

Part 3 Supporting social and economic participation

In addition to the performance reporting for each outcome, the department is engaged in cross-sectoral work that spans social policy, social innovation, social inclusion and the productivity of the economy. This section outlines the department's work around these activities.

Social policy

The department develops policies and strategies to help people increase their skills and abilities over the life course, in support of the Government's productivity and participation agendas. In addition to the Government's employment and training services and programs, disadvantaged Australians are provided with the support they need to reach their full potential and to access opportunities to develop the skills and capabilities they need to participate in society.

Social policy initiatives for disadvantaged groups

In 2010–11, the department continued to work closely with a range of agencies on policies directed at improving social and economic participation by disadvantaged groups. These groups include jobless families, low-income women, teenage parents, people with disability including mental illness, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, refugees, people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and people living in disadvantaged or regional locations.

The department made a significant contribution to government initiatives to address homelessness, through its participation on the Homelessness Delivery Review Board, input to the Prime Minister's Council on Homelessness, and work on improving outcomes for homeless people participating in DEEWR programs.

DEEWR contributed to the Government's priority focus on mental health through its significant involvement in developing the National Mental Health Reforms announced in the 2011–12 Budget. The department commenced the five-year review of the Disability Standards for Education. The standards are designed to clarify the rights of students with disability to access and participate in education and training on the same basis as students without disability, and give education providers more guidance on how they can meet their obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*.

In other key social policy initiatives in 2010–11, the department led work on improving the education and employment outcomes for refugees and migrants. This resulted in the finalisation of a data sharing and integration memorandum of understanding with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to facilitate the conduct of cross-portfolio research projects. This will help provide a quality evidence base for future policy development on vulnerable migrants and refugees. The department also developed and released internal guidelines on the use of interpreters (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages) which are being implemented department-wide. The Commonwealth Ombudsman identified the guidelines as best practice in his 2011 *Talking in Language: Indigenous language interpreters and government communication* report.

A cross-departmental project on vulnerable youth was led by the department during the year, with a particular focus on disadvantaged cohorts of young people, including those who are disengaged from education and work, those on income support and those who are highly vulnerable to homelessness, mental health problems and drug and alcohol misuse.

The department is also responsible for policy analysis and development in relation to workforce participation by women and jobless families. In 2010–11, policy development for engaging jobless families was a continued focus. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics data (June 2010), 70 per cent of jobless families are headed by single parents, with the majority headed by mothers. Likewise, the majority of teenage parents with primary care of their child/ren are women. Increasing women's workforce participation is included as a specific focus in work responding to skills shortages, including the review into reform options for the Australian apprenticeship system, the National Resources Sector Workforce Strategy and the Critical Skills Investment Fund. In February 2011, the department was represented on the

Australian delegation to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. This work has informed a number of key policy initiatives, such as the new trials for teenage parents and jobless families announced in the 2011–12 Budget as part of the Building Australia's Future Workforce package.

DEEWR has primary responsibility for eight high-level COAG targets, as part of the COAG reform agenda to improve the wellbeing of Australians now and into the future. The targets relate to educational attainment, and improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. The department assists the Department of Health and Ageing and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs in achieving three other COAG targets.

Social policy trials

The department conducts various social policy trials as part of the policy development process. Findings from these trials help to shape further policy initiatives.

Family Centred Employment Project

The Family Centred Employment Project is a three-year demonstration project that began on 1 July 2010 and aims to address the multiple and entrenched barriers to employment experienced by 365 jobless families on a range of income support payments. The project is being delivered in three priority employment areas across Australia. It began in Goodna, Queensland and Broadmeadows, Victoria in July 2010 and Mansfield Park and Angle Park, South Australia in November 2010.

The project model adapts services to the needs of families in order to assist at least one family member towards employment. Services are being delivered by providers who are expert at helping this client group and who have significant local knowledge. While the project has a strong employment focus, it recognises that overcoming entrenched and multiple barriers to employment may require supporting participants to take interim steps on the pathway to employment. For example, providing assistance with access to child care, help with preparing a budget or encouraging participation in education and training may represent substantial progress towards employment for an individual. At 30 June 2011, across the three project sites, more than 100 jobless families volunteered to receive services as part of the projects. Providers have assisted families to navigate access to services such as financial counselling, legal advice, housing support, and employment and training.

Improving School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure

The Improving School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure (SEAM) is a trial that uses the possible suspension of income support payments, and the offer of Centrelink social work support, to encourage parents to ensure that their children of compulsory school age are both enrolled in school and attending regularly. SEAM recognises that state and territory governments have primary responsibility for school enrolment and attendance issues, and provides an additional tool that state and territory schools and education authorities can use when parents in receipt of income support payments are not engaging with education authorities or schools about the non-enrolment or very low school attendance of their children.

Income support payment suspensions under SEAM are only used as a last resort, where it is clear that the parent is refusing to engage with education authorities on their child's very low attendance or non-enrolment despite extensive support from education authorities and Centrelink.

SEAM is currently being trialled in six Northern Territory communities, in the Logan area in southern Brisbane and in the remote Queensland communities of Mornington Island and Doomadgee. At the end of the 2010 school year, more than 5000 children had parents who were in scope for SEAM.

SEAM has proven effective in ensuring children are enrolled in school, and improvement in children's school attendance is evident. The receipt by a parent of an attendance notice from Centrelink warning that they must take reasonable steps to improve their child's attendance at school or risk having their income support payments suspended has had an initial positive impact on the attendance of the child associated with that notice.

At 30 June 2011 (and since SEAM began), 242 parents across both the Northern Territory and Queensland had had their income support payments suspended at least once under SEAM for either failing to provide Centrelink with the enrolment details for their child or failing to take reasonable steps to improve their child's attendance.

The SEAM trial was extended in the 2011–12 Budget until 30 June 2012, at which time it will be evaluated.

Teenage parents and jobless families

In the 2011–12 Budget, the Government announced 'Building Australia's Future Workforce: trained up and ready for work', a package designed to assist Australia to build an educated and skilled workforce while ensuring that there are opportunities for all Australians to experience the benefits of work. The package includes several place-based components, including two new trials for teenage parents and jobless families that will look at new ways of providing parents with opportunities to participate in education and for their children to participate in early childhood activities. This will build teenage and jobless parents' capacity to join the workforce successfully in the future.

These trials and the Family Centred Employment Project will be fully evaluated upon their conclusion to inform future policy directions.

Geospatial and regional performance monitoring

The department supports the design and delivery of programs and services through its online spatial analysis platform, SOLAR, which provides geospatial and mapping services at the community and regional level. For example, the department uses geospatial mapping to chart local services and organisations in areas where new programs will be delivered. During 2010–11, the department consulted extensively on the adoption of the new geographical framework, the Australian Statistical Geography Standard and the definition of regional Australia as it applies to DEEWR.

Economic analysis

Consistent with the Government's productivity agenda, the department provides advice on developments in the Australian economy, particularly in relation to macroeconomic performance and household wellbeing, and develops and promotes evidence spanning the life course, to support policy development focused on enhancing skills and capabilities.

The department analyses and designs income support programs to promote social and economic participation by working-age Australians. This work supports the advancement of broader goals, such as wage-setting policy, labour supply and labour force participation, and human capital development, including incentives to raise skills. In 2010–11, the department contributed to strategic government thinking in the fields of tax and income support reform directions and changes to minimum wages.

Engagement with international organisations

During 2010–11 the department continued its high level of engagement with international bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Association of Public Employment Services.

The department is represented by a Minister-Counsellor (Education and Employment) on Australia's permanent delegation to the OECD. The Minister-Counsellor is based in Paris and facilitates the department's work with the OECD. The department is also an active participant in key committees that govern the work of the OECD, including the Education Policy Committee, the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee and the Cooperative Action Programme on Local Economic and Employment Development. Through this engagement, the department helps shape and drive the OECD research and analytical agenda, based on domestic policy evidence and requirements, international developments and international comparability.

The department also manages Australia's participation in a range of other OECD projects, including the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, the Programme for International Student Assessment, the Teacher and Learning International Survey and the international indicators of education systems, the OECD's education statistics area.

Social inclusion

The Australian Government's vision of a socially inclusive society is one in which all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in community life.

The department continued the implementation of major reforms to help build more inclusive communities and address the Government's key social inclusion priorities as identified by the National Social Inclusion Statement, *A stronger, fairer Australia*. This involved collaboration with state and territory governments on national partnerships for early childhood development and low-socioeconomic school communities; Closing the Gap strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians; and activities under the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy and the homelessness strategy. The department contributed to the Government's service delivery and not-for-profit sector reforms, and administered a range of place-based strategies such as the Priority Employment Areas initiative, the Family Centred Employment Project and the Innovation Fund.

The Australian Government is also supporting social inclusion by providing a range of incentives and opportunities to encourage people to participate in study, become job ready or move into paid employment. The Building Australia's Future Workforce package, announced in the 2011–12 Budget, is part of this comprehensive effort to achieve greater levels of employment and participation. The department is driving key reforms under the package which will encourage the most disadvantaged groups in our society to develop the work and life skills they need to be part of an increasingly complex and technology-driven economy.

The department also provided information and feedback to the Australian Social Inclusion Board on various issues ranging from jobless families to philanthropy. The board provided input to the development of the national social inclusion measurement framework and reporting strategy, and DEEWR was a key contributor to this process.

Social inclusion measurement framework

The Government is committed to public accountability for progress against the national social inclusion measurement framework—a part of the National Social Inclusion Statement.

The framework is intended to reflect both longer term goals and outcomes of social inclusion and the key areas of government action.

DEEWR has responsibility for reporting against six strategic change indicators that cover three priority areas.

- Priority area 1: Targeting jobless families with children to increase work opportunities, improve parenting and build capacity
 - Proportion of long-term unemployed job seekers in employment, education or training three months following participation in employment services
 - Proportion of long-term unemployed job seekers off benefit 12 months following participation in employment services
 - Labour force participation of single parents by age group of youngest child (0–4, 5–9, 10–14).
- Priority area 2: Improving the life chances of children at greatest risk of long-term disadvantage
 - Proportion of children (aged 3–5 years) from special needs groups enrolled in state and territory funded or provided preschools
 - Proportion of students at or above the national minimum standard in reading and numeracy for:

- Students in schools participating in the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership in years 3, 5 and 7
- Indigenous students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9.
- Priority area 3: Improving outcomes for people living with disability
 - Proportion of job seekers with disability in employment, education or training three months after participation in employment services.

The department's progress against these strategic change indicators is outlined in Appendix 4 of this report.

Social innovation

The department has developed policies and projects to promote social innovation and innovative cross-sector collaborations, with an initial focus on the development of a social impact investment market in Australia to improve access to capital for not-for-profit organisations, social enterprises and other organisations with a social purpose.

A highlight of this work has been the selection of funds managers under the Social Enterprise Development and Investment Fund. The successful funds managers will establish investment funds that provide flexible, tailored financial products and support for Australia's social enterprises to help them grow their business and achieve greater social impact in their communities. The fund is also seeking to catalyse the development of the broader social impact investment market in Australia. It is anticipated that the funds will be fully operational by the end of 2011.

Not-for-profit sector reforms

The department is working closely with the Office for the Not-for-Profit Sector in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet on implementing a range of whole-of-government reforms arising from the Productivity Commission's report on the contribution of the not-for-profit sector in Australia. In June 2010, DEEWR and the Office for the Not-for-Profit Sector made a joint submission to the Senate Economics Committee inquiry into finance for the not-for-profit sector, which provided an overview of the Australian and international social impact investment markets. The department is also a member of a number of working groups that support the work of the Not-for-Profit Sector Reform Council.

Research and evaluation

In 2010–11, the department undertook a range of research, analysis and evaluation activities to support the development of evidence-based policy advice and improved program delivery. Areas of particular focus were the dynamics of income support receipt, patterns in workforce participation and the impact of education and training on labour market outcomes.

The department conducted research into a range of economic and labour market issues that are relevant to social, educational and labour market policy.

Some examples of major research and evaluation activities during the year include:

- projects on early school leavers, welfare and activation, employment retention and mature-age workforce participation, conducted by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research under the Social Policy Research Services Agreement
- studying the factors affecting the difference in cost of providing higher education in regional areas compared to metropolitan areas
- capturing the experiences and expectations of higher education international students using the International Student Barometer
- measuring the accessibility and effectiveness of Disability Employment Services during the first year of operation
- continued analysis on access and participation in preschool programs and identifying factors that influence take-up of early childhood education services

- examination of student achievement in Asian language education across four target languages
- analysis of language, literacy and numeracy levels and the impact that shortages in these foundation skills have in the workplace
- ongoing monitoring and evaluation of SEAM
- development of an evaluation strategy for the Family Centred Employment Project
- completion of a post-implementation review of the Golden Gurus program
- analysis of the impacts of the Learn or Earn policy, the Training Supplement and the change in the liquid assets waiting period to inform the overall evaluation of the Jobs and Training Compact.

The department's research and evaluation capability is supported by ongoing development of primary data collections, including longitudinal administrative datasets of income support recipients and job seekers.