach the potential of the proposed reforms (Kelly 2003). For change to occur a coherent focus of the resources that LLENs represented in their localities was a key need due to the work performed close to the ground (Kelly 2003). As Howard Kelly saw it:

Unless there is a deep seated commitment for on-going reform and on-going internal challenging we will slip, we will not reach the potential we could reach and which probably means that we need to have a much deeper think about what offices schools regions do and what their relationships are, we need to seriously think far more about how LLENS can contribute to thinking and how that can be used as an honest program for thinking about issues to do with who provides what where and what the school sets are (Kelly 2003, para. 26).

Briony (2003) believed LLENs have the capacity to be an effective change agent mounting a real challenge to the bureaucracy. However she was concerned that
there was no authority (“teeth”) to encourage education providers to change their
approach (Briony 2003).

Others took a more sanguine view. One informant like Chris (2003) provided a
number of examples of success by pointing to the implementation of LLEN
initiatives among partners. The adoption of VCAL in three schools in 2003 with a
fourth to follow in 2004 was another notable success encouraged and supported by
the LLEN (Chris 2003). Another potential success has been the identification of a
lack of training and access to TAFE colleges for young people who have not
completed VCE (2003). A scan in the last twelve months identified that there was a
lack of training for young people in the area in need of training for school leavers –
particularly non-completers (2003). In subsequent discussions, as a participant
observer, Chris considered that too many TAFE programs required VTAC ENTER
scores to gain access to TAFEs colleges unless young people obtained an
apprenticeship or traineeship, which entitled them to another access point to enrol
in TAFE colleges. Chris was working to resolve this issue locally and was making
contact with appropriate TAFE colleges to commence dialogue. Having identified
this shortfall in training opportunities the LLEN commenced work with a local
ACE provider and piloted a successful program to assist twelve non-completers
and the program, through its success has expanded to thirty-six in the 2003 (Chris
2003). Numerous outcomes from the program resulted in employment, further
training, or a combination of the two in the form of a traineeship or apprenticeship.

Expanded opportunities are occurring for young people to access more training in
the TAFE sector as many LLENs are now beginning to connect with TAFE
colleges to develop increased numbers of programs that do not require an ENTER
score or Victorian Tertiary Admission Commission (VTAC) access and have
increased the potential to link to vocational or educational outcomes.

It is ‘early days’ in this process but partnerships are being formed by LLENs in all
sorts of ways with education providers, welfare bodies, and some employers to
make changes and attempt to link students to further study or employment, or a
combination of the two in the form of apprenticeships or traineeships.

LLENS had numerous achievements and were performing well after functioning
for twelve to eighteen months (VLESC 2002a). The VLESC paper noted in its
evaluation that the relationships that LLENs were developing between various civil structures and individuals in the community were quite impressive (VLESC 2002a, Keating et al, 2003). Even though many LLEN members had not previously met around tables they had now commenced to collaborate in many activities despite the potential for competing interests (VLESC 2002a, Keating et al 2003).

The value of ‘getting some people around a table’ (Alex 2003, para. 39) and trying to foster a commonality of purpose that reflects the intent of the policies was a key to successful implementation. For Alex (2003) the LLEN did provide a framework enabling “people” to meet, and get to know one another and collectively face the challenge of developing ideas to resolve the problem of poor participation levels among young people in communities particularly in less prosperous areas where Alex worked. It was interesting that Alex (2003) used the term “people” rather than organisations he saw the unlocking of major institutions like TAFEs, schools, government bodies including local government as very difficult without the support of individuals that understood their own bureaucracies and provided suggestions for LLENs to engage with them.

The value of networking was raised a on a number of occasions by Alex (2003) reflecting its value in terms of unity of purpose with individuals as opposed to organisational “stakeholders.” This reflected many of the issues regarding network theory raised by Keating et al (2003) in regards to the informal connection of individuals in communities that come together to form networks. Keating et al (2003) in the context of LLENs and maintained that networking results in the development of local policy and joint implementation strategies with a heightened level of impartiality focussing on needs of the community rather than those of the institutions. As Alex observed the concept of networking is an important antidote to top down style of program development:

TAFE, I haven’t got a handle on … I mean I think TAFE is big and it depends on - its probably like schools in a way – they’re institutions and it depends on who you tap into and you know you get some fantastic people and I speak of the TAFEs I’ve dealt with and others you think well…’ (Alex, para. 17).

To Briony (2003) the development of LLENs was the key policy initiative. The “brief” according to Briony (2003) to engage with education bodies, employers, local government, welfare groups, and community members to develop and foster
support and unify purpose to assist young people with pathways and achieve the targets set down by the state government (Briony 2003).

As a participant observer and working in the field, plans for this particular LLEN plans have progressed soundly and do link young students to industry through part-time and full-time apprenticeship and traineeship positions connected to the VCE and VCAL. Connections with Group Training Companies (GTCs), TAFEs and other members to support this activity are growing and interest from employers and employer associations has also emerged.

Although the employer membership is lagging the community membership is quite advanced (Daniel 2003). The community group in this LLEN has a firm grip on policy intent and have implemented programs that have increased the number of young people continuing their education in the Adult Community Education (ACE) environment within an adult learning atmosphere considered to be more conducive to some adolescents. To Daniel circumstances indicated that the ACE environment was much more suited to engaging and sustaining many young people in learning where traditional education mainly in the domain of secondary schools clearly did not suit or address their needs (Daniel 2003). Although young people attending ACE is now more common given the revised policies as a result of the Ministerial Review, it was occurring “illegally” in this LLEN’s area previously like many other areas. This represented a significant change given that the ACE sector is now assisting young people’s learning and participation in numerous programs that are now “authorised” and supported by the LLEN in which Daniel worked (Daniel 2003) and many others throughout the state. From a participant observer perspective the increased numbers of young people moving towards ACE (and now TAFEs) is occurring with the assistance of LLENs such as those that Chris and Daniel worked for but also in many others in metropolitan, regional and rural settings effectively expanding numbers undertaking VCAL and VCE or a mixture.

In essence LLENs have drawn members of a community together to develop a cohesive approach to boost young people’s participation in the long term. It is a sound policy that the government’s own research indicates has identifiable tangible benefits (VLESC 2003) but is a policy initiative that appears to be under bureaucratic threat. Policy initiatives that have a level of success can experience a lack of objectivity and support if the underpinning reasons for their development are not understood or seen as a threat in some way. This is an added problem that

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND YOUNG PEOPLE’S PARTICIPATION

It may be quite a problem to define, let alone measure or quantify something as ineffable as ‘social capital’ - as the World Bank has observed:

This is especially challenging because social capital is comprised of concepts such as "trust", "community" and "networks" which are difficult to quantify. The challenge is increased when one considers that the quest is to measure not just the quantity but also the quality of social capital on a variety of scales.

Social capital researchers aim to identify methods and tools which can quantify and qualify social capital to inform policymakers and stakeholders to enable them to impact existing and create new social capital which could benefit poor people and nations.

Few long-standing surveys were designed to measure "social capital", leaving researchers to compile indexes from a range of approximate items, such as measures of trust in government, voting trends, memberships in civic organisations, hours spent volunteering. Surveys currently being tested will hopefully produce more direct and accurate indicators. (World Bank 2004)

Given that the World Bank (2003) treats trust, community involvement and civic engagement as effective measures of social capital a calculation of the capability of DET to indulge in education leadership and capacity building may reside with developing stronger links with LLENs and providing enhanced support.

A major outcome of the Ministerial Review polices was building social capital which is a prime role of the LLENs (Keating 2003, Keating et al 2003, Kirby 2000a, 2000b, 2000c).

The measurements that Minister (Kosky 2003a) suggested in speech (referred to in more detail later in this chapter) that were going to be used to measure the performance of LLENS seems to fail to capture the contextual appreciation of complexity of measuring the capacity building.

For example to the World Bank (2004) social capital is ‘measured in a number of innovative ways, though for a number of reasons obtaining a single "true" measure
is probably not possible, or perhaps even desirable. First, the most comprehensive definitions of social capital are multidimensional, incorporating different levels and units of analysis. Second, any attempt to measure the properties of inherently ambiguous concepts such as "community", "network" and "organisation" is correspondingly problematic. Third, few long-standing surveys were designed to measure "social capital", leaving contemporary researchers to compile indexes from a range of approximate items, such as measures of trust in government, voting trends, memberships in civic organizations, hours spent volunteering. New surveys currently being tested will hopefully produce more direct and accurate indicators’ (World Bank 2004).

Measuring social capital may be difficult, but it is not impossible, and several excellent studies have identified useful proxies for social capital, using different types and combinations of qualitative, comparative and quantitative research methodologies (World Bank 2004).

Almost half of the 31 LLENs in Victoria commenced operation in 2001 with the rest commencing in 2002. Their complex task is to work on entrenched problems that date back three or more decades where young people’s participation has been an ongoing problem. To improve vocation and education outcomes for young people the notion that a single measure of LLENs would be employed as a guide to their survival is fraught with problems and fails to account for the value of social capital within communities. It is arguable that it is time to put more resources into the area to support LLENs not less:

Led by a growing body of evidence which shows social capital as a potential contributor to poverty reduction and sustainable development, increasing efforts are being made to identify methods and tools relevant to social capital. (World Bank 2004)

The challenges of measuring the effectiveness of LLENs can be acknowledged. The research done so far by people wedded to the idea of social capital and its ‘mensurability’ indicates that as a key body that is involved in capacity building and networking the LLENs are succeeding (Keating et al 2003). Whether capacity building and networking by themselves will be sufficient to change deeply entrenched social inequalities is an entirely separate matter.
Unity of purpose is the core role of the LLEN (Eliza 2003). The evolution of successful programs emanating from blended resources available within local communities was seen as the key LLEN responsibility by Eliza (2003) and the research shows that was occurring (Keating et al 2003, VLESC 2003). The VCAL to Eliza (2003) was an example of this as schools had started to think beyond their fences and engaged with other providers to furnish the education, training and development within this program.

One of the keys that build social capital and builds capacity in communities is the development of “ties” that link communities and groups. Participation in education is one of the key “ties” that acts as a bonding or unifying agent. The “flip side” is a position where normalised ties collapse, alternative networks and collaborations may be established around “criminal” and anti-social aspects including “gangs”. In areas typified by poverty and low socio-economic indicators this will be a key community concern (Kell et al 2004b).

Problems still exist in terms of young people’s participation despite enormous expenditure by governments on programs. Both the federal and state governments offer a variety of education transition programs with an intended vocational outcome (work). It is estimated they ‘spend about $1.0 billion a year on young people transition programs, not including the “Youth Allowance” Commonwealth benefit, of which the Commonwealth spends about two-thirds and the States a third’ (Dusseldorp 2002b, p.7).

Many initiatives have been introduced by federal and state governments attempting to address the needs of young people and as a result the broader society (Dusseldorp 2002b). Problems of participation in education and/or employment persist and ‘each year one in three teenagers leaves school without completing Year 12 education. Although some students later complete a Year 12 equivalent education, one in five young Australians never completes this level of education. Also unemployment is high among young people’ (Dusseldorp 2002b, p.7).

It may be costly for the state government to withdraw funding from the LLENs and added analysis is required. The focus of the Applied Economics report commissioned by the Dusseldorp Skills Foundation (2002b) provides compelling evidence in regard to the real costs to the community in circumstances where adequate support is not provided for youth. Although the report (Dusseldorp 2002B) does not discuss LLENs as such, it contains particular relevance to the
role(s) LLENs perform and potential economic and social benefits that their networking activity could generate by improving young people’s participation thus reflecting Keating’s (2003) view in relation to the policy context that the education bureaucracy has failed to grasp:

… the goals for education and training can be summarised as enhancing social justice, human and social capital: the pursuit of all three goals would complement each other

(Keating and Robinson 2003, pp. 7-8)

Briony (2003) argues that while some LLEN groups are attempting to focus on change at the centre, the LLEN that she works for has decided that the time would be better spent working on local issues: as altering the centre was a task considered too great and nigh on impossible. The LLEN committee had some sound reasons. The plight of young people in Briony’s particular region was very disturbing given that the retention rates in schools were significantly lower than the state average. The ‘On Track’ data within this region when presented to the education community resulted in a profound sense of “shock” (Briony 2003). Simply stated they had not known that over forty per cent of the school leavers had failed to achieve any kind of ‘outcome’ at all in this particular LLEN catchment area. Both Briony and Chris remarked that the On Track data presented some excellent insight into the problems young people face with an added impact on the society. The added complexity that the On Track data signified was the lack of understanding within the community at large about the poor impact of education signalling that much needed to be done locally due the very poor outcomes for young people combined with very low retention rates in secondary schools (Briony 2003, Chris 2003).

Daniel (2003) reflected Briony’s (2003) belief that the bureaucratic style of decision-making from the centre added tensions to the attempt to devolve policy formulation back to the communities. Daniel (2003) has expressed concern about the lack of support from the education department both within the formal interview and in subsequent conversations. Daniel was highly motivated in relation to the Ministerial Review policies and the role and potential of LLENs. This level of enthusiasm is embodied in the following quote from Daniel who considers that the government policies represent the ‘biggest structural change in the provision of education and training in Australia if we pull this off, and this is the notion of devolving planning and decision making and support to the community through a thing called a LLEN’ (Daniel 2003, para. 58).
The formation of LLENs provided a magnet for certain groups to be attracted, particularly persons based ‘within the bureaucracy structure but who did not have an alternative avenue apart from the bureaucratic line structure to recommend changes (Daniel 2003). Persons were empowered to step outside that bureaucratic structure and with the assistance of the ‘LLEN initiate newer ways of doing things and ideas’ (Daniel 2003, para. 89). This also enabled the LLEN to initiate new ideas and provide advice directly to the commission [VLESC] without going ‘through the line agencies of the department’ (Daniel 2003, para. 89). Added to this the LLEN had some capacity to fund some pilot initiatives and establish partnerships through programs (2003). There are a range of activities that are commencing but Daniel’s LLEN, at the time of the interview, had only been an entity for twelve months (Daniel 2003). Daniel added the valid observation that time is required to expand the activities of LLENs and develop co-operative arrangements among members (Daniel 2003).

A VLESC paper evaluating LLENs found ‘that there is widespread support for this innovation. The importance of community building and supporting education and employment outcomes for young people is almost universally accepted’ (VLESC 2002, p.6). The paper also concluded that ‘the principles underpinning LLENs are seen to be a good idea. Working for young people is a simple but powerful theme that is rallying diverse groups and people. As a result, new conversations are beginning, sectional interests are being set aside, and strategic action and careful decision-making are leading to beneficial outcomes’ (VLESC 2002, p. 6):

   Our evaluation also indicates that the success of the LLENs, their credibility and influence, will ultimately depend on the department and the State Government responding to issues raised by LLENs and their support, especially in the short to medium-term (VLESC 2002, p. 6)

The schools in Chris’s LLEN area had been quite supportive of the LLEN and its associated activities (Chris 2003). The schools all had representative members and they had provided data and participated in various events and activities that the LLEN were undertaking (Chris 2003). The formation of the LLEN with a high level of acceptance by local educators was very important as this was an area that was devoid of an abundance of young people services in contrast to other areas that Chris was involved in prior to working with the particular LLEN (Chris 2003). So the active participation and support of the local schools was essential to network
scarce resources and improve outcomes for young people in an impoverished environment (Chris 2003). In a sense Chris (2003) had identified that her LLEN was comprised of a group that were in touch with their community and through some of the work of the LLEN and what the On Track data had isolated, they were responsive due to discourse and examining the facts objectively.

The overall acceptance of the Ministerial Review policies was an interesting concept to draw from the data. There were many forms of acceptance. The most conspicuous was the high level of acceptance and belief in the policies by the executive officers who are working on policy implementation daily and in difficult circumstances given that the research indicates pronounced support for the policies in the general community but with severe question marks over the various parts of the state education department.

The thing about a LLEN to remember is that a LLEN is not an organisation that sits apart from everything else; the LLEN is all the organisations that make it up, that are part of it, … and that’s something a lot of people that are on a LLEN have not come to terms with…”

(Briony 2003, para. 12)

The LLEN is well placed to understand issues at the coalface and develop strategies in an attempt to combine local resources to work on young people’s participation problems. Conversely central bureaucrats appear to have limited experience and knowledge to appreciate the skill required to connect resources and programs such as federal and state funded initiatives funded to benefit youth.

Victoria has metropolitan, regional and rural variations that have both similar and differing mixtures of program focus that can, and do work to rectify and realign programs to benefit young people (Keating 2003, Keating et al 2003, Kelly 2003, Kirby 2003, Spierings 2003b, Persons Alex 2003, Briony2003, Chris, Daniel 2003, Eliza 2003). However in terms of local policy implementation with the LLEN occupying the cutting edge Chris (2003) suggests that duplication of effort and government’s positivist insistence of meeting reporting requirements has its problems.

In the main governments develop programs, theoretically, as a reflection of what they consider should be undertaken to benefit the community (Ozga, 2000, Ball 1990). The next stage is developing programs and processes that implement the
policy. However a stage of accountability that is akin to positivism (mathematically/scientifically measured “truths”) is required by government departments. This is achieved by converting policy into numbers to measure program against policy intent according to Chris (2003). An ideal situation for LLENs would be to “corral” or fence in the resources that are on the ground and focus them on the problem of young people participation and shield various service structures from reporting requirements in cases where it induces a distortion of meeting a unity of purpose (Chris 2003). For example the Jobs Pathway Program does not permit servicing young people as clients if they have left school over twelve months ago (Chris 2003). This presents a service gap and impedes the development of strategies to improve transition services and an establishment of expanded programs in TAFEs or other education bodies enabling increased enrolments of young people who previously faced a curriculum that clearly failed the test in terms of suiting their needs (Chris 2003).

Chris sees the LLEN as having great potential, but in order to fulfil that potential the LLEN requires more authority (Chris 2003). For example, given the overlap in schools between the federally funded Job Pathway Project (JPP) and state funded MIPs Program Chris would like to have the authority develop a local policy that MIPs focus on school students and JPP focus on school leavers (2003).

According to Chris (2003) the particular LLEN that she manages has adopted policies that focus on local initiatives (2003). The aim of the LLEN is to establish service needs and focus local resources and succeed through a co-ordinated program effort rather than develop “major” policy (Chris 2003). Chris (2003) was of the view that it was extremely difficult for LLENs to influence the centre and like Briony (2003) perhaps it was best for the LLEN to work on local issues that were in their control. Keating et al (2003) and Daniel (2003) reflected the view that the LLENs impact on policy change was thwarted by a bureaucracy that did not have protocols or points of contact to influence needed changes.

The research conducted by the LLEN Chris worked for has shown that unless there are expanded offerings within TAFEs for young people to access there is a barrier to achieving the targets associated with young people’s participation set as a an outcome of government policy (Chris 2003). This issue was raised in the interview with Chris however in subsequent research in this study it has become clear that TAFE colleges have insufficient entry points to tertiary education unless students
obtain a reasonable ENTER score or are employed within the competitive market of apprenticeships or traineeships. Unfortunately the latter option is not a well-understood option as many young people deem apprenticeships and traineeships as unsavoury and this suggestion in some quarters extends to career teachers (ANOP 1994, Aspire 2002, Chris 2003, DEST 2002, Kirby 2000a, 2000b, Nelson as quoted by Green the Age 28 February 2004, Teese 2000, and Teese 2003 - in Cervini’s article The Age January 11, 2004, Peoples 1998).

Policy implementation to Daniel, from a LLEN Executive Officer perspective, is an “enormous” task. ‘I think we have underestimated collectively …the significance and effort required’ (Daniel 2003, para. 59). Daniel along with Kelly (2003) expressed concern at the implementation “timetable” demanding greater achievement from LLENs in a ‘shorter timeframe than was originally envisaged (Daniel 2003 para. 59). LLENs are a key policy driver (VLESC 2003a) but to Daniel (2003) there is tension in terms of the bureaucracy understanding the territory. An initial issue for LLENs is to be accepted (2003). Kirby (2003) and others (Keating et al 2003, Kelly 2003) considered LLENs were conceived as key structures to focus local activities that would have potential to be exemplars that could impact on major policies at the “centre” but Daniel illustrates issues requiring resolution from the “centre” to assist successful and full implementation (Daniel 2003).

Policy, in its various stages, from a public service perspective is quite different to policy from a LLEN perspective (Daniel 2003). Policy to the public service is ‘predictable in the sense that as a public servant what you get to do after you’ve signed a policy, you translate policy in most instances into a program and you administer a program. That program has a budget and defined outcomes. We’re dealing with cultural and structural change and as such …. [the LLEN is] not a program; it’s about changing fundamental values and ways of doing things’ (Daniel 2003, para. 66).

Daniel (2003) viewed the public service, or the “centre” as lacking skill in managing partnerships despite being given this role by the Minister. Daniel (2003) argues that LLENs are theoretically supposed to “partner” government and provide assistance to the bureaucracy in the process of implementing government policy through the creation of community partnerships aimed at developing young people pathways and establishing ‘a basis for life long learning systems’ (Daniel 2003,
para. 66). Daniel was concerned that this was not occurring and the centre was unable to deal with a potentially new body impacting on policy and the “status quo” (Daniel 2003). As a result Daniel (2003) was critical of the centre’s ability to partner with the LLENs even though there were clear demands for LLENs to perform this role within the community. Daniel was pointing out a level of hypocrisy. Daniel (2003) like Keating and Robinson (2003) considered that the bureaucracy was unable to devolve policy and had a barrier or structural inadequacy that hampered implementation, as the ‘centre’ is unable to accept major policy advice from an external source(s). This issue is covered in greater detail in the section headed Devolution of Policy, but it is notable within this section in relation to policy as it returns to the basic premise that introduced this section being good ideas are one thing - implementation is another - as Kirby (2003) stated.

Policy implementation is assisted by dedicating resources and showing leadership according to Kirby (2003). Kirby also observed that some senior persons at the ‘centre” were not interested in key aspects of policy change. Eliza (2003) corroborates Kirby’s observation with comments relating to the education department’s regional offices.

Eliza’s LLEN is geographically placed among several covered by two education department regional offices. From the outset Eliza advised that there was reluctance among the senior managers to be involved with the LLEN as they failed to see the “importance” or “value” (Eliza 2003, para. 6). This circumstance altered for one of the regional offices in terms of attitude by a significant level of manoeuvring by Eliza’s LLEN to place the context and policy role the LLEN was attempting to forge in perspective (Eliza 2003). Support and active participation developed among senior members in one particular regional office, whereas the other office remained steadfastly uninvolved ‘having no interaction at all’ (Eliza 2003, para. 6).

Eliza (2003) believed that support by Regional offices was crucial to the success of the LLENs and therefore to good policy implementation. The responses from regional offices have ranged from active and committed support, to tokenistic membership, and attendance but also active exclusion of LLEN activities (Eliza 2003). The response of no action at all from regional offices or the centre is in itself a policy reaction of no action which Rist and Smith (refer Denzin et al 2000, Smith et al 1999) suggest is a response that may occur whilst considering how to
handle a situation or new development, or a decision has already been reached and
the decision of non-action has been affirmed. The non-action by some regional
offices regarding involvement with LLENs reflects Kirby’s (2003) concern where
the bureaucracy put in place procedures for the LLENs to commence operation but
ongoing support for policy implementation was characterised by inactivity due to
trepidation about involvement in a policy initiative that may not succeed. Keating
(2003), like numerous critical theorists (Anderson 2003, Freire 1970, Habermas
sustains favours and bestows a commanding position to particular society groups.
Keating (2003) states that from his perspective the education department was
unable to redirect resources to areas of need rather than perpetuating privilege.
Eliza’s observations showed that implementation of the Ministerial policies were
made more difficult by a lack of active support which may result in ongoing
domination to the point where the institutionalisation of disadvantage prevails thus
echoing a key contention of Freire (1970 a renowned critic of education) and

A ‘Marxist’ view is that bureaucracies represent ‘ideological forces’ at work that
can distort reality, sustain domination and result in stark inequalities in a range of
areas one of which was education (Roderick 1986). Keating (2003) shared this
view.

Kirby considered that the ministerial policies had scant impact on the education
bureaucracy (Kirby, 2003):

I think they have gone through the necessities of getting it up and making it
work but I don’t think we’ve won too many hearts and minds and there’s
still a few among the bureaucrats who will stand back and say we don’t want
to be associated with it if its going to come to an end. That is probably the
majority view…

Kirby 2003, para. 14)

The need to establish an understanding by staff within the DET portfolio about the
Government policies adopted from the Ministerial Review is an area that needs
attention. Work within the field has resulted in an understanding that workplace
pedagogy in the “centre” has not occurred to improve DET staff’s understanding of
the policy agenda to benefit young people, their community, and industry with the
intention of building social and human capital. As a participant observer I have
asked staff at all levels within DET about training and development to understand the context of the government policies and very little training has occurred although some regional offices have taken it upon themselves to conduct sessions on VCAL with the assistance of the VQA and also conduct forums for schools in conjunction with LLENs to improve outcomes for the students. Evidence gathered suggests that staff particularly in the centre have not been involved with professional development to better understand the background and need for policy reform to address the needs of young people in the Ministerial Review context. Sadly there has been a lack of leadership in this area and this is having a deleterious impact, it would appear, on policy devolution and the activities of the LLENs (Keating et al 2003, Kirby 2003, Alex 2003, Chris 2003, Daniel 2003).

The criticism of DET as a bureaucracy was overwhelming when reviewing the empirical data. The questions posed to the nine formally interviewed informants were purposely innocuous and non-leading (refer to the Introduction). It should then seem surprising that they resulted in such a high level of criticism of the bureaucracy compounded by such a lack of respect. To some this point may be overplayed when reading this chapter. In fact a range of additional data was actually available - such was the level of concern about DET.

The issue of longevity of the LLENs is a recurring theme encountered when undertaking work in the field as a participant observer with the prospect of policy implementation being at risk due to the withdrawal of support from politicians and bureaucrats in regard to the LLEN. Uncertainty in relation to continued funding has been a recurring issue of discussion raised by a number of LLEN key personnel with a level of concern. This unease appears to have been exacerbated after Minister Kosky spoke in a public forum on 19 May 2003 at a LLEN conference in Melbourne.

Keating and Robinson refer to the ‘almost inevitable desire on the part of government to justify expenditure – of $27M - over three years in the case of LLENS’ (Keating et al 2003, p. 20). Kirby held grave concerns in this area as well and commented that politicians get nervous with budgetary issues and have a history of stopping policy initiatives with scant regard to proper evaluation (Kirby 2003). This was one reason Kirby (2003) advised that he embarked on community consultation as he considered that if the policies of the Ministerial Review were to have any hope of continuing community support and knowledge was essential. A
point that Spierings (2003b) makes and is further expanded by Applied Economics (Dusseldorp 2002b) is that expenditure of this kind to develop an intermediary between the education sector and the labour market has economic validity and this requires further analysis in the context of LLENs. It needs to be stressed that although the Applied Economic report (Dusseldorp 2002b) does not cover LLENs specifically, it makes convincing economic arguments on the subject of the financial returns to the economy and society if young people are supported. Added to this the amount of voluntary work by people that support, advise LLENs or work for free on their committees is not taken into the equation, it would appear, given the positivist measures Kosky seemed to impose on LLENs as outlined at this conference. If the unpaid support various individuals, education and business organisations provided to LLENs was identified in dollar terms rather than in kind support a new picture would emerge given the savings by government.

LLENs perform quite satisfactorily according to a government report (VLESC 2002a). However despite the common sense policy outcomes that the LLENs represent, and the economic value of their existence, politicians’ judgments can be clouded. Minister Kosky’s speech referred to below epitomises a reduced appreciation of the policy intent and strengths. Why implement major educational reforms and then appear to cast severe doubt on their value in a public speech? Kirby’s (2003) comments about politicians referred to in Chapter Three have a ring of sound soothsaying.

If LLENs were to experience a demise this move would place a key plank of the Ministerial Review at risk. The flow on effect to young people’s participation may be an added risk as the education sector has failed to address the needs of young people for more than three decades (Kirby 2000a, 2000b, Dusseldorp, 1998, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, Teese 2000). The LLENs represent an ongoing “exogenous shock” by influencing largely from outside the organism (Kirby 2003) and this research indicates that the education department is not well placed to address the needs of young people in Victoria.

The words of Minister Kosky summarised the policy implementation challenge for LLENs and their role. Minister Kosky’s (2003b) public speech at the LLEN Conference, May 2003, reaffirmed the core policy issues in her view concerning the challenging LLEN role. ‘The core business of LLENs is to improve education, training and employment outcomes for young people’ (Kosky, 2003b). The
Minister acknowledged the dedicated work of persons involved in LLENs noting that much of the work was voluntary. The Minister then proceeded to state that the LLENs would be assessed by the ‘tangible, sustained and measurable improvements to young people’s education and training outcomes’ (Kosky 2003b). LLENs are placed in a very difficult predicament. Keating (2001) and Janesick (in Denzin et al 2000) state that education is very complex to reform and despite an enormous amount of research few changes are notable in the past three to five decades. LLENs are designed to assist the capacity building role – however Kosky (2003b) suggested that quantified measures (positivism) were to be used to evaluate the performance of LLENs. Reforms of the magnitude that the Ministerial Review proposes will take considerable time and LLENs do not have the authority to make demands on the education sector to address the significant changes required to achieve demonstrable statistics that show “tangible, sustained and measurable improvements” to participation levels of young people. This tall order enunciated by Kosky for LLENs is a shared area of responsibility by the education industry and civil society (Kirby 2003, Kirby 2000a) and contains dubious logic. Why are LLENs subjected to these measures with the threat of a metaphorical axe over their existence but not other parts of the education bureaucracy?

From my discussions with a number of LLEN staff and members, as part of the field work, the Minister appeared to unnerve a number of delegates and Executive Officers by referring in her speech at the VLESC Conference to the issue of ongoing funding (Kosky {19 May} 2003b). The Minister said that a further two years of funding had been secured accruing to five years of funding for LLEN operations and then the task of the VLESC will be to advise the Minister on the gains made in those five years in terms of young people’s participation (Kosky 2003b). The Minister then said that a re-evaluation of the need for state coverage by LLENs would occur to address whether ‘LLENs are the most effective means to improve outcomes at the local level’ (Kosky 2003b).

LLENs receive a small budget and consequently have limited resources (Long 2005). The Minister’s view was considered by many to be untimely by many persons at the conference, four of whom were key informants to this research and were present. The Minister’s comments were unproductive and represented a setback to LLENs and their role.
There is a particular tension and criticism of the education bureaucracy that has been addressed in the research. This section highlights additional areas of tension that stem from the funding issue. Implementation may be impeded if staff in LLENs withdraw their labour due to possible insecurity. It takes a considerable time and effort to develop programs and strategies to attack the young people participation problems and the need to build social and human capital that are central to the Ministerial Review policy response, social capital and capacity building are all complementary and integral components of the roles of LLENs. Where staff begin to face the prospect that the bureaucracy may withdraw support and staff move on to other positions networks may have to be rebuilt. To Putnam (2000) the evidence is accruing through research that where trust and networking flourishes within communities’ individual citizens experience the benefits, along with industry, smaller and communities. This can build to national prosperity. To Putnam (2000) social capital can thwart the menacing implications of “socio-economic disadvantage.”

However the Minister’s speech, from this researcher’s observation, was taken by many to signal the possible end of LLENs. Kirby (2003) and Spierings (2003) and other informants were uncertain of the continued support for LLENs with the notion that those at the “centre” were not favourable to the concept (Kirby, 2003, Spierings, 2003b, Briony 2003, Chris 2003 and Daniel 2003). Kirby referred to the policy pertaining to the formulation of LLENs as a policy getting under the bureaucracy’s guard and suggested as early as 2003 that the ‘empire was beginning to strike back’ (Kirby, 2003). Kirby referred to politicians being nervous about policy initiatives and in the face of criticism, even though they may not have been given sufficient time to succeed, resources and authority to progress may be withdrawn and this was an added problem with policy implementation (2003).

Tense relationships do not strengthen the capacity of LLENs to implement government policy. An area of tension among informants that I noted as a participant observer involves the problems associated with influencing the policies of government or being placed in a position where the discourse between the LLENs and the centre has the capacity to influence (Daniel 2003, Keating 2003, Keating et al 2003, Chris 2003, Alex 2003). There does not appear to be a bridging structure inside DET to accommodate the potential of LLENs to enter into meaningful policy advice to the bureaucracy although protocols in relation to this appear to be developing (Keating et al 2003). The LLEN along with network
theory represents a structure that shapes activities not at the macro level but at the meso level suiting and shaping the education and training focus in line with the needs of the local community, its industry and economy (Keating et al, 2003). The implementation of LLENs is a major initiative to redress the outcomes for young people unable to access the opportunities of the labour market equitably. The bridge between education and the labour market is inadequate and when analysed economically has hidden costs that can be rectified through focussing the resources of a community (Spierings 2003b, Dusseldorp 2002b). Overall the relationships between LLENs and the bureaucracy and Regional Offices of the Department of Education and Training require more work to enable the policies to gain a greater foothold (Keating et al, 2003).

The devolution of policy has induced a type of friction that the bureaucracy is not accustomed to (Keating et al, 2003, Daniel 2003). Historically the DET has had a level of inactivity with policy development (Keating 1999). The centre’s professionalism and capability to work with and consult LLENs (who represent wider community structures) requires significant internal change to embrace needed transition and ongoing reflection of new policies aimed at rectifying young people’s disadvantage as a result of poor education policy.

Questions of policy devolution are embedded in the work of Keating and Robinson (2003). They pose a number of excellent questions concerning the ‘nature of relations between LLENs and government’ (2003, p30). The questions raised by Keating et al (2003) reflect numerous concerns that surfaced in the interviews with informants within this research:

How does a robust central policy regime react to potential shifts in the locus of authority? What tensions arise within a bureaucracy that retains strong sectional territories? Is there resistance or accommodation in the face of localised decision-making? What is the attitude of government to LLENs – has this altered over time? What is the nature of the commitment to LLENs, for instance in the face of budgetary pressure? What pressures does this create within the bureaucracy? How do LLENs respond to perceptions of changed expectations of them? (Keating et al 2003, pp. 29-30)

At no stage were any of the LLEN informants in any way critical of the Ministerial policies. From wider work in the field as a participant observer this extended to
other LLEN executive officers who were not formally interviewed. The acceptance of the policies across the board has been astounding and this was reflected even in the words of opposing politicians who openly expressed support for the policies and passed it with a definite congratulatory tone (Victorian Hansard, 29 November 2000). This corroborates what has been noted in field work and the formal interviews where highly knowledgeable and prominent academics such as Keating and Spierings verified support for the policies and maintain that the integrity of the Ministerial Review guiding principles are standing the tests they face (Keating 2003, Spierings 2003b).

THE VICTORIAN CERTIFICATE OF APPLIED LEARNING (VCAL)

Has the advent of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), a key policy recommendation of the Ministerial Review (Kirby 2000a) meant that the education sector is now better placed to address the needs of more students? Any answer to this question needs to begin by acknowledging that not all students have access to the VCAL. However by 2004, it was offered in over 200 Victorian secondary schools, all the nineteen TAFE colleges in Victoria, a very small number of independent schools and some Catholic schools, and within the Adult Community Education sector (VQA 2005).

One of the key recommendations made by the Ministerial Review panel was to develop an alternative senior secondary school qualification which became known as the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). This relatively new certificate first piloted in 2002 with a modest 546 VCAL enrolments but has increased to 5,137 in 2003, 8125 in 2004 and 10,227 in 2005 (VQA 2005).

VCAL was treated by its proponents as a second chance for young people with fragile scholastic records (Keating et al 2005). Others consider that although it was introduced to reduce the attrition rate in secondary education it also attracts persons more suited to ‘applied learning’ (Cook 2005). Both views on VCAL positions have merit and have certainly been corroborated many times in my field work.

A telling issue to shed light on this effective policy change resulting from the Ministerial Review is reflected in the actions of VCAL students enrolled in 2004. In 2005, VCAL saw many students enrolled in 2004 re-enrol in 2005 (VQA 2005). ‘Had VCAL not been available in 2005, 31% of students surveyed would have left
school’ (VQA 2005, p.1). VCAL is obviously encouraging lots of young people to remain in education due to its increased relevance to them. An added bonus is that the adult vocational life that many young people are about to embark on has clearer signposts as a result of VCAL and this is evident in the statistics provided in Table 4 below.

Victoria has provided young people with the opportunity to complete their Year 12 study in TAFE institutes. TAFE institutes and ACE providers have long offered VCE courses, but mainly for adults. Programs for VCE study by 15 to 19 year-olds in TAFE were piloted in 2001 and 2002. By 2003, 3,763 15 to 19 year-olds were enrolled in VCE in TAFE—equivalent to 3.5% of Year 11 and 12 enrolments in Victorian schools and an increase from negligible numbers in 1999. After the initial VCAL pilots in 2002, Victoria fully introduced it as an alternate senior school qualification in 2003 to schools that opted to participate. VCAL provides a flexible program of study for students interested in subsequent enrolment in VET courses, an apprenticeship or entering work directly. The VCAL is structured around four compulsory themes:

- Literacy and numeracy that can be addressed by appropriate units from the VCE or the Certificate of General Education (Adult);
- Industry specific units that can be built out of VCE-VET courses, possibly but not necessarily structured to qualify for a VET Certificate.
- Work related skills that involve structured workplace learning, a part time apprenticeship or traineeship, work placements or part time work.
- Personal development skills, developed through community-based projects or voluntary work.

(Long 2005, p.7)

Keating (1999) and Teese (2000) had argued that the Victorian Government had allowed the independent school sector to act in a de facto role in dominating the curricula policy process. Both argued that the government had surrendered a good deal of political control to this sector encouraging a number of unhelpful attitudes and elite interests to prevail (Keating 1999, Teese 2000). The Ministerial Review’s recommended policies heralded a significant change in this respect. If the policies are fully implemented, and in a co-ordinated and well-researched way, they may well represent a major shift in the long term that may address major issues of social
inequality and disadvantage (Kirby 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, Keating 2003, Spierings 2003a, Teese 2000). Young people, through initiatives like VCAL will experience increased benefits through curricula, and policies that connect them into more relevant education and training opportunities (Kirby 2003).

The data presented by the expert informants, and observations in the field, provide comments on what is already occurring, particularly in relation to VCAL that show considerable promise. In many seminars and forums in relation to post compulsory education and training the increasing frequency of young students sharing their renewed enthusiasm and vocational plans that have arisen as a result of their education experience in VCAL is quite telling. These young people are in effect demonstrating a process that is representative of dignity raising as the curriculum is more practical and suited to their needs; it does not focus purely on the academic pathway to the degree the sector once did, nor question those who reject scholastic life to the extent that education may have previously done (VQA 2005).

VCAL is proving to be a very sound policy initiative. The conclusions reached by research undertaken are quite compelling (VQA 2005).

VCAL provides diverse pathways for students
- Total VCAL enrolments are rising, which indicates the popularity of this Year 11-12 vocational education pathway.
- The proportions of Intermediate and Senior VCAL are rising, which indicates that students who started off doing foundation-level programs liked them enough to continue on to intermediate and senior level programs.
- Most 2004 VCAL students were either in education and training, or working, in 2005. Of those who were working many were also doing structured training through an apprenticeship or traineeship.

VCAL improves student retention
- In 2005, VCAL kept 2004 students in education. Had VCAL not been available in 2005, 31% of students surveyed would have left school.

VCAL is especially important for non-metropolitan students
- In 2004, 42% of VCAL students were in non-metropolitan providers. This represents 11% of the total number of students were enrolled in senior secondary programs in government and catholic schools in rural and regional areas. (VQA 2005 p.1).
Table 4: Year 12 VCAL Student Destinations

For most Year 12 2004 VCAL students VCAL led to apprenticeships and employment
(VQA 2005, p.3)

VCAL, as an alternative qualification, can combine VCE and vocational subjects, and rightly recognises the achievements of students whose strengths are not primarily academic. The emphasis on VCE results is, in many respects, unfortunate. We have no way of measuring persistence, resilience or confidence, qualities which can be better indicators of later success in life. Nor does the result reflect the other challenges - economic, personal or health-related - that some students have had to overcome while doing their VCE. As The Age observed in an editorial:

Our preoccupation with the VCE is understandable. The ENTER score largely determines entry to university courses and that, in turn, is considered a predictor of earning capacity down the track. That is why schools whose students perform well in the VCE are happy to broadcast their results, and why it is disturbing when students at schools in economically disadvantaged areas struggle to pass. Education has the potential to allow students to overcome social and economic inequality. When the school system perpetuates inequality, it fails, sending a message to government that it must try harder.

(Age Editorial 18 December 2003)
As Teese (2000 p.9) observed:

If the curriculum is a test of students, what is a test of the curriculum? Is it the ever-greater depth of understanding that describes the evolution of academic subjects? Or is it the ever-greater social spread of learning without which societies cannot cohere democratically, and without which theory must remain the servant of privilege?

Again the research indicates that VCAL has engaged students to a much greater degree as shown by the data from the VQA (2005.)

Table

Table 5 VCAL Student Outcomes

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>VCAL STUDENTS IN 2005</th>
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<tr>
<td>What they did in 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intermediate VCAL 17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation VCAL 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11 VCE 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Education 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 10 64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not attend school 31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCE 43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE/ACE 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCAL elsewhere 10%</td>
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Victorian schools are well placed to have a greater mix and freedom at the senior level new ways of doing things can be forged in education the support of VCAL. In time with additional changes in the middle years of schooling (MYS) students may experience a more applied learning curriculum which could have an increased impact of engagement in both senior secondary qualifications in Victoria being VCAL and the VCE. VCAL is quite flexible. For example there is nothing to prevent a student undertaking a component of a TAFE diploma as part of their VCAL and obtain credit. This is already occurring. Students at numerous TAFE colleges are undertaking a range of vocational studies in areas such as furniture making and design, plumbing, electrical, health to name a few examples. Many
choose this experience to continue in the vocational field of study connected to the VCAL course or carefully move in another direction as this choice is now available so pathways can be changed thus suiting the skills and capabilities of the young people. Students are able to work part time as an apprentice or trainee and then graduate with VCAL from school and continue the apprenticeship and perhaps use it to articulate to diplomas, degrees and beyond. My work in the field suggests that more training is required for career teachers and an allocation of more hours enabling this group to assist students further. At the time of completing this research the federal government has announced policy moves in this area. So to return to a previous point there is much more flexibility in the system and it is needed given that a minority of 41.9 per cent of year 12 Victorian school leavers in 2003 progressed to university in Victoria in 2004 (Curtain et al 2003) and this in effect represents a significant minority of school leavers as this percentage does not reflect earlier school leavers who did not reach year 12.

Significant change was needed so that post-compulsory education had increased relevance for students. VCAL has proven to provide a measure of relevance as shown by the VQA data (2005).

The disturbing statistical evidence and poor focus of post-compulsory education arguably puts not only young people at risk but also produces political, economic and social problems. The need to train and develop skill formation strategies to transform delivery across all sectors, public and private, is crucial (NCVER 2002). VCAL has developed a framework of education that is forging better signposts to further study or apprenticeships and traineeships (VQA 2005).

The policy outcomes of the Ministerial Review potentially have creative and flexible options that are available to students within the VCAL. Added to this the Australian Qualifications Training Framework (AQTF), and the accreditation that this structure permits, allows a credit matrix to permit students to gain recognition for qualifications gained and expand possibilities in tertiary education after completing VCAL (VQA 2004). This however depends on the tertiary institutions lowering the “drawbridge” and understanding credit transfer to a high level.

Alex made a number of informative statements concerning the implementation of VCAL. To Alex (2003) numbers of teachers were ‘feeling their way’ with
implementing the qualification and were in some quarters meeting resistance in their schools.

In effect Alex (2003) saw the VCAL as a sound policy initiative and idea that would, in time, alter and hopefully resolve the imbalance stemming from the curricula on offer in post-compulsory education. Despite the mixed response to VCAL, and the potential inhibiting factor on implementation in terms of quality, circumstances indicate that the program was striking a chord among students and many educators (Alex 2003). The research surrounding the success of VCAL has proven Alex to be correct (refer VQA 2005). The VCAL has a considerable amount of development to undergo and perhaps is hard to grapple with for a traditional system that is steeped in a pedagogical framework that Hargreaves et al (1996) maintains reflects a nineteenth century model of education. Circumstances indicate that as an innovation the VCAL, once fully implemented, has a capacity to alter post-compulsory education as well as earlier secondary school years. The flexibility of program structure and pedagogical, andragogical and heutagogical approaches; combined with the opportunity to include programs at a higher AQF level than VCE, unite to form a program that has in built capabilities to be an historical watershed in the post-compulsory curriculum (Keating 2003). The VCAL can involve aspects of diploma level programs, absorb VCE subjects, adopt components of competency based training, involve negotiated curriculum and assessment, provide credit for part-time apprenticeships or traineeships – the possibilities are endless. But most importantly it has to engage young people who may have otherwise rejected education by tapping into their skills and when focussed correctly as it has flexibility unlike the traditional focus of VCE – the more traditional curriculum offering. This is not to suggest that the VCE does not engage students. Equally it should not be assumed that because students are performing well in school they are enjoying the experience (Kirby 2000a).

Kirby (2003) refers to change in a variety of ways. One of the first areas included VCAL and Kirby considered that this may have an impact on employers that were prepared to become involved with education “again” and overcome previous problems with interpretation and the language of the education sector so that they could have a better understanding of the world of the educationalists and vice versa (Kirby 2003). Kirby did not consider that the Ministerial Review had any impact on a state-wide basis in terms of employer organisations (Kirby 2003). He
considered that the advent of VCAL would impact significantly (Kirby 2003) and the VQA report (2005) proves this forecast to be accurate.

Spierings believed that ‘a debate is emerging and change is occurring within education’ acknowledging that ‘young people have different learning styles, different approaches, different needs’ (Spierings 2003b, para. 23). The introduction of VCAL was a significant step forward (Spierings 2003b). The other challenge to the education sector was going to occur in the compulsory years particularly the middle years of schooling (Spierings 2003b). TAFE was responding to the post-compulsory group and increased numbers of young people are now being educated by the ACE sector and with the advent of VCAL there will be more offerings in VET in schools thus increasing ‘distinct pathways for certain young people’ (Spierings 2003b, para. 21).

Briony (2003) like Spierings (2003b) considered that the pedagogical and andragogical changes in approach in schools and the policy reforms of the Ministerial Review to curriculum, notably VCAL were a major policy breakthrough. Briony (2003) also considered that a broader environment for learning in ACE, whether it was VCE or VCAL, was a needed change to acknowledge the broader needs of many students and capacity of educational services. This signified a major change in thinking that secondary schools were suited to all when clearly the research indicates that this was not the case (Kirby 2000a, 2000b, 2003). Prior to the government enacting the Ministerial Review policies it was illegal for persons under the age of eighteen in Victoria to undertake VCE in education bodies apart from secondary schools. Kirby (2003) was dismissive of this draconian measure that was instigated by a former Labor Minister of education being Joan Kirner in 1988.

The advent of VCAL in the schools was a monumental change to Eliza (2003). Eliza (2003) stated that in the previous year there was a total absence of VCAL pilots in her catchment area but now seven education providers were involved from 2002 to 2003.

VCAL represents a map and signposts for young people in transition. In terms of successful policy intervention in the sphere of education VCAL is probably a lead agent Keating (2003)
MANAGED INDIVIDUAL PATHWAYS (MIPS)

The need for new policies that developed new pathways for young people is now crucial for the well being of the community in social and economic terms (Dusseldorp 2002, Hargreaves et al 1996, Kirby 2000a, Teese, 2000). The Ministerial Review defines pathways as constituting 'the period during which young people move from compulsory schooling to occupations' (Kirby 2000a, p 47).

As I have already indicated ‘Pathways’ was a frequently used term in the literature relating to education and training for post-compulsory students over the past decade. As Kirby observed:

The Review has noted that the term lacks clarity, partly because of the diversity of its use. It is frequently used to designate the options that are available to young people in education, training and employment as they exit a stage of education and training. It is also used to describe planned routes through education and training into employment careers. Linear pathways do not apply to the actual experience of the majority of young people. Yet much of the structure of postcompulsory education is based upon the assumption of the validity of a meritocratic selection and choice process for linear pathways. These processes are reinforced by career guidance services. The Review, therefore, has arrived at a different concept of pathways. The transitional journeys for many young people are diverse, dynamic and uncertain. For most, the essential ingredient for progress will be the knowledge and skills, and the associated qualifications, which will allow them to move to the next stage in the transition process. Pathways, therefore, are a series of learning platforms. This is a definition that is better suited to the concept of lifelong learning (Kirby 2000a, p 47)

This extends to a view that it is important that the benefits of economic development and of education and training should be extended to all young people, and that a failure to broaden and strengthen the education and training outcomes for young people will weaken our economic future as well as weaken a social fabric that is based upon principles of social justice. (Kirby, 2000a, p. 8)
The Ministerial Review policies sought to expand both education and vocational opportunities depending on the students’ interest and capacity but vocational planning on a one-to-one basis is a sound policy but sadly under funded in Long’s view (2005).

The Ministerial Review expressed a view that pathways to employment training or further education were “poorly signposted” (Kirby 200a). MIPs are aimed at students in Years 10-12. ‘In 2004 94.5% of (ACE, TAFE and state secondary school) students had a current individual pathway plan—although LLENs reported that some students contacted as part of the On Track follow-up could not recall having a plan’ (Long 2005, p. 9).

Those who choose to steer away from further education are directed to appropriate employment networks to provide assistance to find employment including re-examining training positions in apprenticeships or traineeships. Victorian government schools, TAFE and ACE have introduced the Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) program which provides individual mentoring, career counselling and career planning for students 15 years and older. As a result, each student should have an individual Pathway Plan that is updated annually. Students meet with a mentor (usually a teacher, but also possibly a designated MIPs coordinator) several times to discuss, form and record their longer term employment and study plans as well as to set short-term study goals and to identify actual or potential barriers to their achievement. (Long 2005, p. 9)

Long considers that the funding is too modest and may not account for the needs of “at risk” students who are apt to leave school early without being able to draw sufficiently on the resources and advice on offer given a meagre ‘$14m per year, or less than $125 per secondary student per year’ thus equating to employ ‘less than one full time staff member per 100 ‘at-risk’ student’ (Long 2005 p. 9).

Spierings (2003) like Keating (2003) considered that the allocation of MIPs funding might have been more effective if it were allocated to LLENs rather than to the schools. ‘There was a lot of resistance to MIPS particularly from the unions. Unions just wanted it to fund their agreements: Something that was supported
through Minister Delahunty’s office, whether she supported it or not, I can’t say, but that was the case…” (Keating 2003, para. 8). By allowing the LLENs to control the MIPs funding young people may have been advised differently. Vocational advice concerning a future for students stemming from alternative approaches is superseded by a misguided notion that university represents the pinnacle of vocational success (Teese as quoted by Cervini, 2004). The dominating view that TAFE programs and apprenticeships and traineeships (and perhaps VCAL), were synonymous with a second best option as opposed to the academic/university paradigm that prevails in secondary schools represents a situation in need of rectification (ANOP 1994, Aspire 2002, DEST 2002a, Kirby 2000a, 2000b, Teese 2000, Peoples 1998).

The Panel’s intended policy outcomes aim to achieve meaningful results to support the ‘broad objectives of better education, training and transition outcomes for young people, a better-prepared workforce, and a cohesive and democratic society’ (Kirby, 2000a, p. 9). A key policy objective was to ensure that increased ‘levels of participation and successful completion of post-compulsory education and training programs’ contribute to a highly-skilled Victorian and Australian workforce for the global economy and facilitate the economic and social inclusion of those at risk in the changing economic environment’ (Kirby 2000a, p.9). The development of MIPs is an integral part of a framework designed to give students better signposts for managing a more successful transition and represents a sound policy initiative. The notion of a career guidance person examining the potential pathways for young people focuses the plan on the individual and offsets bias. Teese (2000) Teese et al (2003) and Kirby (2000a), express concern in relation to a propensity of secondary education to focus on a university enrolment which is at odds with reality as only about thirty per cent of school leavers do go into university (Curtain et al 2003).

**ON TRACK DATA**

The LLENs became conversant with what became known as the On Track data as it provided insights into local areas building to a state wide picture never obtained before. As Kirby (2003) said it was unusual that education had such limited measures.

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On Track is a Victorian Government initiative designed to ensure that Year 10 to 12 government and non-government school students are on a pathway to further education, training or employment after leaving school. On Track 2003 was the first comprehensive study of post school destinations collected and published anywhere in Australia. On Track builds on the Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) program available in Government schools. MIPs assists 15-19 year old students with individual career and education plans and support to implement those plans. (DET 2005)

This policy initiative emanating from the Ministerial Review ‘provides a comprehensive picture of what happens to young people after they leave school’ and ensures that Year 10-12 students are contacted after leaving secondary education and provided with further advice and assistance if they are not studying or in full time work’ (DET 2005).

The On Track project also includes a 4 year Longitudinal Survey which will follow specific groups of the 2003 Year 12 completers to develop a more detailed picture of their transitions over the 4 years after they leave school. On Track adds to the information previously available to parents and the Victorian public, by highlighting the diversity of pathways young people pursue after leaving secondary school’ (DET 2005).

The On Track data has also focused to an extent on early school leavers but the data is at best indicative and not yet sufficiently reliable to base sound conclusions on in this writer’s view.

Informants like Chris (2003) and Briony (2003) both remarked that the ‘On Track’ data was a shock to local educators given the poor results of vocational or educational connections for young people in their LLEN catchment areas. The Ministerial Panel considered that educators had a limited appreciation of student outcomes (Kirby 2000a) with both Chris (2003) and Briony (2003) supporting that view. The On Track data also stimulated local government to express concern at retention rates in local schools and were quoting the insights of the LLEN in the
local media and took a keen interest in supporting the local LLEN as a consequence (Briony 2003).

The State Government of Victoria has fully acknowledged the criticism of the education industry by the Ministerial Review that student outcomes were not being monitored or measured (Curtain et al 2003). The Government implemented the policy now referred to as “On Track” to gauge broader data on student outcomes and has also set and “owned” targets in relation to participation rates for youth. The targets set by the Finn Review (1991) were viewed as failing due to a lack of ownership by a government body (Peoples, 1998).

The Brack’s government has however set the following targets to evaluate the progress of the Ministerial Review policies and performance by the sector.

- By 2005 - Victoria will be at or above national average benchmark levels for reading, writing and numeracy as they apply to primary students.
- By 2010 - 90% of young people in Victoria will complete Year 12 or its equivalent.
- By 2005 - the percentage of young people aged 15 to 19 in rural and regional Victoria, engaged in education and training will increase by 6%.

Within these targets, there will be a particular emphasis on improving performance of those communities and schools that are presently struggling. These targets will help us all keep sight of what must be done and ensure we all appreciate the urgency of the task.

Governments have traditionally not liked targets. Setting them is a bold step and a sign of our determination for action.

(Steve Bracks, Premier of Victoria 2000)

Until June 2003 the education department in Victoria failed to capture valuable data on the outcomes of their key clients - the students (Allen Consulting Group Report, 2001, Curtain et al 2003, Kirby 2000a, Kosky 2003d). Monitoring the outcomes of post-compulsory students to gauge the effectiveness of their programs within schools and other education structures such as Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE) and the Adult Community Education (ACE) sector simply did not occur (Allen Consulting Group Report 2001, Kirby 2000a, Teese 2000).
The Victorian Government has since moved to remedy this problem and uses ‘On Track Data’ to measure the outcomes of students completing year 12 and establishing the percentage of persons that apply for tertiary entrance (VET/TAFE or higher education), or whether they are offered places and actually enrol, and those who obtain or seek employment or work combined with training in the form of apprenticeships or traineeships.

The development of the so-called ‘On Track’ data some degree has resolved this problem by trying to measure the outcomes of completing year twelve Victorian students from the 2002 cohorts in its first phase. It was reasonably successful given the 73 per cent response rate to provide data on destinations, (Curtain et al, 2003). As Curtain (et al, 2003, p.13) has noted:

Victoria has set a new standard of reporting on school leaver destinations by releasing recent data on the destination of 2002 Year 12 leavers for nearly all secondary schools in the State. Information on the destinations of 48,450 students from both Government and non-Government schools who were enrolled in Year 12 in 2002 was gathered in March and April 2003. A total of 73 per cent of the eligible population participated in the On Track survey. It is significant that the destination information for each school was released publicly and published in the major metropolitan newspapers on 2 June 2003.

Table 6 table below (quoted from Curtain et al, 2003, p.13) presents unpublished data on the combined results from ‘On Track’ surveys. The aggregated data is a move away from assessing schools performance on a single measure of Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER) and University offers and provides the education sector, particularly secondary schools, with new paradigms to gauge effectiveness in connecting students to varied forms of education, training and work. Curtain makes the valid point that of those who act in response to the On Track survey ‘27 per cent of the eligible population who did not respond or could not be contacted are likely to contain a disproportionate number of school leavers who are not in education or work’ (Curtain et al 2003, p.13).
Table 6: Aggregated Destination Outcomes in March/April 2003 for Victorian 2002 Year 12 Enrolled Students, Per Cent (Number = 48,450)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrolled in</th>
<th>Enrolled in</th>
<th>Apprentice/</th>
<th>Employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Looking for</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>TAFE/VET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Ministerial Review policies were clear from a political viewpoint that the ‘relationship between government and the providers of education and training programs should be built upon accountability for outcomes’ (Kirby, 2000a, p. 27). The political perspective, meaning the relationship between the state and its affairs in the education sector, is clarified neatly in the Ministerial Review. ‘When the Government invests public funds in education and training for young people, it, the public and the young people are entitled to receive the best possible outcomes’ (Kirby 2000a, p. 27). The education system needed to monitor outcomes against targets and make necessary adjustments to ensure that participation rates increase significantly as the benchmarks, or participation levels of young people are unsatisfactory (Kirby 2000a).

AN OVERVIEW OF THE POLICY INITIATIVES

Kirby (2003) considered the policies have given some teachers and principals that were working innovatively in the field a new lease of life to enable them to go ahead with the work that they were doing anyway with sanctions as a result of the policies that were previously frowned upon by the centre.

A debate was emerging that surrounded the issue of alternative education and parity of esteem to mainstream education particularly in the postcompulsory education phase (Spierings 2003b). To Spierings an equivalence of esteem should
exist and an important issue that required added change was for young people to re-
engage in learning or work and developing an ‘appetite for learning’ (Spierings
2003b, para. 21). To Spierings (2003b) these were emerging issues but an
increased focus was required to address the needs of a large number of students to
change the inequitable outcomes.

The context and intent of the policies was well understood by the LLEN managers
interviewed formally, and others who I have come to know well through day-to-day
work. Each of the informants showed a strong commitment to the policies in their
various stages from formulation, development of intent, consultation with the
community and government, and implementation. The dedication to the Ministerial
Review policies, and residual intent to create balance and significant improvement
in young people’s participation, was crystal clear in all the interviews with the
informants. Each of the informants was able to provide many examples of further
acceptance in their communities as well as resistance. It needs then to be stated that
none of the informants were critical of the Ministerial Policies or the underpinning
research that led to development. Keating being well placed to comment on
opposition to the policies concluded that resistance was mainly borne from
elements within the education bureaucracy and not particularly evident elsewhere
except for issues regarding staffing in schools as a result of additional funds from
the Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) initiative (Keating 2003).

Whilst Kirby was clear that education department staff were in the main either
hesitant about or resistant to the Ministerial Review policies he also was able to
identify a number of persons that worked in the schools sector who were
undertaking projects that were quite helpful to the development of aspects of the
policy framework (Kirby 2003). There were people within the bureaucracy in all its
parts who were resistant but there were also many who were accepting (Kirby
2003). He was able to illustrate the number of teachers and school principals and
directors as collaborators in education as many of the practices that came to be a
part of the policy framework were based on work being undertaken by many of
these people (Kirby 2003).

Kirby (2003) believes that the policies provided a new lease of life for many people
working within the education industry. The policies were “enabling” as they could
expose and sanction some of the creative and innovative practices and projects that
were previously not permitted (Kirby 2003). Given the advent of an environment
more conducive to innovative practices to assist youth, Kirby envisaged that persons he considered to be creative under the previous, and more rigid education paradigm, who pushed the boundaries would use the new policy framework to push the edges more to benefit young people thus exploiting the new framework to the further benefits to young people by bringing added changes in time (Kirby 2003).

As a result of the Ministerial Review policies the ACE sector was drawn into educating teenagers in greater levels. The ACE sector’s approach to their student clients stems from an educational paradigm that is not stricken with a traditional rigidity and they are more likely to be conversant with the need for change (Daniel 2003). The mainstream secondary education system, in most states and OECD countries, is widely condemned and considered to cause significant problems for many young people in its current form (Dusseldorp, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, McNeil 2003, Gates Foundation 2004, Kirby 2003, Kirby 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, OECD 2000, Sweet 1998, Teese 2000, Teese et al 2003). Alex (2003) and Daniel (2003) hold the view that the people within the ACE sector that were involved with the LLEN were dedicated, committed and some of the most capable people to assist young people to re-engage with education and training.

Leadership was an issue that also identified as an “implementation” barrier (Spierings 2003). Reference is made to the instability within the education department bureaucracy. ‘They’ve had four permanent heads in four years so inevitably that leads to a certain degree of instability and disruption’ (2003, para. 10). Spierings also mentioned a number of additional factors. He returned to the issue where for a time there were two ministers involved (referred to earlier by Keating – 2003) and the situation where the Premier provided a declaration of initial support for the targets and underpinning policies but since then there has been a lack of public visibility reinforcing this support both for the targets and policies by Bracks (Spierings, 2003b).

Keating (2003) was convinced that the polices were sound but was concerned that the implementation due to a lack of bureaucratic support thwarted their effectiveness due to attitudes and a lack of understanding in DET. There were two main issues that Keating referred to as inhibiting implementation (2003). The first issue has relevance to Kelly’s comments concerning the VLESC. Keating - with a disclaimer that his information was secondhand - considered that the VLESC was both ‘disappointing’ and ‘impotent’ (Keating 2003). He sheets the blame home to
the department in general as it ‘hasn’t … allowed it [the VLESC] to be the broader contextual thinking type of body that it was meant to be’ (Keating 2003 para. 10).

To Keating it was obvious that the Department had the resources to allocate to the VLESC to enable it to fulfill its role but this was not occurring (Keating 2003). Obviously this was an inhibiting factor to the implementation phase given an under resourced and impotent VLESC that was supposed to drive and guide the policy implementation on the ground and assist in the policy domain areas of the LLENs.

The second issue that Keating refers to is a more major inhibiting factor to implementation. Simply stated Keating did not consider that the bureaucracy understood that focusing the available education and training resources in many structures throughout Victoria could resolve broader social and economic ailments Victorian society faces (Keating 2003). Resolving the problem of poor participation among youth, and its connection to beneficial flow on effects in terms of building social and human capital to the benefit of the wider community, was to Keating through despondence not understood as an underpinning orchestration of the Ministerial policies as a whole (Keating 2003). This reflects the independent research that was undertaken about DET that pointed to this issue where the managers had little comprehension of the connection and relevance of their role to the wider community and failed to grasp issues of leadership and the context of education to the society (see Allan Consulting report 2001).

To Keating (2003) there were specific bureaucratic barriers that needed to be worked through but the more disturbing aspect was the lack of understanding. Keating’s exact words are well worth quoting to ensure that this key issue he raises is clear to the readers.

…but the other genre was really the context. Some of us took a view, I suppose me in particular, that it was the context that we felt were the various authorities, the whole department et cetera which dealt with postcompulsory education and training was – did not have a view of the context, the broad economic social context for their various policy areas and therefore there is a need to try and locate in a holistic manner the issue of youth transitions, youth pathways within that and that was also partially reflected again as the government’s policy as a more integrated postcompulsory phase; something that I don’t think has been achieved to any great extent, but that was the
argument and that was reflected pretty strongly in the report. The report sets the argument about context rather than the specifics of what you do about it. (Keating 2003 Para. 5)

How can the organisation that is supposed to convey the implementation of policy do so when there is little, if any attempts to instill an understanding of the policy context within the staff to better equip them to appreciate their broader and changed role? It would appear that the Allen Consulting Group’s (2001) perception of management and a lack of understanding that prevailed among this stratum of the bureaucracy is corroborated given the views of Keating (2003, Keating et al 2003) and Kirby (2003). This represents a major obstacle to the implementation of policy.

Alex (2003) maintained that state schools and the bureaucracy had been reeling under the dictates of a radial conservative government being the Kennett government from 1992-1999. This era had quite an impact with ‘cuts to schools, cuts to education perhaps, various policies under the Kennett years and I think they’ve gone into their bunker a bit, quite a lot’ (Alex 2003, para. 14). This point has a high level of validity given that the data points to extreme cost cutting by the bureaucracy during the Kennett years. This era saw a high level of fragmentation and competition (Blackmore 1998). Many school closures and staff retrenchments occurred (refer Introduction) Then in 2000 staff in the government sector faced policies that were almost diametrically opposed. Competition was scaled won and the Ministerial Review policies stressed the need for co-operation (Kirby 2000a). A focus on young peoples’ engagement and an injection of finance and investment in added education infrastructure with added staff security were espoused by both the Minister (Kosky 2000) and the Premier (Bracks 2000).

Alex considered that some, but stressed not all, state school educators were presenting as barriers to change to a surprising degree. Alex expressed concern at the attitudes of state secondary school principals (as does Daniel). Both Alex (2003) and Kelly (2003) considered that the Kennett era of government induced a wariness of government initiatives and “negativity” among teachers (Alex, 2003). On the other hand Alex considered that the Catholic education sector to be quite open and supportive and their view of LLENs was that they represented an aid to assisting with resources and showed a desire to engage ‘whereas in a state school perhaps they …might see us as a threat’ (Alex 2003, Para 15).
Briony approached the issue of policy implementation with information stemming from a different dimension. To Briony (2003) one of the key inhibitors to implementation of the LLENs, a major policy initiative, was that they were formed prior to understanding their actual role – what they were supposed to do as a structure. This in part reflected a concern that Kirby (2003) expressed regarding the policy formulation/recommendation stage. Kirby considered that in some areas throughout Victoria “LLEN like” structures existed in the community on an informal basis in some areas but not all making it difficult for LLENs to develop an established role where previously an informal network was not present (Kirby 2003). Given that informal structures did not exist in some communities Kirby considered that it might have been better to pilot some LLENs and allow them to develop the concept to be gradually replicated (2003). The decision was made to recommend state-wide coverage and the Ministerial Review Panel, with elements of concern, conceded to this measure encouraged by positive signs from the government (Kelly 2003, Kirby 2003).

Where informal networks were not as well established “challenges arose” according to Briony (2003) who was speaking from actual experience in her area and was able to reflect on other LLEN “catchment” areas as well. Working with a large committee from ‘different sectors of the region…[accustomed] to a competitive environment [and] bringing them together collaboratively …to assist young people’ had its complexities (Briony 2003, para. 6). This issue to Briony signified the largest hurdle faced by their LLEN and was exacerbated by the experience ‘that most people have come on board not really understanding what their role is’ (2003, para. 6). Briony had a sound grasp of the concept of “networking” as reflected in the “Networks and LLENs: Policy and Practice” (see Keating et al, 2003). However Briony expressed concern with regard to the committee members being able to bring the issues of their “sector” to ‘the table and be able to discuss those and find resolutions though round table discussions, solutions to problems, …just getting working parties together, advisory groups, reference groups …’ (Briony 2003, para. 6). Briony reiterated that the particular LLEN where she is the Executive Officer involves committee members who did not understand the LLEN policy concept. To Briony ‘… people became part of the LLEN as they saw it as a funding organisation which we’re not, and they felt they could get some money to run their programs…’ (Briony 2003, para. 6).
The ‘On Track” destination data presented a range of issues that signified problems in terms of implementing policies (Briony 2003). Whilst Briony saw the need to measure destination outcomes for young people as crucially important, criticism was levelled at the government as ‘TAFE colleges have not commonly had to report on what their completion rates are; who’s completing, what the destinations of students’ are (Briony 2003, para. 10). Added to this TAFE colleges in Victoria also conduct VCE and VCAL programs and the outcomes for this cohort do not feature in the On Track data. The point Briony makes here is that a full picture of what is occurring for young people is made more difficult if certain segments of the education sector are not respondents (Briony 2003). The data for TAFE or ACE based youth, for that matter, is not identified along the statistical lines within the On Track data. The On Track statistics only capture data on secondary school students as shown by Curtain et al (2003) and corroborated by the VLESC website (VLESC, 2003). A concerted effort to capture data for postcompulsory aged young people would provide greater knowledge of participation therefore assisting planning.

The support from DET for LLENs was questionable given the interesting example provided by Eliza (2003). Eliza used the case of the development of a state-wide advertising campaign to promote LLENS (Eliza 2003). The executive officers of the LLENS had to approach the support unit in DET in an attempt to convince the centre to develop a campaign announcing that LLENs were in existence and required involvement with community partners to assist them with their policy implementation function (Eliza 2003). To both Eliza (2003) and Daniel (2003) it was surprising that the centre had not done this and in part explained why employers and businesses, or the larger community, were not familiar with the role of the LLENs.

In a similar vein to Eliza (2003), Spierings (2003b) was of the view that the government should have promoted LLENs widely issuing firm directions from the very top of the bureaucracy and government with strong signals of support. Spierings (2003) considers that a coherent strategy with regard to devolved policy within LLENs is lacking and greater co-ordination was required.

Slowly but surely schools were now being evaluated differently due to the On Track data (Briony 2003). This data has provided shocks in terms of the teachers really coming to terms for the first time what was actually happening to the
students exiting from their care. At first Chris considered that the teachers knew what was happening - ‘they must have known, surely they knew, well they actually didn’t know’ (Briony 2003, para. 32). The on track data showed that many students had passed year 12 but the shock was that many of the young people were saying that they did not know what to do and this formulated a change in the activities of the LLENs in conjunction with schools in Briony’s area. The focus of the LLENs as a result of the On Track data analysis was to focus on assisting persons to enable them to better understand some of the actions they may take to participate in further education and training or employment (Briony 2003).

Kirby (2003) believed that the dominant characteristic of the Victorian education policy community was complacency. As Kirby stated, ‘we’d come to accept as the normal order that there was a substantial number of youngsters for whom the education system didn’t work, who were disaffected before they’d completed secondary education, disaffected with it, disaffected with education and training before they’ve reached the ripe old age of sixteen even’ (Kirby 2003, para. 6). As Kirby saw it policy makers in the 1990s had been dominated by an ethos of competition which meant that too many education institutions were failing young people as they competed with each for scarce resources (Kirby 2003). Kirby resorted to a metaphor to describe this situation saying the schools and colleges had ‘pulled up the drawbridge’ clearly not wishing to extend themselves beyond the job that they were doing (Kirby 2003)

Briony raised another problem when she said:

I feel that secondary schools need to move and one of the issues that they face is that teaching cohort is around about my age, it’s pretty old and a lot of them are fairly set in their ways and don’t want to change, that walking into a maths classroom and telling kids to open up to page “such and such” is a very easy way to teach and introducing experiential learning to the classroom makes it a much more difficult job and that, again because of my experience in teaching I can understand you know the time constraints that secondary teachers do work incredibly hard and it’s not an easy job but in the long run it would be made easier if kids were more interested in what they were doing and I think they we could make it more interesting, what they’re doing if it was more applied experiential approach rather than sit down, keep quiet and do as you’re told approach, which I believe it still is in many cases. It is certainly the subjects that kids seem to stick with, those
that are having difficulty at school, those that are at risk of leaving, are the ones that do have an applied approach to learning and that could be taken on board for maths, for English and yeah I think that it would be something that the more formal subjects could really have a look at. So it’s the structure of schools that is another big challenge.

(Briony 2003 Para. 10).

Both Briony (2003) and Eliza (2003) argued that the development of more sensitive and relevant pedagogical/andragogical approaches in secondary schools required major change and that the current mass education culture was not interesting or suited to many of the young students. Eliza observed that a person working on the particular LLEN’s committee was a teacher who experienced great difficulty in understanding the need to promote VCAL for a segment of the student population who were unsuited to the VCE (Eliza 2003). The particular person was unable to see its merit in context (Briony 2003). Eliza held the view that this occurred as a result of a lack of professional development (workplace andragogy) within the school and sheeted the blame back in part to the principals as neither they nor the staff ‘share the big picture with their staff, and they might want to protect that because if they know too much they might get overwhelmed, or they are overwhelmed already’ (Eliza 2003, para. 42). Eliza sees that there is a definite change amongst principals but remains concerned that the need for change is not necessarily filtering down to teachers (Eliza 2003).

Resistance is a policy response that is difficult to avoid. In terms of change Kirby considered that the adopted policies had the least impact on the education bureaucracy (Kirby 2003). Even though the department staff went through the necessary processes to establish LLENs and revise the governing structures within the organisation such as the VQA, VLESC and VCAA, the Review in itself did not change many people’s views in the bureaucracy (Kirby 2003). To Kirby (2003) there were a few among the bureaucrats who will stand back and not be associated with the Ministerial Review if the policies come to an end. There would not be a complete change of opinion within the education sector because of the complexity of turning around a sizeable organisation ‘with so much vested interest’ (Kirby 2003, para. 15).

Chris (2003) is quoted earlier in this writing in relation to the complexity that surrounded changing the nature and character of the bureaucracy. Given this view
the approach was to grasp issues that were within their control at the coalface and concentrate on those and this may in time be reflected in the policy change due to the response at the centre (Chris 2003).

Change is an interesting aspect of the LLEN work as they represent an entity that acts as a broker, but there is a need to be accepted by members and players in the education field and to be responsible for doing, or putting into practice the actions discussed and planned to enable valuable changes (Chris 2003).

Eliza did not consider that the Ministerial Policies had created a balance in education by any means at this early stage and gave an illustration of an education policy meeting that they attended. The focus was almost entirely on VCE despite the main topic on the agenda being the VCAL. Eliza described herself as a conservative person but was feeling increasingly comfortable to start making “ripples” to push people’s thinking to create minor changes to build on in the future (Eliza 2003). A fairly traditional government secondary school also extended an invitation to discuss VCAL. Eliza remarked that this was a breakthrough given that not all of the government schools want VCAL (2003).

Change was seen by Eliza as absolutely crucial and was able to demonstrate how firmly entrenched the education paradigm is and subscription to the dominating culture was active in this particular metropolitan area of Melbourne (Eliza 2003). Although Eliza laid claim to being a conservative person, her experience in the LLEN provided a different position to examine the rigidity of thinking and the complexity of the task to change things. This culminated in Eliza realistically settling for minor incremental change and minor concessions to policy implementation and change (Eliza 2003). Eliza expressed a concern, as change in her view was being inhibited or blocked by an ageing workforce in desperate need of a significant level of personal development to change the way that they handled the students. Eliza (2003) put forward the view that nine out of ten teachers really cared about the “kids” but needed assistance to alter. To Eliza (2003) and Daniel (2003) the school principals had a considerable role in changing the offerings particularly in the postcompulsory years. Without the support of the principals change was not going to happen (Daniel 2003, Eliza 2003). The advent of VCAL in the schools was a monumental change to Eliza (2003). Eliza (2003) stated that in the previous year there was a total absence of VCAL pilots in her catchment area.
but now seven education providers were involved from 2002 to 2003. Change was afoot.

THE FUTURE OF INNOVATION?

At the LLEN conference in May 2003 in Melbourne a facilitator asked LLEN representatives to itemise what changes they would like to see occur in post-compulsory education to address the needs of youth. It was both astonishing and powerful for this participant observer to note the frequency of persons speaking for groups and stating that one of the major changes they wanted was to abandon secondary schools as they presently existed and build them again with totally new foundations and curricula approaches. From recall all the groups (and I believe there were about 23 groups of ten or so people) represented were of this view. The people participating attending the conference and representing LLENs came from industry, local government, all sectors of education, the welfare sector and the community at large. Clearly the LLEN experience had provided a new portal, meaning a more elaborate vantage point for persons to witness what was occurring in education. The view that emerged clearly did not subscribe to the dominating culture to maintain education in a form that reflected the independent education sector as the model. Armed with increased knowledge about the plight of young people in the society combined with increased discourse had obviously impacted and moved this large forum to make it clear that they would like to make very radical changes to secondary education.

For the purposes of ensuring my observations and research were correct I contacted about ten persons who were also at the LLEN conference, including three of the informants interviewed. I was quite surprised by this outcome wanted to establish with certainty whether they too were of the same understanding where each group expressed an interest to abandon secondary schools as they presently existed. They all reflected the interpretation I recalled. This is not an issue isolated to Australia or Victoria. Take for example the situation in the United States where in McNeil’s view.

For over two decades, commissions, reformers and researchers have called attention to the problems of the American high school. The litany of shortcomings is long and well documented. On almost every statistical measure and for large groups of students, our high schools are not making
the grade. At a time when the needs of our youth and the demands of society, the workplace, and life have changed dramatically, high schools have not responded. The gap in achievement, graduation, and college attendance between white high school students and minorities is growing. Colleges and employers complain that high school graduates are ill prepared for the work required. As the Education Trust has observed, “the data suggests an object at rest in a world that is rapidly rushing by.” The American high school experience is sorely in need of rethinking and redesign. (McNeil, 2003, p.5)

The Gates Foundation reflects this view of high schools referring to the United States:

Today’s high schools are obsolete; they do not prepare all students for college and instead put many students on tracks to nowhere.
In many cases, our secondary schools not only fail to reinforce, but actually undermine, early childhood gains.
(Gates Foundation 2004, p.3)

High schools in the U.S. are ineffective as they ‘prepare a small portion of their students for college, far less adequately prepare a larger number for the workplace, and lose roughly a quarter of the students, who drop out (from tertiary education) without earning a degree’ (Gates Foundation, 2004, p.3).

The Ministerial Review policy views, particularly in relation to social capital, are reflected by the philosophy of the Gates Foundation:

The Graduation requirements should reflect the personal and social skills necessary for further learning, work, and citizenship. These include civic knowledge and understanding, tolerance, the ability to think and work with others, and a disposition to contribute to the collective good. Students need to leave school intellectually sophisticated, morally committed, and capable of positive civic action. They need schools that consciously and effectively develop these capacities.
(Gates Foundation 2004, p. 3)

The notion that secondary education needs to be overhauled, is obviously not an exclusive view. Looking wider again this view is echoed within OECD research (see OECD 2001, “Schooling for Tomorrow, What Schools for the Future?”).

Kirby made an interesting point concerning evaluating the performance of the education sector. Given that there was no profit or loss evaluation of the education departments it was difficult to evaluate or measure the performance of staff and this enabled people to resist being involved in areas that they did not wish to be part of even though it was government policy (Kirby 2003). Kirby (2003), referred to vested interest which is worth defining. People with vested interest in bureaucracies have been conferred with some power and authority. The phrase evokes a notion that Kirby believes that the vested interest, power and authority, may be a factor in bureaucrats not being open to the reformations the policies have the potential to create. Could it be that the implementation of the policies with the support of the bureaucracy may result in a changed status to those able to exercise power, interest and domination? If those in the centre, as Kirby referred to key bureaucrats, did fully support the policies then it could be argued that the LLENs may become a powerful policy development community that may break or more likely thwart the hegemony that critical theorists and others (Teese 2000, Ball 1990) suggest is operative in education.

Alex claimed that his experience dealing with schools and teachers in the state system reflected a fair amount of negativity. Alex considered that the general thrust of VCE and the overwhelming direction of students to concentrate on university entrance was a tune that the state government teachers had unfortunately danced to for many years (Alex, 2003). This was still occurring despite the figures and outcomes for young people in his particular LLEN’s catchment area showing that a significant need to broaden the offerings within schools existed (Alex 2003). ‘I think there are cultures within schools who resist {change and VCAL} and I suppose, like I have heard comments for example, with the new VCAL that some of the teachers feel that there will be a resistance to that and it will be marginalised, …..because of the prevailing culture in the school (Alex 2003, para. 14).
Networking is a core issue that is entrenched within the Ministerial Review policies and integral to social capital (refer Chapter Three). Chris (2003) identified major problems in the will to network and supports the Ministerial Review policies to identify a common goal through objective and shared means. Chris (2003) expressed concern that there was resistance amongst secondary schools to allow other providers, apart from secondary schools, such as TAFEs or private RTOs, to provide vocational education and training.

The resistance stems from a view that secondary schools should perform this task and there was a disregard when faced with the prospect that other parts of the education industry can perform this task well including ACE, and TAFEs (Chris 2003). This point was relayed by Chris (2003) and he further justified his concern as he was witness to persons who were involved with secondary schools espousing this view. To Chris (2003) this view was not necessarily focussing on the best interest of students. Chris also disclosed that in some quarters secondary school teachers saw VET in schools purely as an opportunity for VET to be delivered by schools adding tension and contestation to the terrain when attempting to provide best outcomes for young people and contemplating using other providers (Chris 2003).

The option of attending a TAFE college, or an ACE class for one day per week was potentially better for a student to experience differing environments and draw beneficial aspects from both – not to mention the added potential of a workplace as a part-time apprentice or trainee (Chris 2003). The expansion of the environments where people learn was an issue where Chris departed from her colleagues working within the LLEN committee. This was one problem but the broader issue is obviously focussing on the problem young individuals face and objectively linking them to the best option to assist their pathway. Too frequently the term committee may not be seen as a team, a working group (Chris 2003). LLENs faced the problem where resistance was a problem in cases like Chris (2003) outlined, showing that individuals continue to see issues as a servant of their self-serving institution.

In defence of the schools there was a valid argument that the budgets provided by the state did not stretch sufficiently to pay for VET in schools by external providers such as TAFEs. But solutions were not examined with the notion that the client was the most important in the equation. There was a resistance to work these issues
through and use a collective wisdom in a team of ‘committed’ people or the membership of the LLEN (Chris 2003).

To Daniel (2003) the principals showed further resistance as they understand that the LLENs’ brief was to undertake environmental scans to plan and implement strategic projects and increase young people’s participation where possible. This process involves examining what is occurring in schools, isolating data that focuses on outcomes through the On Track statistics, and other measures, and recommending alterations (Daniel 2003). This is seen by some principals as interference and possibly an intrusion (Daniel 2003). In the early stages of the LLEN Daniel encountered a feeling of hostility among school principals but this has been addressed in his view through other measures including professional development activities aimed at this group (Daniel 2003).

The LLEN that Daniel worked for had three local government bodies in its catchment area, however only two chose to participate. The odd one out made their position clear by stating that a structure like a LLEN was about ‘cost shifting by state government to local governments’ (Daniel 2003, para. 85). Local government bodies are broad. Ironically one part of this particular local government body was resistant whereas another body contracted by the same local government to provide young people and family services were active and supportive participants of the LLEN (Daniel 2003).

Eliza, as earlier stated, commented that in the early stages of the formation of LLENs the regional management of DET did not wish to ‘have anything to do with the LLEN at all; it was really interesting’ (Eliza 2003, para. 6). Eliza (2003) had worked in the regional offices in the area and remarked that the various levels of acceptance regarding LLENs across many of the government regional offices were noteworthy. There was reluctance in some and there was acceptance in others (Eliza 2003). The same issue about resistance to the LLEN was shown in government secondary schools according to Eliza (2003).

Reticence and resistance to the VCAL has been well documented earlier. The VCE was still viewed by one particular government school as the ultimate aim according to Eliza (2003). As a participant observer this view is reflected in many schools even though in many instances the data shows that their academic enrolments in
university are far from outstanding. The resistance to alternatives was an area that Eliza (2003) felt that as a LLEN executive officer there was some assertiveness required on their behalf to instigate some change even though this particular school considered themselves to be quite conservative. In the face of this resistance to change Eliza described a situation where she adopted an out of character assertiveness as the school professed they did not have any students that would suit the VCAL whereas Eliza was able to demonstrate that the statistical outcomes for the year 12 cohort of 2002 indicated that VCAL would have suited a sizeable proportion of students (Eliza 2003). Eliza did not refer to the students in year 11 and those who had departed school prior to year 12. If she did this would have supported her case admirably given the statistics shown by the VQA report on VCAL (2005). My work in the field as a participant observation suggests to me that the statistics apart from year 12 are not taken into the equation by school educators to the level of seriousness that should occur and schools are judged on the 81-82 per cent of completers not those who have departed early (refer Long 2005 for detailed statistics).

An element of resistance was identified where the LLENs have alerted the department and the VLESC about issues of concern and dissatisfaction (Keating et al, 2003). ‘LLENs have raised a number of policy issues with DET and the VLESC in the past but have expressed some dissatisfaction that they have received no response from the VLESC; this lack of feedback has fuelled a view that LLENs are not being given the priority that they believe they deserve’ as a further demonstration of resistance within the bureaucracy (Keating 2003, para 26).

Keating clearly considered that the department is resistant to the policy intent of the LLENs (Keating 2003). This element of resistance has caused considerable angst between the LLENs the DET and its component sections being the VLESC and the Office of Tertiary Training and Education (OTTE). In effect the bureaucratic elements of the education department require the development of new protocols to change their processes and appreciate the development of policy from a direction that their structure appears unable to handle (Keating 2003). In effect a code of conduct, of sorts, has been established with a protocol paper instigated by the LLENs, and responded to by the VLESC, to establish communication guidelines and associated protocols so the department is in effect more responsive – less resistant – and policy advice from networked sources like LLENs may induce change (Keating et al, 2003).
Resistance within the bureaucracy to change, equity and the thrust of the
Ministerial Review policies is deep seated and there appears to be a propensity to
allocate resources, in the resource rich school sector areas by the sections in the
department to sustain a privileged position (Keating 2003).

At the stage of policy formulation there was little resistance in effect to the
Ministerial Review policies. Resistance came in other forms and at other stages
according to Keating (2003). One form of resistance occurred where Minister
Kosky encountered opposition to MIPs by the teacher’s union who wanted the
money allocated to schools thus enabling the added finance to impact on a global
budget and result in more staff (Keating 2003):

There was a lot of resistance to MIPS particularly from the unions. Unions
just wanted it to fund their agreements: something that was supported
through Minister Delahunty’s office, whether she supported it or not I can’t
say but that was the case and Minister Kosky won that one too.
(Keating 2003 para. 8)

Keating (2003) considered that in the face of this resistance the Minister carried the
issue through capably resulting in a reasonably effective policy implementation of
the MIPs initiative, which he viewed as one of the key successes of the Ministerial
Review policies. Keating also related that there was “huge resistance” that was
predictable in regard to ‘the establishment of the VQA. Resistance obviously came
from the Board of Studies’ but this was quelled by Minister Kosky once again
according to Keating (Keating 2003 para. 8).

Resistance is a refusal to comply. There are policy makers and academics who
believe that sectoral interest resistance to change can be overcome with pressure
exerted by discussing and identifying what is really occurring and making it public
knowledge. The value of LLENs working throughout Victoria and developing
information about their local communities has the capacity to break the
“monolithic” nexus of a bureaucracy that is structured and geared to operate under
the false assumption that vocational, educational and training needs are uniform
throughout Victoria (Keating et al, 2003). This section has highlighted resistance
whilst acknowledging that the issue is permeated throughout the observations
derived from work in the field as a participant observer, or through interviews and
added theoretical research.
Implementation of policy represents an unsavoury predicament if the problem is not owned.

Q. Who owns the problem?
A. Well that’s the essential problem, I don’t think anybody does and that’s why, but not just in Victoria in other states as well, accountability is the central issue that has to be tackled. (Kirby, 2003 para. 26)

Kirby claimed that ownership was ill defined and there was not an identifiable group or body that viewed young people’s participation as their problem – including secondary schools (Kirby, 2003). To Kirby it was important to establish LLENs ‘to see whether that is the place where the ownership begins in the community’ with the added advantage of On Track data being used as a pointer to ownership and responsibility (Kirby 2003, para. 26).

Some LLENs from Kirby’s observation suggested that they did not own the problem and their responsibility was to give policy advice to government as the problem was theirs (Kirby 2003). This argument has some validity as it reflected aspects of policy intent that were implicit in the role of the LLENs (Kirby, 2000a).

Kirby stated that the Ministerial Review panel ‘had a number of discussions with the head of a TAFE college who was very interested in this question. He has now moved across to schools, which is quite interesting, but their approach is to say well we’re going to raise the school leaving age. This is their proposal, and we’re going to make the school responsible… whether the person is in school or out of school up to that age and even beyond it (Kirby, 2003, para. 26). In Queensland they intend to ‘pin it (ownership) on the school’ (Kirby 2003, para. 26):

That’s the central question which most states are looking at. If you can’t find ownership of the problem then how can you resolve it, how can you deal with it. If you’re having a house built and something goes wrong with it, so it’s falling down on one side, one wall falls out, your first job is to find out who’s responsible because only then can you have it put right. And that’s been, that’s one of the great problems with the whole thing, who is responsible? Who should take responsibility and leadership for getting it done and if you want them to have responsibility then you’ve got to give them the resources to deal with it. You can’t say to a youth worker, just to take an absurd example, in a community, you’re responsible for all these
youngsters who fall out of school but give them no influence over the bodies that can do something about it or no resources to do it. So the LLENS in a sense were saying we want the communities to take responsibility and we want to give you the resources or at least to tell us what you need to get that job done. Now it didn’t mean that the community collectively became responsible but it did mean that the community would identify where responsibility lies and bring the policies to bear. But it’s the key question I think. I mean it’s really where we should have started. The real issue is who’s responsible and that’s in a sense the failure of the whole system, that nobody is responsible (Kirby, 2003 para. 26).

As John Spierings (2003b) put it:

In policy terms … we’re probably at a point now where government has sort of hinted that it owns the problem by saying … we’ve got these targets to address it. And it’s sort of saying to the LLENS that it’s your responsibility to help us meet the targets but then it’s not giving the LLENS the muscle to be able to do that effectively really because it’s not providing the resources.

In Spierings’ view the LLENs cannot dictate to education bodies to form seamless partnerships and insist that every exiting student has a pathways plan and follow up strategy as they do not have the authority (2003b). Spierings believed that the federal government attempts to conceal its responsibility claiming that ‘the states have got all the school issues’ and they own some of the labour market issues but the federal government interest in connecting education to the labour market is a problem ‘so there’s still a huge amount of work required to get anybody to really own the problem’ (2003b para. 36):

I’ve just been overwhelmed really by the effort that a number of people on the ground are making. I mean if you go to most JPPs you know people in that program are working their guts out on the smell of an oily rag, following kids up, linking them up with employers, with TAFE, providing them with career advice and guidance, tasters, free apprenticeship programs, all that sort of stuff. I think at a community level there is an increasing sense of ownership and again that’s where you’d hope that the LLENS could be more effective in actually marshalling that sense of good will that’s there in communities. It’s really giving them enough latitude to be able to do that enough, you know a range of tools to make a substantial difference. (Spierings 2003b, para. 36).
To Kelly the Victorian community does own the problem meaning the ‘government owns the problem on behalf of the community which means that government has to set in place a sustainable framework where there can be a statewide response to the problem and issues and a local response to the problem’ (Kelly 2003, para 24). Kelly also considers that the commonwealth government also owns the problem but lacks commitment to foster resolution.

Educators also have a responsibility in Kelly’s view as ‘the teachers in the classrooms or the ones in the neighbourhood houses own the problem or the problems remain’ as both obvious and pronounced (Kelly 2003, para. 24).

At the core of the problem ‘a need to embed a much more deep seated cultural change about teaching and learning practice, not only in the post-compulsory years but in the middle years for young people who are so disengaged’ exists (Kelly 2003, para 24). Kelly sees the problem involving ownership and responsibility by education, governments and the community.

The problem is ‘owned at multiple levels and in one sense it’s owned by the government but on the other it is a situation that I often reflect that we have had record economic growth for a decade now and second best performing OECD country but I think we’ve got something like the second or third highest level of poverty amongst all the OECD countries. ‘So in a period where we have rapid economic growth and increasing wealth we have had an increase in poverty’ (Keating 2003, para. 26). Given this observation Keating was concerned for Australian society when the economic cycle results in a recession. Keating was critical of the federal government for perpetrating disadvantage for reasons akin to a form of social Darwinism he did not understand particularly as he claimed it was exacerbated by ‘a policy regime in schools that doesn’t recognise disadvantage’ (Keating 2003, para 26). It appeared that Keating had a similar view in relation to the education department bureaucracy to that of the federal government as ‘kids from the most needy backgrounds are not given any extra money compared with kids from the most wealthy by the government and there seems to be resistance to the very notion that you should address that issue. So I don’t really understand it and it’s certainly deeply within the education department, there’s been no capacity and will to address these matters’ (Keating 2003 para. 26).
Keating considered that the state government was attempting to show ownership by adopting all of the Ministerial Review policies (Keating 2003). To Keating however enormous barriers were evident to the implementation of the policies as the two that should own the problem were the federal government and education department bureaucracy and overt demonstration of ownership was not apparent (Keating 2003).

The Ministerial Review Panel recognised that the disturbing educational, vocational and social situation for young people called for major changes in education policies, strategies and practices. The implementation of the policies represents quite revolutionary changes for education systems in schools, TAFE and community education centres.

The Review Panel made it quite clear that ‘the needs of young people are the central objective rather than the needs of institutions’ (Kirby 2000a, p. 26). These needs ‘were driven by three broad requirements of the community’ (Kirby 2000a, p. 26). These included the need for industry, and the Victorian and Australian economies, to be served by ‘an education and training system that will produce the high levels of knowledge and skills that are required to compete internationally’ thereby underpinning economic considerations (Kirby 2000a, p. 26). Secondly an essential need exists for education and training to ‘contribute to building community values, or “social capital,” in an age where technological and social changes have threatened the social fabric’ (Kirby 2000a, p. 26). The Ministerial Review argued that there was a need for the benefits of education and training to be accessed and achieved by all young people’ (Kirby 2000a, p.26), reflecting the political dimension as defined above, which was seen as crucial. In the opinion of the Review panel the ‘three needs: industry skilling, social capital and social justice, are closely connected’ (2000a, p. 26) and each can be translated respectively to economic, political and social imperatives. These goals according to the Victorian Government Education Minister, Lynne Kosky, are attainable and can be driven through sound educational policies that are suited to skilling young people with abilities and attitudes that are aimed at ensuring they participate productively in their community (Kosky 2003b).

The acceptance among the LLEN operators is extraordinarily high. The overall tone of all information received indicated exceptional support for the policies as can be seen by the range of quotes already cited within the research.
This chapter has suggested that the Ministerial Review panel’s recommendations have already had considerable impact in a policy community that is very conservative, steeped in tradition, and resistant to change. The early results of these policies represent a good start in a remarkably complex terrain.
CONCLUSION

The fundamental significance to all the principal millennium themes: nationhood and identity; our economic standing and the prospects of future prosperity; our personal and collective visions for our society and generations hence are obvious and in need of urgent attention and depend on education. (Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2000c, p. 3)

In this thesis I have explored a recent exercise in Australian education policy-making carried out by a Ministerial Review panel headed by Peter Kirby that convened in 2000 to address a range of issues in Victoria’s post compulsory education and training. As I argued the Review panel was faced with a situation where government and its members believed that post-compulsory education in Victoria was in crisis.

A range of expert and academic research was providing plenty of evidence about the persistence of youth unemployment. In 2000-2001 young people were still facing an unemployment level 2.7 times higher than 25-54 year old persons in Australia (Curtain, 2003). Young people had lost significant ground in the labour market over the past three or more decades and it would appear that education has changed insufficiently to address this problem (Curtain et al 2003, Curtain 2003, Curtain 2000, Kirby 2000a, Sweet 1998, Teese, 2000). The same experts were likewise convinced that such things as the vocational, education and training participation rates of young people suggested that a revision of educational policies was needed to address the needs of young people (Kirby, 2000a, Dusseldorp, 2000, Sweet, 1998, Sweet 2002, Teese, 2000). By the year 2000 almost 300,000 young Australian adults (20 per cent) were considered disadvantaged and 500,000 of the total cohort of young people (20 per cent) are considered to be in a precarious labour market situation (Kirby, 2000a, Curtain 2000, Sweet 2002, Teese, 2000).

In Victoria special concern was voiced about the way education policy makers privileged the needs of universities. According to Teese (2000) universities distorted and inhibited the development of curricula that could be designed to address the needs of those post-compulsory students who had no interest in
enrolling in university studies (Teese 2000). (In 2004 for example only forty per cent of year twelve 2003 graduates enrolled at university (VLESC 2004).

Among those involved in the development of policy some were advocating that the main objective of post-compulsory education and training should be to prepare students for their vocational lives with a view to maximising young people’s participation in the labour market. The same experts could point to a range of evidence to demonstrate that post-compulsory education was failing to equip young people for an adult vocational life (Dusseldorp, 1998, 2002a, Curtain et al 2003, Kirby 2000a, Sweet 1998 Teese, 2000).

As I showed the unexpected victory of the Bracks-led ALP in the state elections of October 1999 paved the way for an inquiry into post-compulsory education. In the course of the election the Party had campaigned strongly about the failures of educational policy under the Kennett government and had advocated that the major objective of post-compulsory education and training ought to be to prepare students for their vocational lives.

In this thesis I have documented the way the Ministerial Review panel took a clear policy stand in ways that parallel Apple’s (in Dale 1989) argument that contemporary education can no longer remain neutral in its many institutions that have caused ‘domination and subordination.’ In this regard at the core of the Ministerial Review process was one basic question: who benefits from the current forms of post-compulsory education?

The Ministerial Review called for an overhaul of the post-compulsory education system in Victoria. The recommendations of the panel (Kirby 2000a) were framed by the objective of increasing participation in education and training (Kirby 2000a). This goal is replicated by ‘virtually all OECD nations including Australia’ (Keating et al 2005, p.7).

This objective informed the recommendation to establish a new Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). This recommendation reflected the Ministerial Review panel’s belief that big changes were needed in curricula and senior level certificates in Victoria certificates on offer in the senior school area (Kirby 2000a, 2000b). It reflected concern among some experts like Keating et al (2005, p.7) that:
The limitations of the mainstream certificates, especially in achieving equity in participation and outcomes, have induced some governments and authorities to introduce certificates that are alternatives to the mainstream qualifications at the upper secondary levels. Apart from Victoria, no Australian state has introduced a certificate like the VCAL (Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning), although there is some debate in some states about this option.

The establishment of the VCAL, a key policy initiative emanating from the Ministerial Review, is also a senior secondary school certificate that has enormous flexibility to develop opportunities from an education and vocational basis. The flexibility of this program is only beginning to be realised by the education sector. This program enables many andragogical combinations such as paid employment as an industry component as an apprentice or trainee, or simply as a normal worker. It has a personal development stream which enables students to undertake a range of dignity raising initiatives and work with the community which has enormous potential and scope for students to pursue. An additional strand within the program is literacy and numeracy and this can be linked to the students’ needs and level and connected to the type of work the student may pursue when leaving school, thus adding an applied and practical mode of relevance.

Another key proposal was the idea that Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) be established (Kirby 2000a). A core charter for LLENs was to increase social equity through better and more relevant post-compulsory curriculum.

An added feature of the Ministerial Review policies was to mark clear signposts to work or further education, and training. Under the managed individual pathways Program (MIPs - another policy initiative emanating from the Ministerial Review) each senior student in the state school, TAFE and ACE systems develops a vocational and educational plan. This plan is guided by persons with some training employed or contracted by the state secondary school system and that takes into account his or her skills and attributes.

Victorian government schools, TAFE and ACE have introduced the Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) program, which provides individual mentoring, career counselling and career planning for students 15 years and older. As a result, each student should have an individual Pathway Plan that is updated annually. Students
meet with a mentor (usually a teacher, but also possibly a designated MIPs coordinator) several times to discuss, form and record their longer term employment and study plans as well as to set short-term study goals and to identify actual or potential barriers to their achievement.

Through MIPs schools provide support to exiting students for up to six months after exit. At the time of exit students should have a planned pathway. Those not going on to further education, training or secure employment are referred to an appropriate agency. Six months after exit schools follow up all students who have not completed Year 12 and again offer assistance, usually through an appropriate referral. As Long (2005, p.9) points out:

The target of universal participation in MIPs by senior secondary students in government schools has virtually been achieved—94.5% of students in Years 10-12 in 2004 had a current individual pathway plan—although LLENs reported that some students contacted as part of the On Track follow-up could not recall having a plan. (Long 2005, p.9)

Back in 1978 the then-Premier of China, Chou En-Lai was asked how he would evaluate the effects of the French revolution of 1789. He said –wisely- that it was ‘too soon to tell’. I would be the first to acknowledge the same conclusion apropos the effects of the Ministerial Review panel and its work. As Long (2005, p. iv) has argued:

Victoria’s leadership on skills, educational attainment and transitions is longstanding and deserves respect. If Victoria is to continue to set the pace on post-compulsory pathways it must systematically revisit and renew the policy directions and programs of the Kirby reforms.

The research pointed to almost universal acceptance of the policies. This was attributable to a number of factors such as the drive, knowledge and experience of the panel combined with sound methods of research and the leadership shown particularly by Kirby that mobilised community support throughout the policy process stages. The research data reflects compelling evidence that people were pleased to be included and impressed that there was a genuine interest by the Ministerial Review panel in regard to their thoughts, ideas and possible impact on policy formulation. This secured loyalty and legitimation for the process and the interrelated stages of formulation, design, intent and implementation. This had been absent in the Kennett era and for many being able to participate and involved
in community consultation, or writing to the panel, represented a dignified involvement on an issue that is collectively seen as being of crucial importance. Young people’s experience of unemployment, underemployment and unsatisfying employment has reached alarming proportions and has been unchecked by the education sector for decades.

The research also found that acceptance of the policies was slow and often hesitant. The LLEN conference in 2003 involved LLEN participants discussed the problems facing young people in the light of the On Track data and other research. This conference pointed to a level of dissatisfaction with secondary schools particularly and the will to engage with a new and totally revised pedagogical framework. This represented what might be called an ‘exogenous shock’ for the DET bureaucracy and suggests that people working in the LLEN networks are committed to reforming post-compulsory education significantly.

Bureaucracies have the expertise, will and interest to constrain policy change (Keating et al, 2003, Daniel 2003). Is this a manifestation of hegemony? To those who work within a broadly defined critical theoretical tradition (eg., neo-Marxists, feminists etc), hegemony is a process where a dominant culture maintains its position of supremacy. In Anderson’s words this involves:

… the perpetuation of a status quo dominant groups and subordinate groups, where importantly the subordinate groups share the views of the dominant culture’ (Anderson, 2003, p.9).

Anderson (drawing on Gibson, 1986) states that hegemony ‘is an achievement of a “common sense” set of beliefs whereby those are subordinated in the belief system that the status quo is right or natural’ (Gibson, 1986 in Anderson, 2003). The ongoing maintenance of dominance by the ruling class is justified and maintained managing to prevail in securing ‘active consent’ of those dominated (Anderson, p. 9, quoting Gramsci in Gibson, 1986 p.53).

Hegemony – arguably - is too prevalent within the post-compulsory education sector. In the context of education the dominance of the independent schools is characterised by the key performance indicators of ENTER performance and enrolments in universities (Teese 2000). The symbiotic relationship between prestigious universities, whom, to a degree dictate curricula with “all care but no responsibility”, has a broad impact on the notion of success through the education
system that reflects status dominant groups (Teese 2000). For decades the curricula within schools and notions of success have been tilted inappropriately to the “ultimate” goal, which is obtaining a place at university (Kirby, 2000a, Peoples 1998, Teese, 2000, Hargreaves et al 1996, Schools Commission 1980).

The question of the value of the experiment with LLENs in my view ought to go beyond an exercise in ‘measuring’ things like increased participation rates on the part of young people. We need additional kinds of qualitative data about the potential of emerging partnerships and the residual economic and social benefits that they may be able to cultivate (Keating 2003). A key question (posed by Keating and Robinson 2003) arises concerning how much time is required for the more ineffable benefits of LLENs to surface. This poses questions about the length of time LLENs require to develop a project oriented to enhancing social equity, social justice and human and social capital in their communities (Keating and Robinson 2003).

It is evident in the research I have done that the process leading to the implementation of the policies has sometimes been thwarted by a level of ambivalence on the part of some personnel within both the ALP government and inside the DET combined with a failure to take responsibility. The resources devoted to address issues raised by LLENs are often meagre. This represents a certain degree of ambivalence about the value of LLENs and the will of the government to invest seriously in educational programs. Arguably this represents a failure to either understand or value ‘social capital as an idea that might inform a progressive approach to policy-making. Alternatively the scepticism on the part of DET bureaucrats about the ‘social capital framework may reflect a healthy scepticism about the value of an idea whose provenance in neo-liberal economic and social policy circles might suggest that it is being used to divert attention away from the need for a major investment of community resources including taxation revenues in urgently needed social infrastructure.

The resistance to the reforms in the post-compulsory education sector, despite a stated interest on the part of the Bracks government in improving young people’s participation in education and training, was pointed to frequently by my informants. The lack of leadership from the Office of Premier and Cabinet, Treasury and the Department of Education has been pointed to by informants.
Keating, along with some other critics is concerned that modern governments are unwilling to resource change. Keating believes that this problem is prevalent among both Coalition federal governments and ALP state governments who seem to be more concerned to minimise anxiety on the part of the corporate sector by maintaining large budget surpluses than by investing taxation revenue in social resources (Keating 2003).

The Federal government has indulged in shoring up the dominant position of the independent schools particularly as they allocate more federal funds to this sector than is allocated to the state system (Rood et al The Age 12 March 2004, Green 12 March 2004, Lawrence The Age 10 November 2003). Green (12 March, 2004) maintains that this measure is provoked to build up votes in the Federal government’s domain. The result is that allocating resources to the detriment of the majority results in a situation where the state (meaning Federal Government in this case) is actively using its power to entrench disadvantage among young people in education, including the post-compulsory level, and maintaining dominance thus making the effectiveness of the Ministerial Review policies more difficult. The commitment to fundamental rights of opportunity seems to have prevailed for a considerable time within the education sector (Teese, 2000). But despite the efforts of the state government through the adoption of the Ministerial policies to scale back the hegemony that has a recurring pattern in education, the federal government appears to have asserted the privileged hold that Keating (2003) and Teese (2000) criticise through the inequitable direction of financial resources. The independent schools, elite universities, and the Education Department also perpetuate this hegemony (Keating 2003, Teese 2000). Doubtless the truth or otherwise of this line of criticism would need another thesis to explore properly.

‘When the world is fit for children and educational agencies are fit for adults we will know that the truly educative society has been achieved’.
(Lister in Buckman 1973, p. 29)
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APPENDIX – Basic information on the confidential informants

In relation to the LLEN management informants only fundamental information is provided on grounds of ethics to maintain confidentiality. The names of informants in each case are pseudonyms.

‘Alex’

Alex has worked as a primary school teacher for over ten years and has also worked in employment agencies within the public and private sector. Alex has extensive experience as a councillor in local government adding insight and dimension into government policy and practice from this third tier level of government perspective. Alex has been involved in policy formation and implementation at a government secondary school for an extended time further adding to his knowledge of the sector. The experience in the employment agencies has provided extensive knowledge concerning the plight of young people, particularly those who have withdrawn from participating in education, work, or training prematurely. In his interview Alex demonstrated a heightened appreciation of the cost to the individual that can result from unemployment and on a broader scale the cost to the community.

‘Briony’

Briony was a secondary school teacher and enjoyed school and planned to return as a teacher. Having finished a degree Briony was tired of study and went to work in an area of the public service that had a strong connection to unemployed youth. After working there for eight years Briony decided to return to study and qualify as a teacher. ‘So it was probably a decision based on not much careers experience. So I went back and did a “Dip Ed” and then I started teaching at (X) Secondary College in the late ‘80s and I was at (Y) Secondary College for ten years as a classroom teacher and I became a careers teacher. I went into careers probably because I had the background (in the public service) and dealings with young unemployed people. I moved into careers and then from there, it was at the time when VET in schools was starting to take off so I got involved in setting up the (A) VET cluster with a couple of other teachers in the region’ (Briony 2003 para. 2).
Briony then worked for another organisation funded by government and was involved with VET in schools and work experience, the work placement program and then operated, coordinated work placement across a particular region of Melbourne for three years. Briony then ‘moved (to a certain region) as the manager of the VET in schools program’ in a part of Victoria moving away from the normal area of residence and employment to find ‘that I really missed it and I was very surprised how I much I missed it and so the LLEN job came up I came back, I applied for that position as project officer’ (Briony 2003 para. 2) and came back. But it was coming back to an area that I’d worked as a teacher and the VET coordinator so it was coming back to an area where I really had a well established network and that was why, that’s how I ended up here’ (Briony 2003 para. 2).

‘Chris’

‘I’ve been involved in senior education for thirty years so it’s a long road for me. Firstly I just did secondary education as a maths teacher and then later on moved into TAFE for the last ten or twelve years teaching in the ESL department and VCE in TAFE. So being very interested in the issues that young people face, particularly in (a particular region in) Melbourne, I’ve been working over (here) now for nearly twenty years. And the social issues that they face and how they impact on their education and how that manifests itself in literacy problems, literacy issues, language issues of course, the whole issue around disrupted education and no education by many of our new arrivals and the social and welfare issues that new arrivals face because of the trauma that they’ve experienced either through war or refugee camps and combinations of those (Chris 2003 para. 2). Chris advised that when the Ministerial Review panel was undertaking community research and consultation ‘I participated ... at VU (Victorian University) TAFE and I was fascinated by the concept that we could actually have a local approach to education and that’s what came out of his report very strongly. So yeah post-compulsory education has always been where I’ve been interested. I’ve taught from year 10 upwards for most of my teaching career’ (Chris 2003 para. 2).

‘Daniel’

Daniel has worked in a variety of roles and organisations in the teaching and research areas. Daniel has extensive experience as a teacher in secondary schools, TAFE colleges, ACE and University sectors. In terms of research Daniel has
undertaken extensive research in the fields of labour market and education research with particular emphasis on postcompulsory education. Policy development and implementation is an added area of wide-ranging depth that Daniel has been immersed in for over three decades.

‘Eliza’

Eliza has experience in secondary education that extends beyond three decades in teaching, leadership and co-ordination roles in the careers/VET sector. Eliza has also acted as an education consultant and also assisted a number of LLENs in tender submissions to the state government that were successful.

‘I’ve got a thirty-year background as a secondary teacher. Through that time I’ve had leadership experience. I’ve probably not made a preference for teaching in post-compulsory years because I enjoy the lower years as well but the leadership positions have been focussed on the post-compulsory years so 10, 11 and 12 and probably the thing that probably triggered me to pursue it was I actually had the privilege of taking a group of year 7 students through from year 7 to year 12 for the 6 years as coordinator just to see a group mature, develop, all their experiences I suppose. You think you have an idea when you teach them for a couple of periods a week, it might be over the course of a year but you get to know them after six years, so probably the work that I did with that. And then through various other events that took me into that field that included working with the new VCE, bringing that in, being a verification person, forming or assisting to form policy and implement it. Then I moved out of the secondary school probably as a result of taking that year, that particular group for year 12, and this will sound corny but for the 12 months after they left I couldn’t understand why I was so unsettled and I reckon I was grieving for them after being so close them for six years’ (Eliza, 2003 para. 2).