



# Vocations:

the link between post-compulsory education + the labour market

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## › NCVET:

- Generous funders, even better contract managers
- Facilitate new knowledge creation + its diffusion
- Rare gem in the Australian public policy environment

## › Research colleagues

- WRC/ACIRRT team members + University of Melbourne, LH Martin Institute, (especially Leesa Wheelahan + Mary Leah) and Melbourne Grad School of Education (especially Kira Clarke)
- Especially Ruth Schubert and the current team at Uni of Melbourne

## › Defacto partners:

- NSW BVET (skill eco-systems + competence to capabilities) [now the NSW Skills Board]
- AEU
- AQFC and
- AWPA + ISCs, especially Community Services and Health

## › Warning

- Given billing for this event, this presentation far more detailed than usual

- › Why did we do this study?
- › How did we do it?
- › What did we find?
  - Overview of the entire 17 publications in a page
  - Case study of the detail available: Strand 3: Pathways in the labour market
- › Was it worth it?
- › Where should we go next?
- › Conclusion

# 1. Why did we do it? [a]

## › Elliot's despair [from the Hollow Men, 1925]

Between the idea

And the reality

...

Between the conception

And the creation

...

Falls the shadow.

This project grappled with the reality of the shadow that characterises the rhetoric and reality surrounding education and its connection with work in Australia today.

# 1. Why did we do it? [b]?

- › Policy about education and work has very clear KPIs:
  - COAG workforce development agreement
  - Apprenticeship enrolment + completion numbers

**Assumption:** more + higher levels qualifications = economic success (personal + national)

## ⇒ Questions

- how do current qualifications link with each other and the labour market?
- can better linkages be established?

## Two simple objectives

- (a) Understand how policy is actually working
  - hypothesis: it really not hitting the mark
  
- (b) Identify a potentially more relevant approach
  - capabilities approach of Sen +Nussabaum

### **Starting point:** skepticism about policy framing:

- Lessons from the US intervention in Vietnam 1962 – 1975
  - General Westmoreland – 1968: ‘all we need is another 250,000 ground troops’
  - His strategy: manage by KPI – relative kill rate, not holding territory the key.
    - outcome: the US met their KPIs but lost the war
- Like VET and higher education today, more resources won’t fix the problem, we need a better way of understanding and engaging with reality.

**Assumption:** more + higher levels qualifications = economic success (personal + national)

- Reality is, however, very different

## 2. How did we go about it?[b]

**Defining facts:** Despite significant investment and huge increase in number of qualifications three fundamental paradoxes persist

(a) while VET quals expands endlessly (eg 106 Cert II + III quals in Agriculture alone)...

.... the actual connections between work + qualifications remain weak

(b) while significant complaints about skill shortages persist

.... complaints of skill under-utilisation continue

(c) while VET conceived as space for vocational development

.... universities increasingly intruding into this space



## 2. How did we do it?[c]

- › Foundation work, especially Buchanan et al, *Education, Work + Economic Renewal* [flows of learning and labour], AEU, 2009 and Wheelahan and Moodie, *From competence to capability*, BVET, 2011
  
- › Proposal for three strands, over three years:
  - Strand 1: VET in Schools pathways
  - Strand 2: VET-Higher Education pathways
  - Strand 3: Pathways connecting educating and the labour market
  
- › Explored over three years:
  - Year 1: Scoping – concepts refined – capabilities + vocations (moving beyond atomistic and linear assumptions about education + labour market pathways)
  - Year 2: What is happening in the three strands
  - Year 3: Could a different framing work better – and if so how?

## 3. What did we find?[a] Overview

- › Mainstream analysis and policy have the wrong starting point:
  - (a) Current jobs
  - (b) Individuals as ‘generically employable’
  - (c) A linear vision of pathways + unconnected competencies
  
- › The reality of segmentation
  - ... and not just poor VET – HE articulation
  
- ⇒ Better tools for understanding + engaging with reality
  - Start with adaptive capacity: individuals + workplaces in an uncertain world
  - Focus on
    - Human capability
    - Vocational streams
    - Communities of trust

## 3. What did we find?[b] Strands summarised

### › Strand 1: VET in Schools

- (a) Current models do not provide strong transitions to the labour market, traditional apprenticeships, post-school VET or higher education
- (b) Quality + outcomes can be improved if have sharper focus: either entry to mid level quals or employment based learning such as apprenticeships

### › Strand 2: VET-Higher Education pathways

- (a) Recognise the qualifications – labour market nexus take one of four general forms (page 28)
- (b) Education pathways are more complete than those in the labour market
  - there is a lack of mid-level jobs to act as a ladder from lower to high qualifications + jobs in the labour market
- (c) Balance between three purposes of quals varies on the nature of the quals-labour market nexus and should be so recognised
  - some will be more concerned with educational progression, others occupational progression + yet others for social inclusion

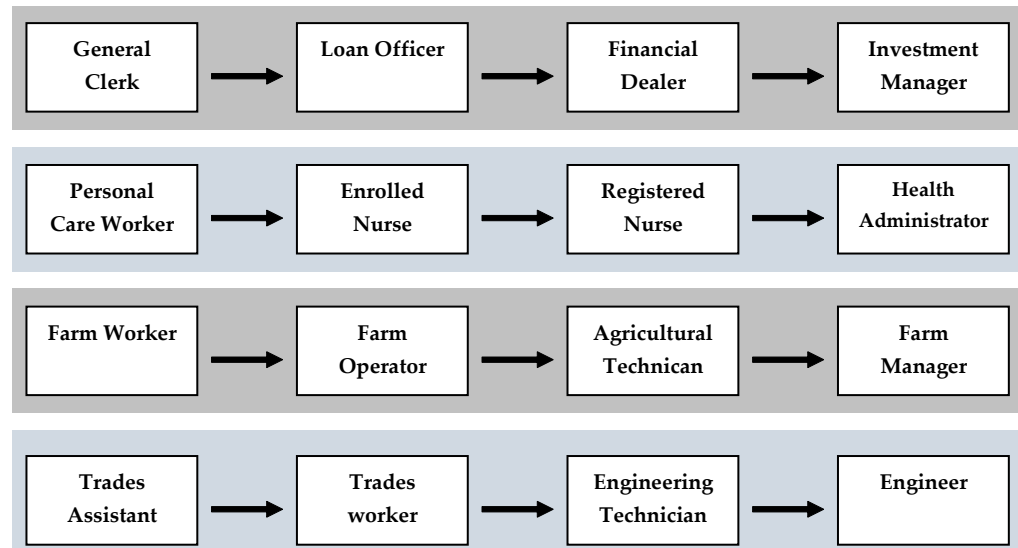
### › Strand 3: Labour market pathways

- (a) Flow of learning and labour are rarely linear (cf awards + framework)
- (b) The capacity of individuals + organisations to adapt rapidly to change would be improved if people has capabilities to function in one of a small number of broadly defined domains (ie vocations)

### 3. What did we find?[c] Case study of Strand 3

- › Current policy assumptions on education – labour market nexus
- › Current reality is nothing like this (optimal matching analysis)
- › Why the current situation prevails
- › How things could be different
- › An example from agriculture
- › Generalising the findings: capabilities + vocational streams as analytical + policy aids

- › How do individuals move into and through the labour market?

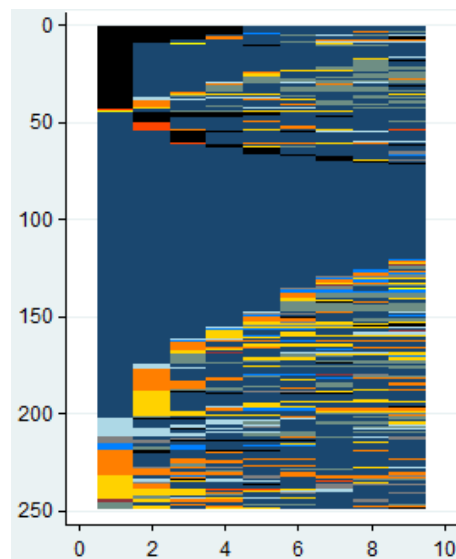


- › What are the commonalities in the trajectories of workers in the labour market?

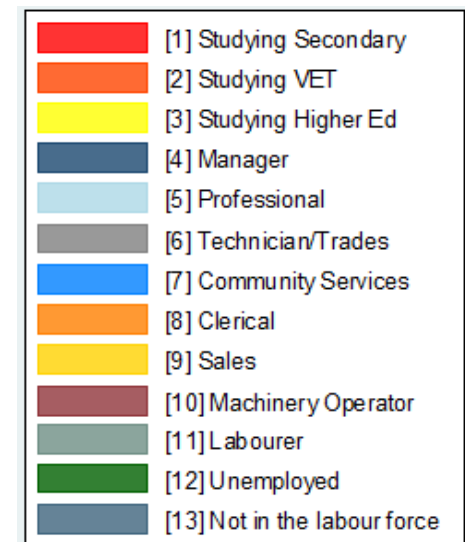
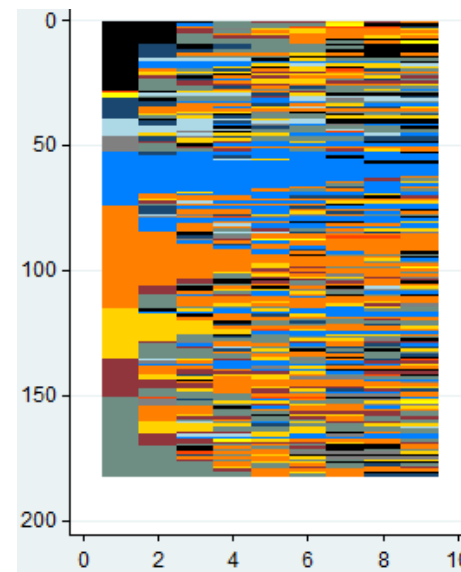
## The reality of segmentation (example from agriculture)

### › Example:

Farm managers

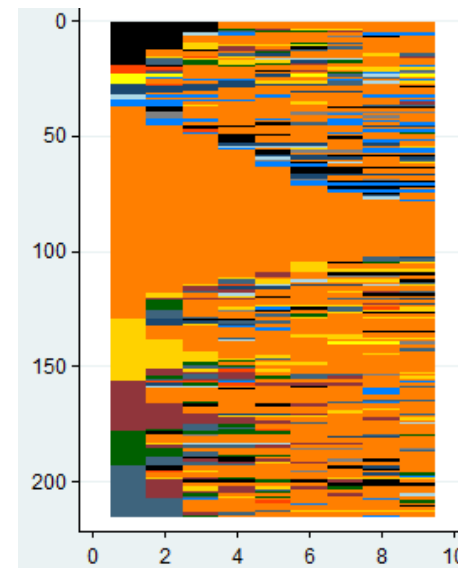
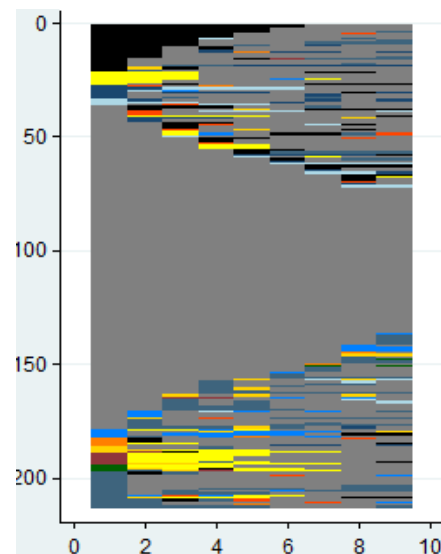


Manual workers in agriculture



# Key results – Healthcare and Community Services

- › Resource constraints inhibit career development – lack of training opportunities and/or work intensification
- › Strongly vocational narrative of care apparent amongst care workers and nurses
- › Career growth tended not to be vertical into management, but sideways into other specialisations.



### 3. Why does current situation persist?

- › Occupational segmentation the overarching result
    - Limited flows to higher skilled occupations or further study
  - › High skill trajectories = access to high skill work
  - › Low skill trajectories = entrenchment in low skill work
  - › Marginal attachment
    - Long episodes out of the labour force, often women and older workers
- ⇒ How do we make sense of these facts?



## How are we to make sense of the key facts

The labour market is not like a lake, it's more like a river

- › Fact 1: limited vertical movements could be conceived as something like Warragamba Dam: overwhelming stasis with occasional leakage out, but this misses the dynamism



## How are we to make sense of the key facts

Even with the river analogy, segmentation does not entail 'rivers + billabongs'

- › Fact 2: flows often involve horizontal churn, not static segmentation





# How are we to make sense of the key facts

New Zealand's braided rivers offer better visual analogy (Part 1)

- › Fact 3: – flows within the labour market are structured, but not neatly





## How are we to make sense of the key facts

New Zealand braided rivers offer better visual analogy (part 2)

- › Flows go into and out of the braided river, as well within  
(analogous to work ⇔ education transitions)



## 3. What did we find? New categories

- › We define vocational stream as:

*‘a set of occupations linked by common knowledge, skills and capabilities within a broader field of practice’*

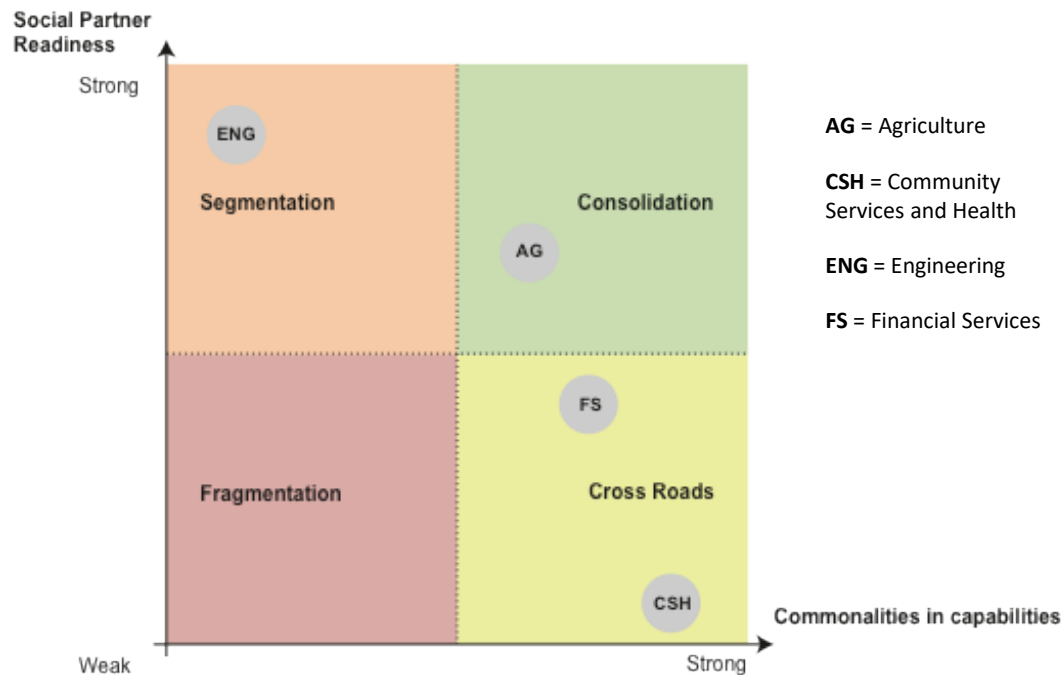
- › For example, care work, financial advice, logistics, engineering, animal and land husbandry, customer service
- › Why might these links be important?
  - Support development of adaptable, autonomous individuals
    - requires practical ability informed by coherent underpinning knowledge
  - Facilitate improved pathways within and between tertiary education and the labour market
  - Provide basis for workplaces with adaptive + innovative capabilities

=> How can vocational streams be improved?

### 3. What did we find? The key policy challenge.

- › Two enabling conditions characterise vocational stream potential
  - Commonalities in capabilities: identifiable linkages and overlaps between the skills and knowledge underpinning broad scope of practice.
  - Social partner readiness: the potential (realised or not) for stakeholder commitment and collaboration around workforce issues. Requires communities of trust

## › Vocational stream potential in the four case studies



# Examples of new categories in action: Agriculture

- › Strong potential for regional vocational streams
  - › Narrabri model being rolled out to Warren Blackwood (WA), Eyre Peninsula (SA), Loddon Mallee (Vic) and Western Downs (Qld)
- › Pivotal drivers of success:
  - › Great sensitivity to the skills ecosystem of the region
    - › Especially nature of local production and skills formation
  - › Engagement of local experts and champions
  - › Ongoing funding



# Compare to current policy in Agriculture: too many qualifications?

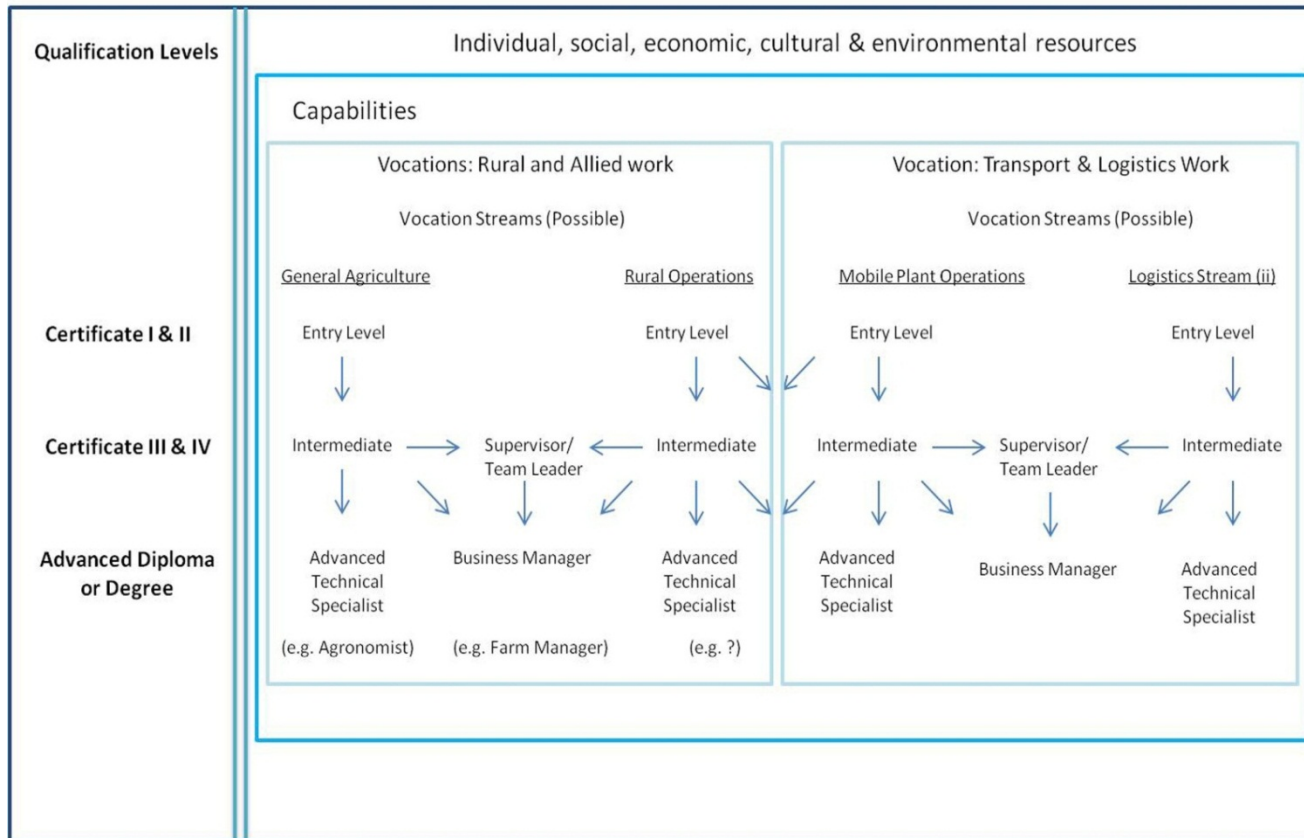
› In agriculture for example:

Qualification level	No. Available
Certificate I	13
Certificate II	36
Certificate III	70
Certificate IV	38
Diploma	33
Advanced Diploma	5
Vocational Graduate Certificate	1
Vocational Graduate Diploma	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>197</i>

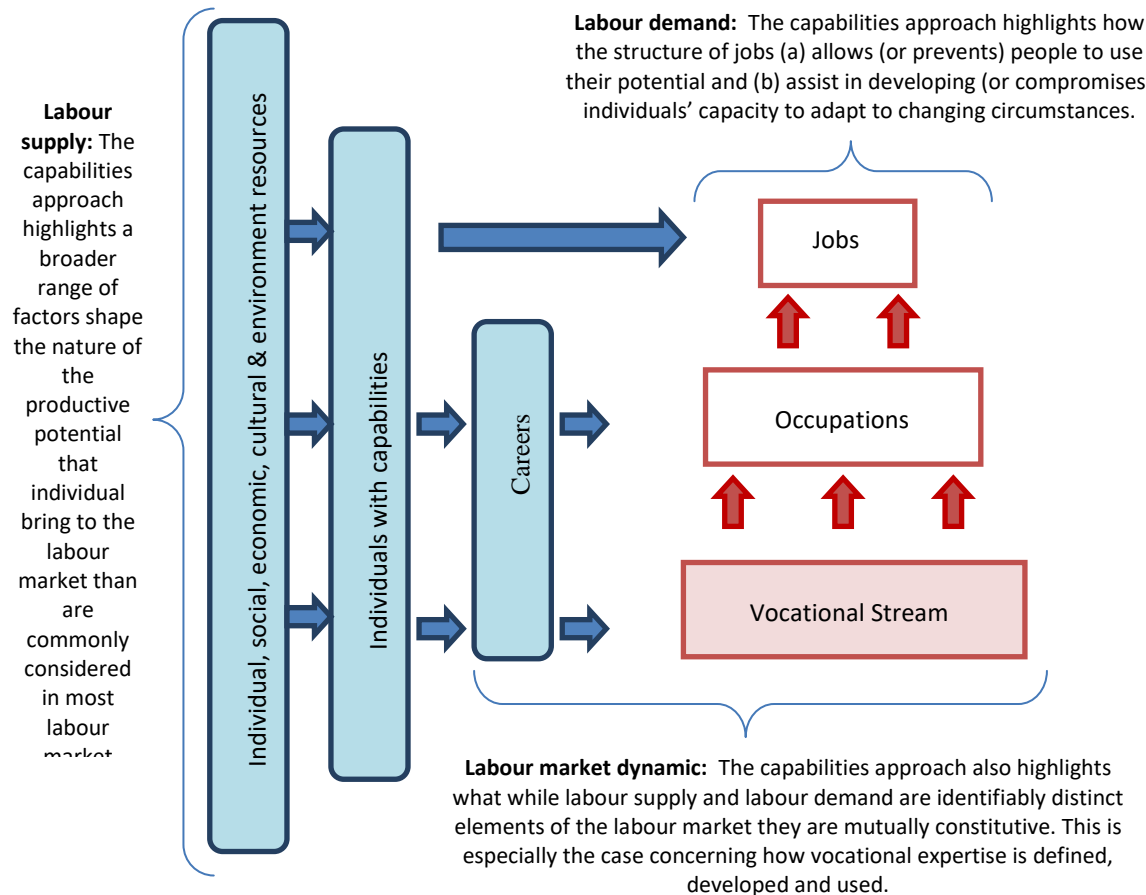
# Rethinking the question: Vocations and the capabilities approach

Elements of capability/ domains of expertise	Qualifications				
	Common Core	Certificates II, III + IV		Diploma	
	Foundations knowledge + skills at intermediate level	General Agriculture	Rural Operations	Agriculture	Business Management(Agriculture)
Agribusiness (eg financing, marketing, economics)	Structure of ag sector + basic clerical + HR skills	Common core	Common core	Common core	More advanced (to articulate into Business/management degree)
Sustainability practices (eg water, land, carbon management)	Basic principles + standard operating procedures	Common core	Common core	More advanced core	More advanced
Operations of machinery + technology	Advanced operational + routine maintenance principles	Common core	- Operation, transport + maintenance of mobile plant + specialist machinery - operation + recovery of 4 wheel drives - cleaning machinery of plant, animal + soils - welding using manual + gas metal arc welding - traffic controls	Common core	Common core
Production systems (eg irrigation + fertiliser use)	Understanding farm production systems	Common + specialism relevant to chosen area	Common + specialist knowledge re chemical application, transport + storage	More advanced	More advanced
Animal science + husbandry	Animal performance nutrition + breeding	Common + specialism of either: - intensive animal production - extensive animal production	Basic/common – ie working knowledge to help with how deploy equipment	More advanced (to articulate into a Ag Science degree)	More advanced – but not necessarily to articulation level with HE
Land, plant + crop science	Land, plant + crop production/ management	Common + specialism of either: - intensive production of horticulture for food - amenity horticulture - conservation land management	Basic/common – ie working knowledge to help with how deploy equipment.	More advanced (to articulate into an Ag Science degree)	More advanced – but not necessarily to articular level with HE

## Relationship between capabilities, vocations, vocational stream & qualification levels; potential examples from Rural and Logistical Work



## How a capabilities approach enriches notions of labour supply and labour demand and how they interact



## 4. Has the project been worth it?

### Yes, but ....

#### (a) On the positive side

- Huge amount of new knowledge created
- Extensive, concrete suggestions devised for a new approach
- Huge interest from a wide range of parties:
  - AWPA, AQFC, Community Services and Health ISC (and MSA)
  - State governments – especially SA and Tasmania
  - Greatest industry interest: Agriculture – especially Cotton and Dairy

#### (b) But ...

- Most nationally interested forums now closed or funding reduced
  - The dominant change in this period has been creation of publicly funded ‘training market’ based on the architecture of atomised and fragmented skill
  - No coherent ‘employee voice’ on this topic
- => irony: other than TAFE teachers, key agricultural employers are the only collective agents making a practical contribution to nurturing adaptive capacity

### › Keys to fostering vocational streams

- Sensitivity to structural differences in skills ecosystem – no ‘one size fits all’
- Early engagement of local experts and stakeholders, key to championing change and its benefits (eg agriculture, healthcare)
  - Need to support communities of trust, especially amongst employers, educators + individuals
  - Sectoral or regional bodies as key players in this process
- Importance of having mechanisms for defining roles, sharing decision making, conflict resolution and evaluation (eg ‘make it work’ in Narrabri, Clinical Services Networks in health)
  - Link between industry development + workforce development is integral (ie our ideas of ‘vocational development’)
- Potential for greater occupational links common within both large organisations (eg financial services, agriculture), and across regions (eg healthcare, agriculture)
  - Most likely first players: agriculture (dairy) and localities in health (Western Sydney)

- › Again like to thank NCVET for support – financial + organisational
  - But more important has been its sensibility: ideas matter and they take time to develop
  
- › Key parts of the VET system are dysfunctional.
  - Recent scandals in the stock market provide ample evidence of this
  - But within the system there are some good legacies of a pre-existing order
  - Pre-occupation with ***‘right skills, right time, right place’*** neglects the need to manage unavoidable uncertainty creatively + with discipline
  
- ⇒ Really need a vision of ‘vocational development as integral to economic + social renewal’
  - we’ve provided the pointers
  - It’s only by working together that we can answer the questions we’ve identified as important
  
- › In the short run gains will be made at sectoral and regional level
  - But we should always be ready to help shape the national agenda. It has been dominated by people who know little of education and even less about the labour market for too long.

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