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Evaluation of Flexible Learning Victoria

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Building Better Learning

SUPPORTING THE FLEXIBLE LEARNING SECTOR

EVALUATION OF FLEXIBLE LEARNING VICTORIA

FEBRUARY 2017

Dr Dorothy Bottrell
Karen Rosauer

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the Elders, their families and forebears of both clans of the Boonwurrung and Wurundjeri tribes of the Kulin Nation, who are the Traditional Custodians of Melbourne land for many centuries. We acknowledge that the land on which we work is the place of age old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal and that the Kulin Nation people's continuous living culture has played a significant and unique role in the life of this region.

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About

The Victoria Institute

The Victoria Institute is a research unit with a focus on inclusive education. We work collaboratively with a range of government departments, policy makers, philanthropic organisations and community groups to improve educational experiences and outcomes for all.

Well placed within Victoria University, The Victoria Institute has social justice as a key focus. Our targeted research program aims to build better learning and greater participation and success for students from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds as well as those who are disengaged or excluded. This includes those young people enrolled in flexible learning programs, which has been a focus of Victoria Institute research over several years.

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Abbreviations

ACE	Adult Community Education
ACFE	Adult, Community and Further Education
BGK LLEN	Bayside, Glen Eira, Kingston Local Learning and Employment Network
CAIF	Capacity and Innovation Fund
CAIF7	Capacity and Innovation Fund Round 7
DET	Department of Education and Training
EO	Executive Officer
FELN	Flexible Engagement and Learning Network
FLN	Flexible Learning Network
FLO	Flexible Learning Option
FLP	Flexible Learning Program
FLV	Flexible Learning Victoria
FLaCA	Flexible Learning and Careers Association
FMP LLEN	Frankston Mornington Peninsula Local Learning and Employment Network
IE LLEN	Inner East Local Learning and Employment Network
LLEN	Local Learning and Employment Network
MCM	Melbourne City Mission
PL	Professional Learning
PW	Project Worker
SE LLEN	South East Local Learning and Employment Network
SFYS	School Focused Youth Service
SMR	Southern Metropolitan Region
VU	Victoria University

Executive Summary

Background

Flexible Learning Victoria (FLV) is a professional body established to support the work of flexible learning program providers in Victoria. Flexible Learning Programs (FLPs) provide educational pathways and support to young people who have experienced barriers to completing secondary education in mainstream contexts, mainly due to social marginalisation or socioeconomic disadvantage. National research on FLPs (Te Riele, 2014) and on flexible learning provision in metropolitan regions of Victoria (Ellum & Longmuir, 2013; Waugh, 2014) concluded there was a need to recognise and develop FLPs as a sector. These reports clearly articulated the need for flexible learning providers to come together: to enable the sharing of tools and ideas; to build partnerships; to build an understanding of themselves as a sector; to organise relevant professional learning; and to advocate for the sector.

In 2015, FLV was created under the "Leading Practice and Leading Change in Youth Education" (LPLCYE) project funded by the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board Capacity and Innovation Fund Round 7 (CAIF7), to create a new umbrella network across Victoria, for providers of youth education for students not in mainstream education. A consortium of four organisations of the Flexible Learning and Careers Association (FLaCA) initiated the project and the work of FLV was guided by the Consortium Committee and a Steering Committee, and coordinated by a Project Manager (initially 0.4, later 0.6 EFT position). Consortium members overseeing the project were SkillsPlus (Lead), Narre Community Learning Centre, Melbourne City Mission and the Brotherhood of St Laurence, with project management by the Bayside Glen Eira Kingston LLEN (BGKLLEN).

Evaluation of FLV

The evaluation of Flexible Learning Victoria investigated how successful FLV has been in its first year in meeting its objectives for the network's development, support for professional learning activities, facilitation of partnerships and collaborations, and advocacy. Victoria Institute (VI) researchers worked in collaboration with the FLV Project Manager to establish the parameters of the evaluation and baseline data, develop data collection tools and data analysis methodology and formulate a plan for the report. The data was collected by the FLV Project Manager and analysed by the report authors, informed by case study methodology.

Guided by the LPLCYE project objectives, the evaluation addressed the following questions:

1. How successful has FLV been in establishing an overarching body for providers of youth education for students not in mainstream education in Victoria?
2. How successful has FLV been in supporting professional learning activities for these providers, in particular for Learn Locals?
3. How successful has the FLV network been in facilitating connections among providers, in particular Learn Locals?

4. How successful has the FLV network been as a platform for advocacy on behalf of the flexible and inclusive learning sector in Victoria, and in particular for Learn Locals?

Data collected and analysed included documentation on the formation and development of FLV, network membership details, an online stakeholder survey, and feedback on professional learning activities. The data analysis comprised descriptive statistics of quantitative elements and thematic analysis of qualitative data.

Where the following findings pertain to FLPs and Flexible Learning Networks (FLNs), it is estimated that Learn Locals comprise 40 to 50 percent of providers.

Key findings

FLV has been highly successful in all four areas of establishing an overarching body, supporting professional learning, facilitating connections among providers and as a platform for advocacy. Key achievements of FLV in its first year include:

Establishing an overarching body

- Across the diverse constituency, FLV stakeholders are now referring to “the sector” and identifying FLV as a “peak body”.
- FLV has effectively combined a clear and cohesive organisational structure with a “communities of practice” approach to networking.
- 14 active or developing FL networks are now established across Victoria, supported by 27 LLENs (Local learning and Employment Networks) and reaching over 200 FLP providers.
- A broad range of providers have engaged with FLV in the formation of FLNs, including Learn Locals, schools, non-school senior secondary providers, TAFEs, Adult Community Education providers, not-for-profit and private community services and training organisations.
- There is a high level of awareness and engagement with FLV across Victoria on the part of FLP providers and “allies” connected to the sector, especially community organisations that have partnered with FLPs.
- There is strong “ownership” of FLV amongst relevant organisations. However, in the short time-frame of FLV’s operation, ownership and leadership have not yet developed across the board.

Supporting professional learning

- FLV supported 13 professional learning (PL) events; that is on average more than one per month.
- FLV worked with FLNs, LLENs and FLPs to provide PL that is responsive to different local contexts and complements existing offerings.
- FLV supported existing events, created new events for local FLNs, supported local FLNs with their own events and sponsored regional providers to attend larger PL events in other regions. FLV's brokerage fund for PL was important to successfully supporting PL activities.

- Feedback on PL events indicated, on average, 86% participant satisfaction and in the stakeholder survey, 88% indicated that FLV's support to professional learning benefited their work.

Facilitating connections

- The wide range of FLV initiated partnerships and collaborations focused on building new relationships, welcoming in new workers, sharing information and resources, collaboratively developing PL events and working with current government initiatives.
- Outcomes of collaboration within and between FLNs include shared knowledge of good practice models in program design and delivery; greater emphasis on complementary rather than duplicating services and this has facilitated more direct delivery time for some FLPs; and efficiency gains where joint use of facilities, resources and relief staff has been practicable.
- FLV has fostered a collegiality amongst providers and helped to alleviate some of the pressures that have tended to foster a competitive environment.
- Over 25 new partnerships or collaborations were identified by stakeholders.
- 81% of stakeholders identified tangible benefits to their work as a result of networking facilitated by FLV; and, in the short time-frame, 60% identified benefits of new partnerships.

Advocacy

- FLV has established itself as a credible umbrella organisation, speaking on behalf of the sector in consultative conversations with the Department of Education.
- Listening to the views and concerns of providers has been important to creating a platform for advocacy and this is reflected in FLPs coming to see themselves as a sector.
- Amongst providers there is a clear perception that FLV can be a strong advocate for the sector in the future.

Going forward

Most stakeholders are saying that FLV is very important for the FLP sector and that they are excited about moving forward with FLV. There is strong evidence that FLV should take a leading role as a peak body, to continue to work in the key areas related to the original objectives of the LPLCYE project and to develop further goals to build on successes to date.

The following recommendations for FLV going forward are based on the evaluation findings and recommendations of the Steering Committee and stakeholders.

1. **Ongoing project manager role.** This role is vital to continue and lead FLV's work, in order to fully operationalise most of the new networks and potentially establish additional networks to complete state-wide coverage.
2. **Advocacy**. This is viewed as a key FLV role for the sector, particularly advocacy on funding and resources. FLV is well placed to continue to raise awareness of the sector with government departments

and community, philanthropic and funding organisations and to advocate on policy matters affecting the sector. However, FLV needs to strengthen its own infrastructure in order to effectively advocate as a peak body.

3. **Coordinating roles.** Specific coordinating roles that are being seen as the remit of FLV in order to progress the sector include data collection and analysis; developing an accurate membership database; to track, document and differentiate statistics for particular groups (eg. Learn Locals); develop the use of online communication.

4. **Membership.** Moving to paid membership when many FLNs have only very recently commenced could be risky. However, once FLV has been in place longer and people are more cognisant of its value at local, regional and state level, the move to a paid membership system may be feasible.

5. **Funding the next phase.** This is an imperative as the LPLCYE project is concluded and longer-term funding will be needed for FLV's effective development as a peak body.

1 Introduction

This report documents the evaluation of Flexible Learning Victoria (FLV), a professional body established in 2015 to support the work of flexible learning providers in Victoria. FLV was created under the "Leading Practice and Leading Change in Youth Education" (LPLCYE) project funded by the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board Capacity and Innovation Fund Round 7 (CAIF7), to create a new umbrella network across Victoria, for providers of youth education for students not in mainstream education. The project included funding to conduct an evaluation, working with researchers from the Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and lifelong learning at Victoria University (VU). The evaluation focused on investigating how successful FLV has been in its first year in meeting its objectives for the network's development, support for professional learning activities and advocacy and facilitation of partnerships and collaborations.

The following introduction provides an overview of flexible learning programs, the objectives of the LPLCYE project and the approach taken in evaluating Flexible Learning Victoria.

1.1 Flexible learning programs

Flexible Learning Programs (FLPs) provide education and support to young people and operate in a range of community contexts. FLPs are also described as "alternative" schools and programs as they differ from "mainstream" educational provision. FLPs "offer pathways to successful educational opportunities specifically for young people experiencing barriers to school completion due to social and economic disadvantage". (Plows & Te Riele, 2016, p.3). This is a vital role, both because currently significant numbers of young people in Victoria leave education completely between Years 9 to 12 each year (Department of Education and Training, 2015), and because education has repeatedly been shown to be associated with "improved life chances" across a range of dimensions, including employment, earnings, health, life satisfaction, civic and social engagement, and reduced crime (McLachlan, Gilfillan & Gordon, 2013, p. 109). FLPs, in helping young people to achieve important educational outcomes, are of benefit to not only the individual, but are also important to society as a whole.

In their recent national study, Lamb, Jackson, Walstab and Huo (2015) found that while "around 23 per cent of young people in Victoria do not attain a Year 12 or Certificate III equivalent by age 19" (p.vi), substantially more Indigenous young people, young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and males, do not complete Year 12 or its equivalent, by age 19. In Victoria around "10,000 young people in Years 9 to 12 leave education completely each year" (Department of Education and Training, 2015). The Victorian government has set a goal to halve that number of "early leavers" by 2025. The FLPs on which FLV is focused, have a vital role to play in helping the Victorian State government to achieve this target (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010).

In addition to supporting the achievement of this goal through direct provision, FLPs could, as Te Riele (2014) suggests, usefully be seen as "showcases of innovation" applicable to mainstream education.

> *FLPs demonstrate success – in terms of learning, gaining qualifications, personal development and community contributions – with students who frequently had been given up on, or perceived as 'too hard', in mainstream settings. The ways in which FLPs work, and the actions they take to achieve these successes, can serve to inform change in mainstream education.*
>
> Te Riele, 2014, p.83

There are a growing number of FLPs around Victoria and nationwide; with more than 900 FLPs educating over 70,000 young people across Australia (Te Riele, 2014). These FLPs might be operating within mainstream schools, operating within TAFE or community colleges, or as separate stand-alone schools or programs.

In her major study of FLPs around Australia, Te Riele (2014) described the great diversity in types of FLPs and the strengths and challenges which come with this diversity. One of the main strengths of all FLPs is their responsiveness to their particular cohort of students – for example, in offering curriculum and learning activity choices that are relevant to young people with a history of disrupted education, those living in out-of-home care or homeless, young parents and students in a range of circumstances that place them at risk of not completing school. However, the diversity in provision is not without some pitfalls:

> *The diversity across and within these three types of programs is a strength, with programs able to adapt to their own cohort of students and context. It is also, however, a drawback, as it hinders programs from coming together as a 'sector' of flexible learning programs. They are often isolated, ad hoc, and underfunded, and may have little time for reflection as a unit, group or community on what really works and why.*

Diversity of FLPs is also reflected in the heterogeneity of their funding security, resources, systemic support and staff professional development opportunities (Mills & McGregor, 2014; Plows & Te Riele, 2016; Te Riele, 2014; Wirenga & Taylor, 2015). In a Victoria-wide study of professional learning in FLPs, Plows and Te Riele (2016) found that while providers are highly committed to PL, there is a need for a wide range of professional learning opportunities that closely reflects the diversity of FLPs. Plows & Te Riele's (2016) report recommends that barriers to providers' access to meaningful professional learning needs to be addressed. The most common constraints are costs, availability of release time and relief staffing. Gaining access to PL is also more challenging for smaller or more recently established or isolated FLPs.

Te Riele (2014) found that despite the great diversity amongst FLPs, they are unified in a common core mission. FLPs are all committed to enabling "young people for whom schooling previously has not worked well, to learn and to achieve valued credentials, improved wellbeing, and enhanced life opportunities" (p.76). And this shared mission, she argues, together with the large number of FLPs, is "evidence for a significant flexible learning sector" (p.76).

Establishing a distinct collective identity as a sector would bring significant benefits to flexible learning programs as a group. Te Riele (2014) suggested it would allow them to address the drawbacks of fragmentation through improved professional development, communication, quality assurance, research and advocacy on behalf of FLPs and their students. Plows and Te Riele (2016) also recommended closer

collaboration across the sector, and with funding bodies and government agencies, is needed to more systematically support and widen professional collaboration and sector-wide professional learning provision. Te Riele (2014) argued that in order to come together as a sector, formal and informal collaboration can be facilitated "through joining / establishing a local, state or national network with other flexible learning programs" (p. 77).

Since her 2014 report, Te Riele's vision of FLPs building a collective identity as a sector, and coming together to collaborate through a network or networks, is being brought to life through the *Leading Practice and Leading Change in Youth Education Project*, and the creation of Flexible Learning Victoria.

Note on the use of terms

In this report the terms FLP (flexible learning program or provider) and FILP (flexible and inclusive learning program or provider), are used interchangeably. Currently both terms are used being used by FLV and by providers in the sector.

1. Flexible learning programs and providers

There are a range of providers of education for youth who are not in mainstream education. Because providers offer a range of different types of programs, and can be funded in a variety of ways, and referred to in different ways, the sector can become confusing. Following is an outline of some of the ways these programs and providers are categorised.

Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) RTOs have been approved to deliver government subsidised and accredited training. They offer a wide variety of courses, and a wide variety of different types of organisations may be registered as RTOs, including universities, TAFEs, community colleges, neighbourhood houses, charitable organisations, community houses, and private (for profit) education providers. For example each of these organisations is registered as an RTO to deliver foundation skills courses: Cire (formerly Upper Yarra Community House), Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre, Homesglen Institute of TAFE, Portland Workskills, Shepparton Adult & Community Education Inc., SkillsPlus Ltd.

Schools There are some government schools, which have been set up specifically as providers of flexible and inclusive education, such as Oakwood School, Pavilion School and Kensington Community High School. There are some registered schools run by charitable organisations, such as Hester Hornbrook Academy run by Melbourne City Mission and St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre in North Melbourne run by Youth +.

Within Schools / Flexible Learning Options (FLOs) There are flexible learning programs that operate within a high school, sometimes they are located separately, such as Bendigo Senior Secondary College's NETschool Centre, or sometimes on the same campus. Sometimes these programs are known as FLOs, for example, La Trobe Valley FLO.

Learn Locals Learn Locals are government-registered organisations. They may deliver pre-accredited courses and accredited courses. If they deliver pre-accredited courses they must be registered with the Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFE), and when they deliver accredited training, they must be registered as an RTO. A wide variety of organisations are registered as learn locals, including

community houses, neighbourhood learning centres, charitable organisations and the college of adult education. An organisation may be registered both as a Learn Local and an RTO, and may offer both pre-accredited and accredited training, for example Melbourne City Mission and Brotherhood of St Laurence.

2. Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs)

There are 31 LLENs in Victoria. They have been set up to "support young people, 10-19 years old, within its geographical boundaries by improving their participation, engagement, attainment and transition outcomes" (Department of Education and Training, 2016).

LLENs are not in themselves FLPs, but may include, as part of their network, education and training providers, including flexible learning providers and a variety of community organisations, family organisations, business and industry.

1.2 Leading practice and leading change in youth education project objectives

The *Leading Practice and Leading Change in Youth Education Project* aimed to create a new umbrella body or network for providers of youth education for students not in mainstream education. The intention was to use the structure of the existing Flexible Learning and Careers Association (FLaCA[1]), to establish growth of the network over the South East region of Victoria and later, into other parts of Victoria.

The key objectives of the project were:

1. The creation of new overarching body for providers of youth education for students not in mainstream education (commonly referred to as Flexible Learning or Alternative Education).
2. Establish growth of the network over the SE region and later, into other parts of Victoria.
3. Create targeted, relevant and action based professional learning activities in order to share best practice.

The project sought to achieve:

- An overarching governing body with a high percentage of relevant member organisations across Victoria.
- A thorough review of existing programs and models.
- Increase capacity and quality of programs for all involved organisations including providers, mainstream schools and youth agencies.
- Active and sustainable partnerships, connections and collaborations between providers that lead to meaningful and impact-based initiatives that enhance the learners' options and pathways, providers' ability to deliver quality education and the sectors' capacity to promote and deliver an effective localized and targeted learning opportunities.

[1] FLaCA was established in 2014 for providers of alternative and flexible learning for student aged 15-19 across the Southern Metropolitan Region (SMR) of Melbourne.

- A sustainable fee based membership and ongoing support through in kind and financial investment from community and businesses sources.
- Greater connectivity between education and training sectors, especially in the cross-fertilisation of ideas, innovation and resources across schools, TAFEs, RTOs and Learn Locals.
- Advocacy platforms and the recognition and valuing of the sector (especially Learn Locals) and the young people.

The Leading Practice and Leading Change in Youth Education Project was funded by the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board Capacity and Innovation Fund (CAIF), via the "Communities of Practice for Quality" stream. The CAIF is intended to "enable Learn Local organisations to access grants in order to improve their capacity to increase learner participation and attainment" (ACFE, 2015, p.2).

Funding was applied for by a consortium of four organisations (the Consortium) led by SkillsPlus. The other Consortium organisations were Narre Community Learning Centre, Melbourne City Mission (MCM) and Brotherhood of St Laurence. These four organisations, all members of FLaCA, had come together out of recognition of the 'need, desire and opportunity (identified in two research reports on flexible learning providers in the Southern Metropolitan region [Ellum & Longmuir, 2013; Waugh, 2014]) to establish strategic, pedagogical and professional development focused networks or communities of practice that link providers more effectively'.

Once funded, the Consortium Committee continued overall management of the project, which commenced in September 2015, for a total period of 18 months (including a 3 month start-up phase and a 3 month finalisation phase). The project was housed at BGK LLEN (Bayside Glen Eira Kingston Local Learning and Employment Network), with BGK LLEN providing project management direction. A steering committee was also established in October 2015 in order to guide formation of the new network.

The overarching body created by the project, was named Flexible Learning Victoria (FLV). The project will generally be referred to as FLV throughout the rest of this report.

1.3 Evaluation research questions and methodology

The brief from Flexible Learning Victoria (FLV) to Victoria University (VU) was to engage with the 'Project Manager – FLV' in the evaluation and monitoring of the growth, sustainability and applicability of the network to professionals. Victoria Institute researchers worked in collaboration with the FLV Project Manager to establish the parameters of the evaluation and baseline data, develop data collection tools and data analysis methodology and formulate a plan for the report. Monitoring FLV development over the course of its first year occurred through regular meetings to discuss the progress of various elements of the project such as networking and professional learning events and to identify relevant documentation for inclusion in the data-set as the project unfolded. Additionally, quarterly monitoring meetings focused on top-level analysis of the data collected to date, review of the data collection processes and identification of potentially additional data to enrich the data-set in light of the research questions.

The development of research questions and methodology for the evaluation was guided by the project's objectives as outlined above (section 1.2).

Research questions:

1. How successful has the FLV network been in establishing an overarching body for providers of youth education for students not in mainstream education in Victoria in terms of:
    a. Growth of membership beyond the original FLACA network
    b. Diversity of membership (types of providers and geographic spread)
    c. Awareness and understanding of the network amongst relevant organisations, in particular Learn Locals
    d. Level of ownership and leadership of the network amongst relevant organisations
2. How successful has the FLV network been in supporting professional learning activities for these providers, in particular for Learn Locals?
    a. Which PL activities were undertaken with support of the FLV network?
    b. Who was the PL for? Was it targeted?
    c. What was the PL about? Was it considered relevant?
    d. How was the PL conducted? Was it action based?
    e. What was the perceived benefit of the PL?
3. How successful has the FLV network been in facilitating connections among providers, in particular Learn Locals?
    a. Which partnerships and collaborations were undertaken with support of the FLV network?
    b. Who took part in those partnerships and collaborations? Were any cross-sectoral (i.e. schools, RTOs and Learn Locals)?
    c. What was the focus and nature of those partnerships and collaborations?
    d. What was the impact of those partnerships and collaborations?
    e. Are these partnerships and collaborations expected to continue?
4. How successful has the FLV network been as a platform for advocacy on behalf of the flexible and inclusive learning sector in Victoria, and in particular for Learn Locals?
    a. Which advocacy activities were undertaken with support of the FLV network?
    b. What were the outcomes of those activities?

Methodology

The evaluation was based on the analysis of information collected by the Project Manager of FLV, as part of their role supporting the project. VU researchers provided support to the project manager with the development of the data collection tools, data analysis and reporting.

Methodologically, the evaluation is based on case study principles and procedures (Yin, 2003). Case study method is a holistic approach that is highly contextualised and particularly suitable for drawing together a range of documentary evidence that includes both quantitative and qualitative components.

The research included four data collection elements: collection of documentation on the formation and development of FLV, collection of network membership details, online stakeholder survey, and feedback on professional learning activities.

The procedures involved assembling documents as data, selecting from the collection those that addressed each of the research questions. Separate analysis of the stakeholder survey and professional learning feedback was undertaken to compile descriptive statistics on participation in FLV. Responses to open-ended questions in the survey and professional learning activity feedback forms were analysed thematically.

Ethics approval for this research was sought and obtained from the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (HRE-16067).

Documentation

Documentation related to the development and running of the FLV project was collected by the FLV Project Manager. This included newsletters, regular reports to the funding body, the Consortium Committee and the Steering Committee, meeting minutes, programs for professional learning run, membership documentation, budgeting documentation, research papers and reports. It also included the project manager's reflections on the FLV project - its development, challenges and successes and minutes from FLV evaluation discussions held in the October 2016 steering committee meeting and the December 2016 Consortium Committee meeting.

This documentation was used both to give an understanding of the development, activities and scope of the FLV project, and to contribute to answering the research questions around successfulness of key aspects of the FLV project.

Database

In developing the FLV project, a database was built comprising interested and potentially interested people and organisations, including those who had expressed an interest in receiving the FLV newsletter, and people and organisations associated with local flexible learning networks (FLNs). Because of the way the FLV project evolved, which will be elaborated in the following chapter, it was not possible to compile a definitive list of all FLV or FLN members. However the database was helpful for the FLV Project Manager, in developing maps showing the reach of the FLV project across Victoria, and estimates of the numbers of people and organisations involved.

Online survey of FLV stakeholders

An online survey was sent to around 450 potential stakeholders around Victoria. It was sent both to people with high involvement in FLV or a local FLN, and to people who had just attended a FLV sponsored professional learning event (such as the At Risk Forum). While initial project planning had envisaged a member survey, the way FLV developed, FLV does not have a list of all providers who a part of FLNs. Rather, FLV has a list of all providers and individuals who have asked to receive the FLV newsletter at a FLV or FLN professional learning event, membership lists of some of the FLNs, all LLENs, and other stakeholders and interested people. Using a mixture of closed and open questions, the survey collected data on:

- Involvement with FLV
- Perceptions of FLV
- Impact of FLV
- Suggestions for direction and improvements

In total 76 responses were received. Of these three were removed because they were blank except for the questions relating to role and geographical location of the service. A fourth response was removed because the respondent said only “Have not heard of FLV”, and “no involvement”. This leaves 72 responses included in the analysis. Of these 72 responses, five people did not answer beyond question seven. These responses have been included in the analysis.

The survey data was analysed in Excel using descriptive statistics in order to provide an overview of stakeholder perspectives. Responses to open questions (e.g. description of new partnerships and collaborations; future priorities and involvement in FLV) were analysed thematically. Although not all of the survey questions related directly to the research questions (e.g. questions on stakeholders’ future involvement in FLV; a research agenda for FLV), we have sometimes drawn on them where the responses related to a key theme, or reinforced themes identified in responses to the focal questions. Such responses provided some indication of the significance of certain themes, which was important to interpretation of the data.

Feedback on professional learning activities

At each professional learning (PL) activity that FLV organised or supported, participants completed a feedback sheet. For the purpose of this evaluation some of the feedback data was provided to the researchers in summarised report format and for some of the PL events the original evaluation forms were supplied. Data from these evaluations was compiled and analysed focusing in particular on questions relating to relevance and usefulness of the professional learning to participant’s work.

2 Flexible Learning Victoria

This chapter describes the formation and development of Flexible Learning Victoria (FLV). Section 2.1 looks at how it was set up initially – including the background context, initial planning, thinking and structures put in place. Section 2.2 then looks at how FLV developed during the year, including changes from the initial planning and structures put in place.

2.1 Network formation

"Partnerships play an important role in supporting programs and the complex needs of these young people" (Ellum & Longmuir, 2013).

In 2013 – 2014 three key research reports about flexible learning programs and providers were published. Two of these reports (Ellum & Longmuir, 2013; Waugh, 2014) arose out of the Flexible Engagement and Learning Network (FELN) in the southern metropolitan region (SMR), and were local to southern and south east Melbourne; the other report was national in scale (Te Riele, 2014). These reports clearly articulated the need for flexible learning providers (FLPs) to come together: to enable the sharing of tools and ideas; to build partnerships; to build an understanding of themselves as a sector; to organise relevant professional learning; and to advocate for the sector (Ellum & Longmuir, 2013; Te Riele, 2014; Waugh, 2014).

In part as a result of, and alongside these reports two new networks for providers of flexible learning were formed in 2014. The Flexible Learning and Careers Association (FLaCA) was established "for providers of alternative and flexible learning for students aged 15-19, across the Southern Melbourne Region of Victoria with a focus on careers, pathways and transitions" (BGK LLEN, n.d.). And a network for flexible learning providers was established in the Frankston Mornington Peninsula (FMP) area – FMP Flexible Learning Network (FLN), supported by the FMP LLEN and the Schools Focused Youth Service (SFYS).

The FELN, the FLN and FLaCA saw the power of a network for FLPs for sharing knowledge and organising relevant professional learning, building relationships and partnerships, research and advocacy and a sense of common purpose. Their experience coupled with the findings of these reports, led to the vision of a Victoria wide (and eventually a national), body for FLPs. In early 2015 a consortium of four organisations from FLaCA successfully applied for funding from the ACFE Board CAIF, to set up a Victoria wide network or professional organisation for FLPs, starting with the South East region, using the structure of the existing FLaCA. This funded project was called, "Leading Practice and Leading Change in Youth Education". It established Flexible Learning Victoria.

The Consortium

The four Consortium organisations were SkillsPlus (the lead organisation), Narre Community Learning Centre, Melbourne City Mission (MCM) and Brotherhood of St Laurence. The Consortium, initially formed to seek funding for the formation of a new network organisation for FLPs, developed into the Consortium

Committee once funding was obtained. The role of the Consortium Committee was to "manage the contractual obligation of the funding received for the formation of FLV". (FLV, 2015b). The Consortium Committee was to meet at least once each school term (four times a year). Starting in August 2015, they will continue till the end of the "Leading Practice and Leading Change in Youth Education" project at the end of March 2017.

The Project Manager

The role of "Project Manager – Flexible Learning Victoria" was developed to co-ordinate the Leading Practice and Leading Change in Youth Education project. While the Consortium Committee's role was to manage the contractual obligation of the funding, BGK LLEN undertook to provide "project management of deliverables under the funded contract" (FLV, 2015b), with the project manager working out of the BGK LLEN office, and supported by the BGK LLEN EO.

A person commenced in the project manager role in September 2015, working 0.4EFT. In April 2016 the position was extended to a 0.6 role.

From September 2015, the position has been held by two consecutive project managers, with the incumbent commencing in July 2016.

The Steering Committee

In addition to the Consortium Committee and BGK LLEN, which had project management responsibilities, a steering committee was formed "to guide the formation" of the new network (FLV, 2015a). The Steering Committee planned to meet once per school term (four times a year), and was intended to run from the end of October 2015 till approximately December 2016, by which time it was imagined that governance responsibilities would be handed over to an executive or similar body.

Representatives from each of the four Consortium Committee member organisations were on the Steering Committee, along with, representatives from Advance Community College, Holmesglen Vocational College, National Disability Coordination Officer Program (NDCO), Oakwood School and SE (South East) LLEN.

2.2 Network development

Information about the initial set up and development of FLV has been sourced from a variety of documents: the regular FLV Project Manager reports to the funding body, the Consortium Committee and the Steering Committee; the FLV newsletter; the new network information pack and descriptive and evaluative reflections from the two FLV Project Managers.

Initial Set Up

The first membership of FLV flowed from the transition of the three existing networks for providers of flexible learning programs in the southern region of Melbourne: FLaCA; SMR Flexible Engagement and Learning Network (FELN); and FMP Flexible Learning Network (FLN), in November 2015. These three networks transitioned into the first two Flexible Learning Networks (FLNs) under the banner of Flexible Learning Victoria: BGK FELN supported by BGK LLEN; and FMP FLN supported by FMP LLEN.

By December 2015 four more networks were in the process of starting up. South East (SE) FLN supported by SE LLEN held its first meeting in December, and conversations were underway for starting FLNs in the Inner East (IE) LLEN region, the Baw Baw Latrobe (BBL) LLEN region (Gippsland area) and Highlands LLEN region (covering a number of local government areas around Ballarat).

In the first FLV newsletter, published in October 2015, FLV was conceptualised as a "peak body supporting professionals working within FILPs [flexible and inclusive learning programs]". Specific characteristics and functions of the intended peak body included acting as a "new professional body" and as a "community of practice that enables advocacy, networking, partnerships, research and professional development for FILPs; ensuring that providers of flexible and inclusive learning programs are supported to empower young people to pursue their aspirations" (FLV, 2015a).

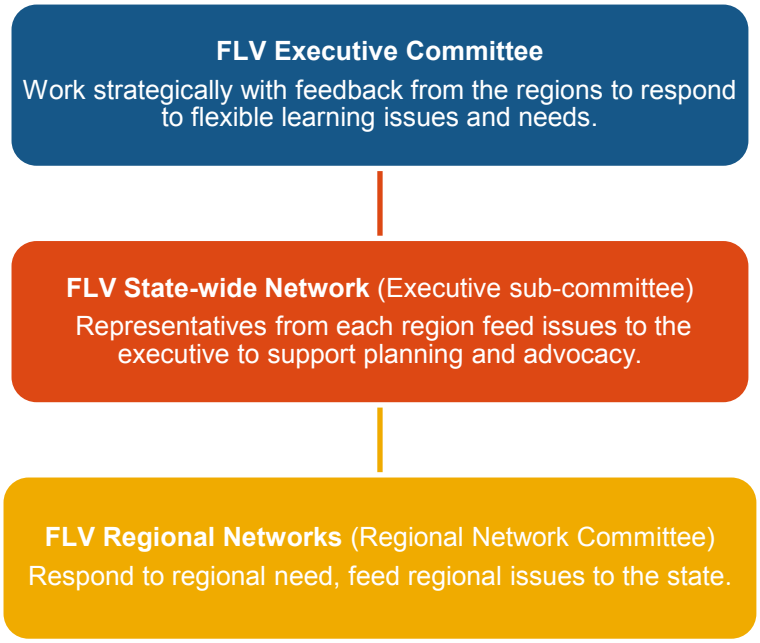
New networks were given a new network pack to provide guidance on governance models, terms of reference, strategies and membership documents, as they evolved. FLNs were free to develop their own local approach, though a broad overall structure for FLV had been designed.

Key aspects of the initially proposed structure for FLV[2] included:

- Each flexible and inclusive learning provider to be part of a local FLN, and a member of the state-wide body FLV.
- In the following year it was imagined that each of these providers would pay a FLV membership fee, to help the network remain sustainable.
- Each local FLN to have its own terms of reference and a committee to run the FLN.
- Each local FLN to have a representative on an executive sub-committee of FLV.
- A FLV executive committee to work strategically with feedback from the regions, and to employ any FLV staff.
- Quarterly meetings of FLV membership.

[2] Taken from FLV Terms of Reference V1 29/09/2015

Figure 1: Initial proposed structure for FLV[3]



The FLV Steering Committee, set up in October 2015, was intended to guide the formation of FLV and then to hand over "governance responsibilities to an executive or similar body" and cease to exist in December 2016 (FLV, 2015a).

In fact, while retaining its vision, values and four core mission areas around advocacy, sharing of resources and knowledge, professional learning and partnerships, FLV evolved a different operational structure.

Development of the FLV structure

As new networks came on board, it became clear that they did not want such a structured organisation and leaned towards the more flexible approach of a community of practice network. Each FLN developed (and are still developing) differently, with some having more structure, or different structures or ways of operating than others, and some being more active than others. However there was a common embracing of the four core mission areas: networking and development of relationships and partnerships; sharing of resources and knowledge; professional learning; and advocacy. Many of the new networks have used as a guide, the one page "FLN Strategy and Priorities Template" (FLV, 2016b), which explains those four core mission areas. The FLN strategies and priorities template was based on a document originally developed by the FELN – the sharing of network experience in this way, has proved useful.

The LLENs have taken on a key role in facilitating the development of many FLNs, with support from the FLV Project Manager. The LLENs have generally taken on a secretariat and central contact role, facilitating and supporting network meetings, holding the database of network members or attendees and managing the network information flow.

Many LLENs have been happy to take on this role facilitating the development of a local FLN, because it aligns well with their own aims and KPIs (FLV, 2016c).

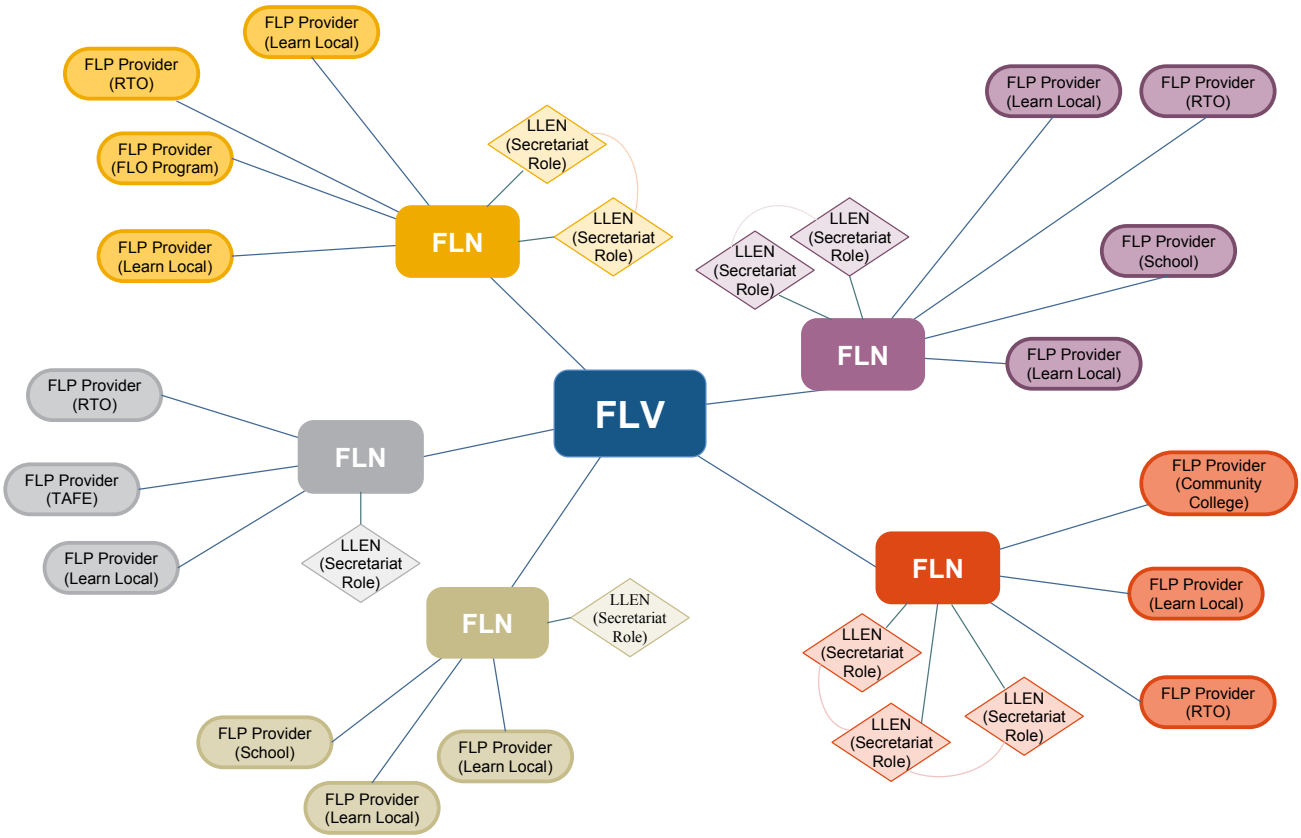
[3] Taken from FLV Terms of Reference V1 29/09/2015

While FLV was initiated with a clear network structure in mind, the project was nonetheless designed to be able to develop flexibly, taking into account feedback from consultation with members and stakeholders, which was actively sought. This combination of structures and thinking, which allowed both for clear focus based on prior research and experience, but also for flexibility and the re-thinking of initial assumptions meant that FLV was able to get buy-in to develop new FLNs across Victoria, in a very short period of time.

A new FLV structure

Currently FLV does not have any individual members, rather it is the FLNs who are members of FLV. The FLNs do not generally have committees, instead functioning in a more informal manner, as a community of practice, facilitated or supported by a LLEN. In several cases two or more LLENs have joined together to support a FLN with a larger catchment area. One of these LLENs acts as the central communication point for the FLN. There are 31 LLENs in Victoria, so with the current structuring, there could be a maximum of 31 FLNs, though as some LLENs have worked together to support one larger FLN, this number is somewhat reduced. Figure 2 outlines the current FLV structure. (Also see figure 10 in chapter 3.1 for a chart showing all of the current FLNs.)

Figure 2: Current FLV structure



The experience of the project workers has been, that while the LLEN EO or PW have in the vast majority of cases, been happy to support the development of a FLN and seen this as valuable, they do not necessarily

see the completion of the FLV registration and census form (see appendix I) as a priority. Additionally FLNs often do not have formal membership, but rather a mailing list of relevant or interested organisations and programs in the LLEN region.

These changes impacted directly on data collection, as originally envisaged, as FLV does not necessarily have access to the membership of each FLN, and in fact membership of some FLNs is currently quite loose. A range of alternative means were used to estimate the number and range of individuals and providers involved with a FLN around Victoria. This includes use of the FLV newsletter mailing list, information supplied by LLENs about membership of their local FLN, and information supplied by LLENs about the physical areas covered by their LLEN and their associated FLN.

At this stage FLV has not moved to a structure with an executive committee, and collections of fees. The Consortium Committee are currently exploring various options for sustainability moving forwards, such as being auspiced by a larger organisation.

3 Making a Difference

The four sections of Chapter 3, will examine each of the four research questions for this evaluation. To what extent has FLV been successful in:

- Establishing an overarching body for providers of youth education for students not in mainstream education in Victoria?
- Supporting professional learning activities for these providers, in particular for Learn Locals?
- Facilitating connections among providers, in particular Learn Locals?
- Being a platform for advocacy on behalf of the flexible and inclusive learning sector in Victoria, and in particular for Learn Locals?

To answer these questions, data from the survey of FLV stakeholders is used, along with FLV project documentation and reports, descriptive and evaluative reflections from the project managers and evaluative reflections from the Steering Committee and the Consortium Committee.

The stakeholder survey – respondent overview

This section includes information about the survey respondents: their role; geographical region; reason for getting involved in FLV; and length of involvement in FLV.

Figure 1 shows the proportion of responses from LLEN Executive Officers (EOs) or LLEN Project Workers (PW), Flexible Learning Program (FLP) staff (including managers, teachers, principals, youth workers, pathways support, etc.), and other roles. Staff in other roles included three school focused youth service (SFYS) coordinators, three managers (one of a TAFE, one of a training organisation, and a coordinator of a community centre), two people involved in client support (but not identified as staff of an FLP), two wellbeing coordinators, two university lecturers, and seven other people in a variety of roles (see figure 2). That 21 LLEN EOs or PWs responded, is notable, given that there are only 31 LLENs across Victoria.

Figure 3: Survey respondents by role

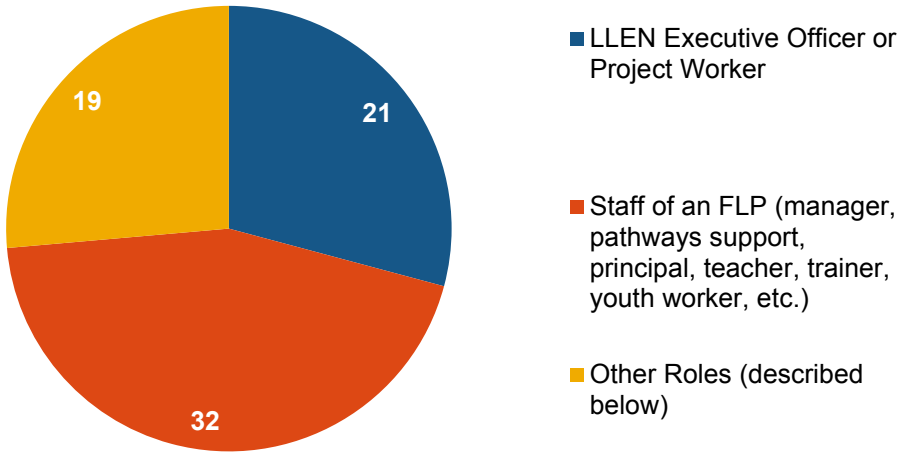


Figure 4: List of "other" roles described by survey respondents

Role	Number of respondents
Chair of LLEN	1
Community partner	1
Coordinator community centre	1
External Client support agency	1
Fee for service provider of sexuality programs/education	1
Manager - training organisation	1
Manager TAFE	1
Mental health clinician	1
Publisher of educational materials	1
School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) Coordinator	3
Student Support Services Network Coordinator	1
University lecturer in Flexible Learning	1
University teacher/researcher	1
Volunteer with City of Kingston	1
Wellbeing Coordinator	2
Youth Planning and Development Officer	1
Total	**19**

The 72 survey respondents came from all four Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) Regions and all 17 DET areas (see Figures 2 & 3). Of the 72 survey respondents, 43% (31) came from the South Eastern Victoria Region – this reflects the origins and development of FLV. FLV originated out of the existing FLaCA network based in south eastern Melbourne and intentionally developed first in the South East region of Victoria.

Figure 5: Survey respondents by DET region

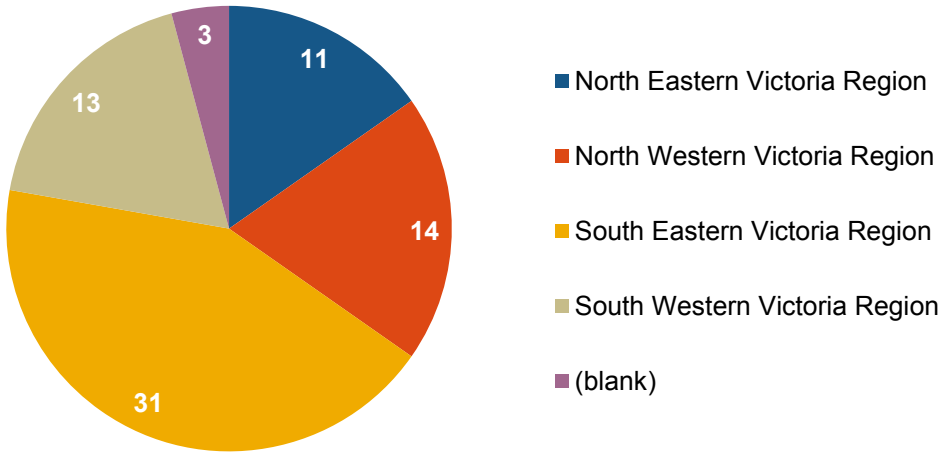


Figure 6: Survey respondents by DET region and area[4]

DET Region & Area	Number of Respondents
North Eastern Victoria Region	
Goulburn	5
Inner Eastern Melbourne	1
Outer Eastern Melbourne	1
Ovens Murray	4
North Western Victoria Region	
Hume Moreland	2
Loddon Campaspe	1
Mallee	8
North Eastern Melbourne	2
(blank)	1
South Eastern Victoria Region	
Bayside Peninsula	13
Inner Gippsland	10
Outer Gippsland	2
Southern Melbourne	6
South Western Victoria Region	
Barwon	3
Brimbank Melton	1
Central Highlands	6
Western District	2
Western Melbourne	1
Total	**69**

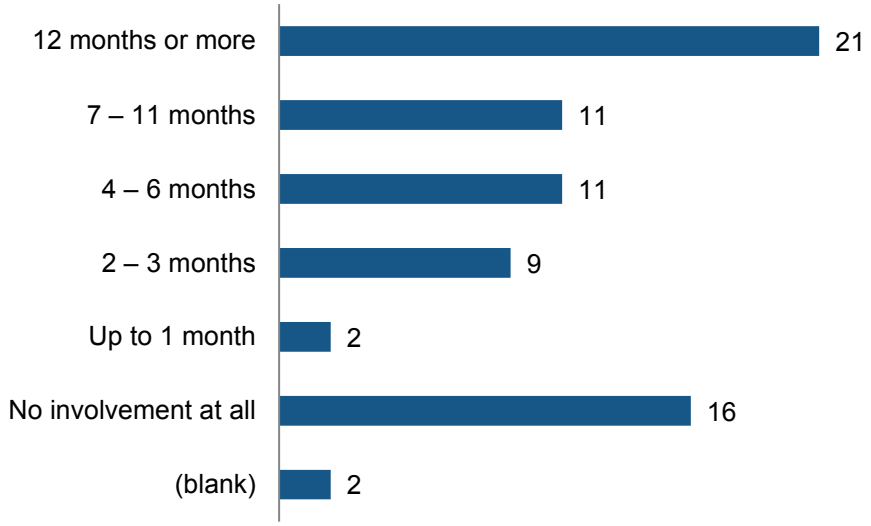
The development of FLV in the South Eastern Region of Victoria, is also reflected in the length of time survey respondents from different regions had being involved with FLV or their local FLN. While 65% of

[4] This table does not include 3 survey respondents who did not enter either a region or an area

survey respondents from the South Eastern Region of Victoria had been involved for seven or more months, around half that proportion of survey respondents from other regions (between 23% - 36%) had been involved for the same period of seven or more months.

Looking overall at the length of time survey respondents had been involved in FLV, 44% had been involved for seven or more months, with 29% involved for 12 or more months. Another 28% had been involved for between two and six months, and 22% of respondents with no involvement at all. The respondents with no involvement included professionals who knew of FLV and had participated in FLV activities such as professional learning and/or wished to become involved with FLV.

Figure 7: Number of months survey respondents have been involved in FLV (n= 72)



Survey respondents were asked what they see as the purpose of FLV (with multiple responses accepted) and then why they joined FLV (with multiple responses accepted). The reasons for joining and the perceived purpose of FLV were largely similar, with networking (sharing resources and knowledge) being the most popular purpose for FLV (86%) and the most popular reason for joining FLV (58%). However, while advocacy was the 3rd most popular *purpose* for FLV, ticked by 72% of respondents, it was the 7th most popular reason for *joining* FLV, ticked by 25% of respondents. Full details are given in Figures 7 and 8 (below).

Figure 8: What do you see as the purpose of FLV?

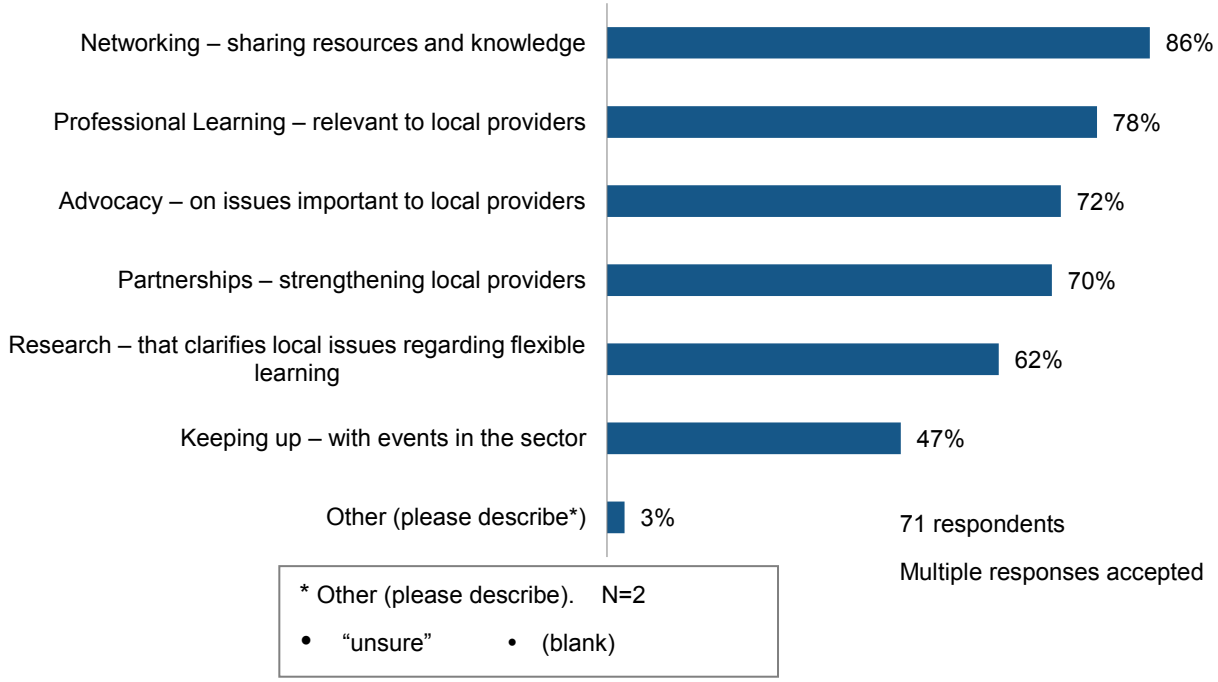
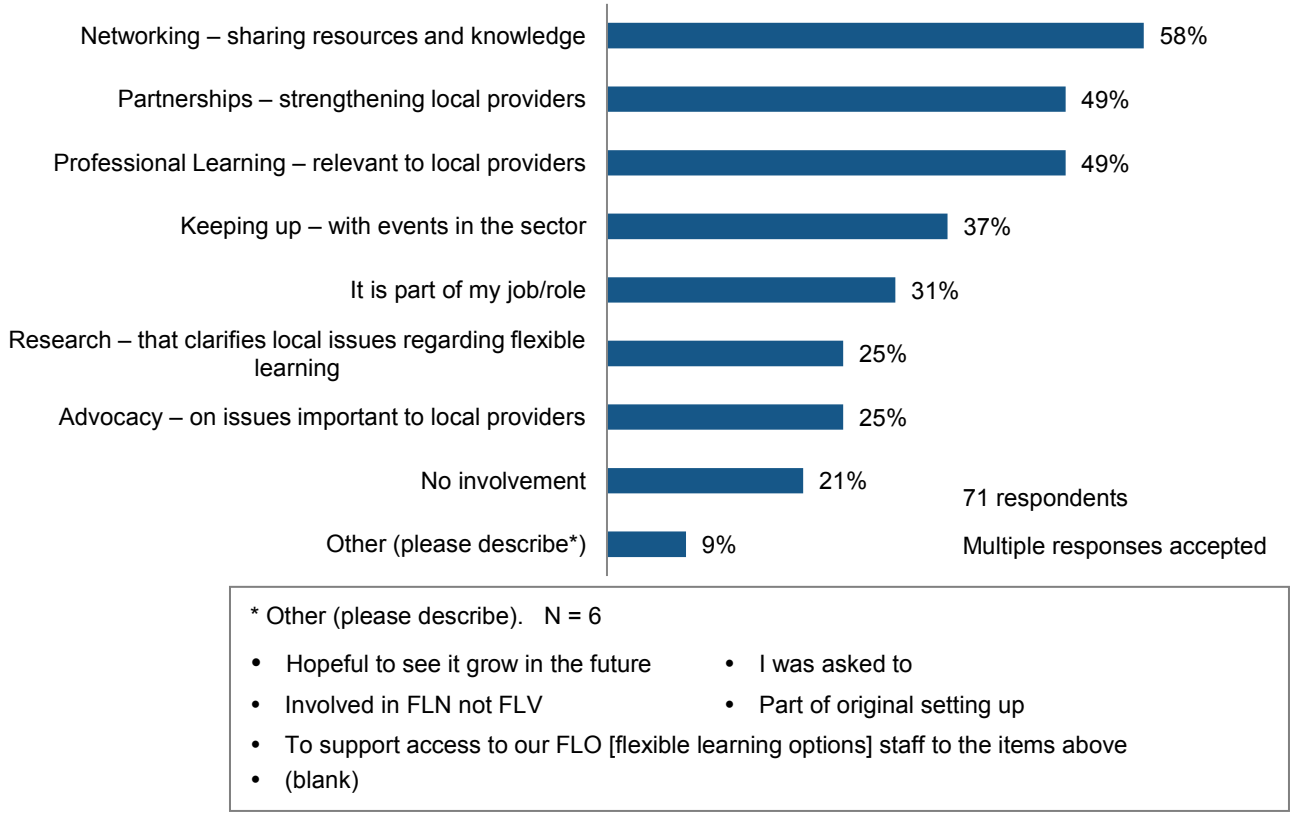


Figure 9: Why did you get involved with FLV or your local Flexible Learning Network?



3.1 Establishing an overarching body

This section looks at how successful FLV has been in establishing an overarching body for providers of youth education for students not in mainstream education in Victoria.

"It's not just another network" – it is focused, driven by what we (the providers) want (gives providers choice in what is important to them in term of their FLN), and it is structured and organised.

FLV Steering Committee Members

Growth of membership beyond the original FLACA network

In January 2017 there were 14 active or developing FLNs around Victoria, supported by 27 LLENs, reaching over 200 FLP providers. Around 70 per cent of the geographic area of Victoria had some form of active involvement with FLV. To have this degree of coverage, in just over a year since the FLV project was initially funded, is impressive.

> *… So it's a very high success rate in a short period of time and I think that that speaks to a couple of things. One is the desire within the sector to be connected. I think secondly it speaks to the natural synchronicity between the project and the LLEN goals and work plans. And thirdly I think it also links with the fact that the Education State initiatives it's just a great time for FLV to have come about with programs like Navigator, the LOOKOUT Education Support Centres, the Reconnect funding. These range of projects that are based around getting young people back into education, it's been timely. Plus things like the Doing School Differently conference that have raised the profile of it in Victoria.*
>
> FLV Project Manager

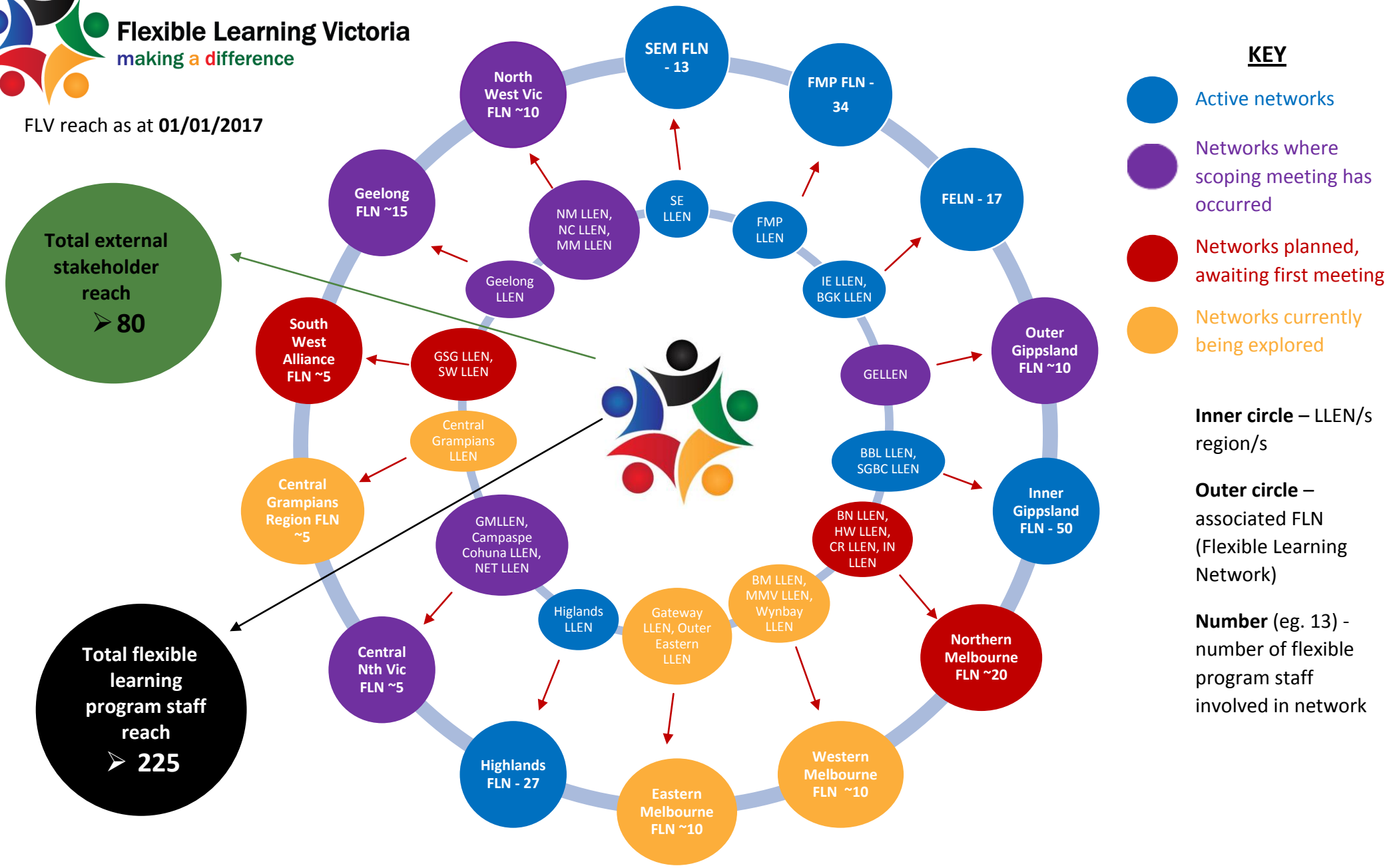
Steering Committee members commented on the momentum and enthusiasm from the existing networks, and that both project managers have been "champions" of the network. They also noted the importance of the project being initiated by providers (a bottom up approach) and being responsive to provider's needs and wants, while also providing leadership, structure and funding (some top down input). This enables "buy-in" from the providers and gives a "sense of belonging".

Of the 14 FLNs, in January 2017: five were active; a further four had already had a scoping meeting (a meeting with providers, and often including a professional learning component); two were about to have their first meeting; and three were in the development phase (see figure 9 on following page).

Figure 10: FLN development across Victoria

Flexible Learning Victoria
making a difference

FLV reach as at **01/01/2017**



KEY

- Active networks
- Networks where scoping meeting has occurred
- Networks planned, awaiting first meeting
- Networks currently being explored

Inner circle – LLEN/s region/s

Outer circle – associated FLN (Flexible Learning Network)

Number (eg. 13) - number of flexible program staff involved in network

LLEN geographic reach can be seen at http://www.llen.org.au/youth-unemployment-through-the-llens/

As has been discussed, LLENs have played a critical role in the establishment of the local FLNs. However getting LLENs on board is not necessarily straightforward, as the Consortium Committee and the FLV Project Manager explain:

> *So even if it's just in that simple area of being able to support LLEN EOs to do their job that's been quite a big thing. And I think from 12 months ago where there was no knowledge of what FLV was and who we were, to now. To have that buy-in with the LLEN EOs … I think we've come a long way. And I think that's because we've been able to demonstrate value. We've been able to demonstrate value to the LLEN EOs who are seasoned professionals in their field, and have seen networks come and go and all of those sorts of things. So I think that's really encouraging.*
>
> FLV Project Manager

> *One of the things about LLENs is there would have been ones where it could have been quite prickly to walk into their space and tell them that you've got something to offer them, locally ... so especially if you are based in metro Melbourne it can be the kind of thing that they've heard a few times ... to win some of those hearts and minds has been really important.*
>
> FLV Consortium Committee

The role of the FLV Project Manager has been important in winning those hearts and minds.

An alternative positive outcome Sometimes a group of providers in one region may opt not to form an FLN, and nonetheless still want and value connection with FLV. Following is an example from a regional area:

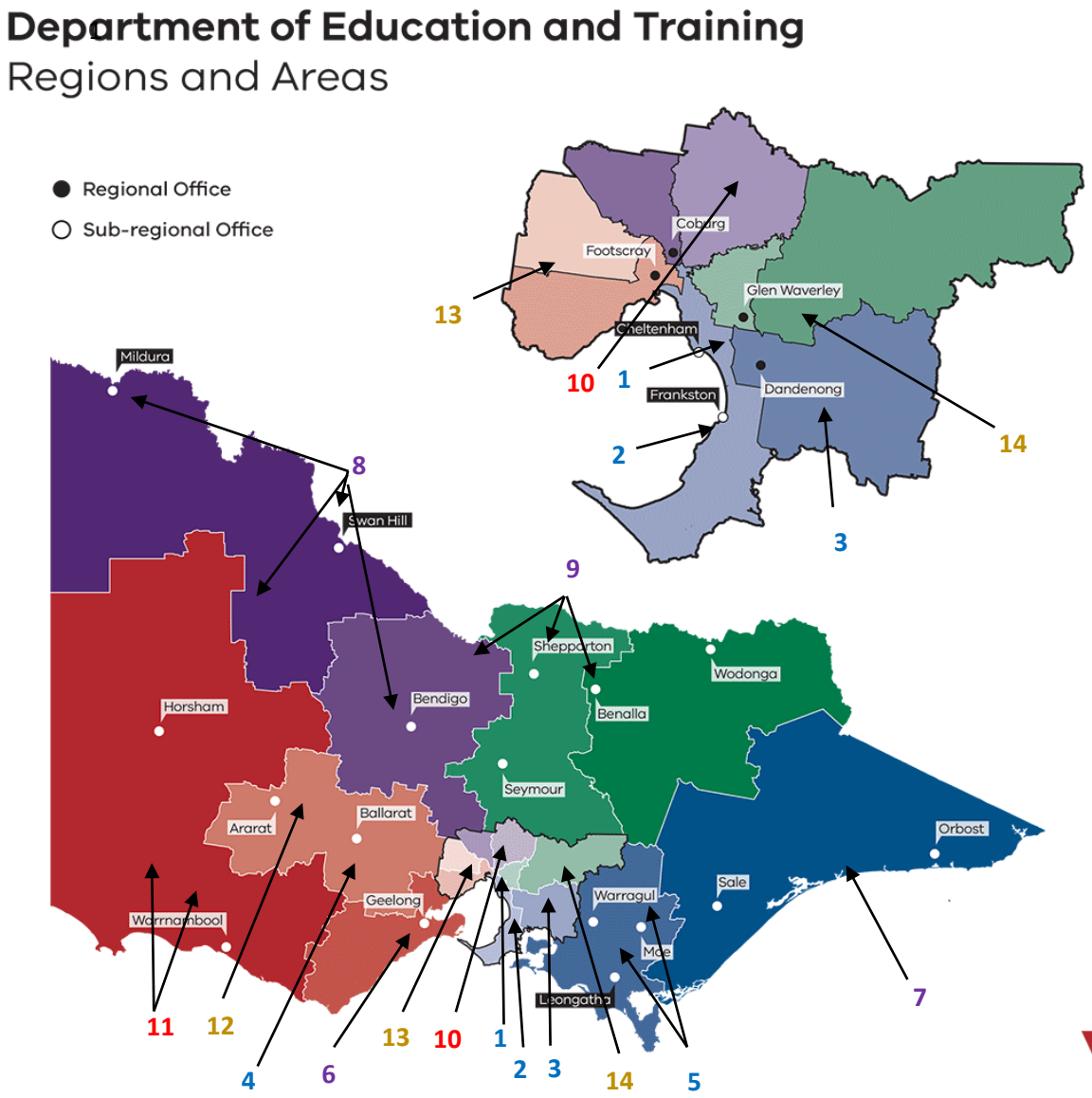
> *I was in [name of town] … And the decision there was that they have existing youth partnership networks and they will continue with those rather than set up new flexible learning networks in that area. … But what we discussed was the fact that whatever FLV was doing could feed into those networks and contribute to those networks, those youth partnership networks. And that they have been set up in those areas for particular reasons and had particular funding attached to them and all of those sorts of things.*
>
> *So I think there was an example where new networks were not needed. But the work of FLV was still appreciated and actively - they actively wanted to engage with it and felt the best way to engage with it was with the existing networks that were set up. So that in itself is a great outcome I think in terms of there not being a no, this is not for us. But rather this looks great, this is the best way it can fit and get traction in this area.*

Diversity of membership (types of providers and geographic spread)

The 14 FLNs that have been established, or are in the process of being established, cover nearly all of the 17 DET areas across Victoria (see Figure 10).

Figure 11: Flexible Learning Networks across Victorian DET regions

FLV Victorian Reach - 01/01/2017



North Western Victoria Region
- Mallee
- Loddon Campaspe
- Hume Moreland
- North Eastern Melbourne

North Eastern Victoria Region
- Ovens Murray
- Goulburn
- Outer Eastern Melbourne
- Inner Eastern Melbourne

South Eastern Victoria Region
- Outer Gippsland
- Inner Gippsland
- Southern Melbourne
- Bayside Penninsula

South Western Victoria Region
- Western District
- Barwon
- Central Highlands
- Western Melbourne
- Brimbank Melton

Flexible Learning Networks

Active Networks
1. FELN
2. FMP
3. SEM
4. Highlands
5. Inner Gippsland

Networks where scoping meeting has occurred
6. Greater Geelong
7. Outer Gippsland
8. North West Vic
9. Central North Vic

Networks planned, awaiting first meeting/event
10. Northern Melbourne
11. South West Alliance

Networks currently being explored
12. Central Grampians
13. Western Melbourne
14. Eastern Melbourne

THE EDUCATION STATE

VICTORIA State Government | Education and Training

Scanning the FLV database reveals a broad range of different types of providers involved in FLNs, including many Learn Local providers, schools (state, independent and Catholic), non-school senior secondary providers, TAFEs, Adult Community Education (ACE) providers, not-for-profit community services organisations and private RTOs.

Overall we estimate around 40-50% of the providers are Learn Locals. Some of these hold other registrations as well - hence a provider may be a Learn Local, a private RTO and a non-school senior secondary provider, enabling a range of ways to enrol and engage young people in their programs.

The first FLV Project Manager commented that in regional areas, the way LLENs and FLNs defined FLPs tended to be broader than in metropolitan areas. So in metropolitan areas when LLENs identified FLPs they were mainly focusing on providers delivering Year 12 program outcomes, whereas in regional Victoria, FLPs tended to include a wider range of programs:

> *… anything that was delivered at the community level that re-engaged or reconnected a young person back into learning. They didn't have to be delivering an accredited program. It might just be a Learn Local delivering a pre-accredited program which was going to link them back into finish Year 12 or go back into study.*

In reflecting on differences the FLV Project Manager thought that lower levels of existing networking in regional areas, might have influenced the broader approach.

Awareness and understanding of FLV amongst relevant organisations

The survey data indicates significant engagement around Victoria, with 20 LLEN EOs or Project Workers completing the survey, 32 FLP staff, and 20 others – most of whom are closely connected to the FLP sector (for example three SFYS Coordinators, the Chair of a LLEN, and two Wellbeing Coordinators) (see figure 3). Of the 76 people who began the survey, just 4 said that they had not previously heard of FLV.

The FLV Project Manager commented on two factors that have helped with awareness and understanding of FLV and local FLNs. On the one hand, support of LLEN EOs has been very important.

> *I think it's been hugely aided by the LLEN EOs that have really thrown their weight behind it. So there's been a few LLEN EOs and LLEN areas in particular that have really got behind it such as the Swan Hill LLEN, the Shepparton LLEN, the Highlands LLEN, Geelong LLEN and the Gippsland LLENs ... So those regional LLEN areas have driven change in their region. And that driving change has enabled connections to occur with providers that otherwise I would have no idea they even existed.*

And coupled with this, the importance of the FLV Project Manager meeting with people in person.

> *So in terms of seeking to raise awareness and understanding of the network among providers, I think the FLV Project Manager being able to get out and meet people in person has worked well. So I've been able to get to Gippsland and to Geelong, and to Ballarat and so on and so forth. I think that's been very important to show that the project is happy to come to you. We're not just Melbourne centric. And it's meant that people have had the opportunity to say in person, this is what's going on for us up here, or over*

here. And the other great thing is that I was able to connect with a lot of those people at the Doing School Differently conference so there was then a couple of touch points.

FLV Project Manager

Level of ownership and leadership of the network

At this stage most of the FLNs have not set up protocols to formalise their network. While this was originally assumed to be a useful measure of the level of engagement of an FLN, it has become clear that this level of structure is not high priority for the providers and LLENs, who tend to prefer a more flexible approach, and are more interested in the strategic aims around networking, sharing, professional learning and advocacy, than in setting up formal structures.

It is also very important to bear in mind how very new most of the FLNs are, with the majority forming just in the last one to six months. It is therefore notable that strongly worded letters of support for FLV were written by five LLEN EOs, an FLP, and by the Chair of the State LLEN Network. These support letters referred to FLV playing a "crucial" role "in providing formalised structure through its peak body status", to support and enhance the work of LLENs, FLNs and providers through professional and financial support to staff development, networking coordination and advocacy. That FLV focused its work at state, local and regional levels is highly valued. FLV's collaboration has led to more effective service provision through local capacity building and as "a key provider of professional development opportunities". Outcomes have included "access to good practice models and resources" for program design and delivery; and efficiencies have been gained by "lessening duplication of effort", thus helping to create "more direct delivery time"; and facilitating "joint use of facilities, resources and relief staff". In summary, FLV was described as "impressive", "a strong community of practice", "instrumental to providing credibility to flexible and inclusive learning providers and the work they do".

In reflecting on this question of network ownership and leadership, the FLV program manager talked about the appropriateness of LLENs taking on that leadership role.

…the regions where the LLEN is ready to, if you like, step up to the plate and take charge, that's the areas where that has happened. So even then it's still sitting under the ownership of the LLEN - rather than say a key local provider. But to me I think that that actually is fairly appropriate. And arguably the role of the LLENs. So it's a nice idea to have a key provider like, say, Melbourne City Mission or Berry Street or someone to run a network in a region, but practically I think what we know is that providers are busy doing the work on the ground and are happy to engage with networks, but not necessarily to run them. I don't think they see it within their remit.

Though in some cases, a provider, or a key person, will be the one to push for the development of a local network.

… you do get key people in areas that agitate and create the momentum for a network. A good example is [person's name and organisation]. She's been a key agitator for networking in [region name]. And it's been between the work of arguably herself and then the [name of LLEN] LLEN EO that that network is starting to get legs. And they've got their first meeting planned for February, for five LLENs working together, which is great.

FLV Project Manager

From a grassroots perspective, “ownership” is also reflected in the level of providers’ participation in FLV and their FLNs. As will be discussed below, providers have expressed strong support for FLV and readily identify benefits of their involvement, even while the organisation is still in the early stages of its development.

Learning and challenges in building FLNs

As will be discussed further, in the section on building partnerships, there has traditionally been either explicit or more hidden competition between providers, due to the nature of funding. In part because of this, there has been for some providers, a sense of going it alone. Just as their students are often excluded and at the margins, providers may also feel isolated, the only ones fighting on behalf of their students. As someone new from outside the region or area, the FLV Project Manager is in a position to bring a broader perspective that can break down competitive barriers and sharing knowledge of commonalities in good practice across programs is important in this regard.

In the stakeholder survey, some providers reiterated the themes of isolation and implicit competition within an area and spoke of the value of the FLNs in forging connections between providers that created a sense of being part of a sector with common goals. Those providers who had already been involved in longer established FLNs similarly emphasised co-operation between providers. As one stakeholder put it, in FLNs “There is a clear sense of belonging for providers and they help each other regularly away from meetings. There is strong collaboration with little sign of competition.”

While the FLV Steering Committee, the FLV Consortium Committee and the FLV Project Manager have all expressed delight in how quickly they have been able to build FLNs around Victoria, there have of course been challenges. The FLV Project Manager mentioned three of these in particular.

Defining the area of a particular FLN In imagining how a network might be built geographically - that is, which LLENs might work together, based on how close they are together - the importance of relationships and politics are left out of the equation.

> *So I had assumed early on that certain LLENs would work together and it just hasn't come off. And so then your initial strategy, which you might have mapped out and talked about actually just doesn't come off. And so then you're left with a particular LLEN region, which could be huge, you know. Looking at a couple of these regions on the map they’re big regions and they're just not in with one of the networks that you've looked at forming.*

FLV Project Manager

Areas that don’t want a FLN A particular LLEN or its providers may decide that they do not want a FLN at this time. In that case, FLV could take on a direct role in helping link in providers who do want that.

> *… it's all completely voluntary. It’s not a government initiative. It's all about going to the LLENs and saying is this something that you think is needed locally? And then they go to the providers and say is this something that you think is needed locally? And so the answer no has to be acceptable. If that's the answer, then that's the answer.*

So I suppose in that case it's just about still trying to ensure that providers that would like to be linked in know about what's going on, and are able to access that should they wish to.

FLV Project Manager

Expressing initial interest but … In some cases, LLENs have expressed interest in earlier initial conversations, but then action has faltered for some reason. In these situations, the project manager could arrange an in person conversation, and any glitches might be resolved, but in the current project time frame this has not yet been possible. Nonetheless, there was some indication in the survey responses of stakeholders who have not yet been involved or had minimal involvement with FLV that they do intend to be involved or more so in future. The momentum already gained at the grassroots level is likely to continue to build, particularly because the need for umbrella coordination of a range of activities is now widely recognised across the sector.

3.2 Supporting professional learning activities

This section looks at how successful FLV has been in supporting professional learning (PL) activities for providers of youth education for students not in mainstream education in Victoria.

Early in the life of FLV, a survey of FILPs and FILP stakeholders was conducted, to help determine appropriate PL offerings. Alongside that individual conversations with stakeholders have also been important. FLV has provided support for a large number of PL activities in a range of ways, thinking flexibly about what would be most useful for providers and networks in different areas and contexts. For example FLV has:

- Organised or supported specific PL sessions, such as Trauma Informed Practice for teachers in Swan Hill, Dealing with Anger and Behavioural Issues in Frankston, the South East Melbourne FLN Professional Development Workshop (full day), and various others;
- Supported conferences and forums, such as the At Risk Forum in Brighton, the Ballarat Flexible Learning Forum, and the Inclusive Learning Conference in Frankston;
- Given an invited presentation at the national Doing School Differently conference.

I think in regards to professional learning that's probably been one of the biggest successes of FLV … the number of professional learning activities that have been put on.

FLV Project Manager

FLV has supported these PL events in various ways, for example through:

- Sponsorship of the event - such as paying for catering or speaker fee;
- Sponsoring people from regional areas to come to a larger conference focused on FLPs;

- Enabling the event - such sourcing and/or booking speakers, helping with formation of the agenda for the day and sometimes with logistical organisation, in partnership with the LLEN or other providers.
- Presentation at a conference

Working with the LLENs and other key providers to get these different PL activities happening, has been "really good partnership work", noted the FLV Project Manager. Typically, the FLV Project Manager explained, FLV will open the event on the day and talk about what FLV does, "…. And to contribute I suppose context. To talk a little bit about this is what we're learning about today and this is how it links to the work of Flexible Learning Victoria and the work of flexible learning providers". However in some cases an FLN will have conversations with the FLV Project Manager in planning an event, and FLV may provide some financial support for the event, but the FLV Project Manager won't attend the event.

… having that professional learning brokerage money has been a great way to get the networks up and off the ground, a good carrot to dangle – in terms of getting buy-in from the LLENs. **FLV Project Manager**

In the case of the larger forums and conferences that FLV has supported, this has involved working with a range of different organisations. For example the At Risk Forum involved working with BGK LLEN, Holmesglen TAFE, Bayside Council, Glen Eira Council, Kingston Council and the School Focused Youth Service.

Talking about these larger forums, the FLV Project Manager commented:

> *So lots of these events have come about and have been well attended and have been free for the providers to attend, and have been great networking events in their own right. Plus great professional learning opportunities. Overwhelmingly the feedback and evaluation of those events has been very positive by attendees. And we've heard lots of comments like it's great to get professional development that specifically tailored to me and to the sector.*
>
> *…*
>
> *What we would find is that you would get a much wider group than just people from flexible learning settings. So the At Risk forum in Brighton there were probably, I think we had over 100 people attend that and maybe 50 of those were from flexible learning providers and mental health providers and these sorts of settings. And then probably about 50 were from more mainstream schools and so forth. So then it's a great way as well to get the overlap of people from different settings. **…** So sharing good practice, showing off the best practice of specialty providers if we kind of characterise flexible learning as that.*

Another important approach to supporting PL for regional providers, where travel time and cost increases the barrier to accessing relevant PL, has been to provide sponsorship for flexible learning providers in regional areas to attend larger events in Melbourne or in other regional areas, such as the Flexible Learning Forum in

Ballarat, and the Doing School Differently Conference in Melbourne. For example in the Outer Gippsland region, providers said that rather than holding their own PL event somewhere in their region (which would necessarily be a long drive for some, as the region is very large), they would prefer to be supported to attend larger PL events and bring the knowledge back - communicating via email or online, or organising a networking event to share knowledge. They call this the "Champions of Change" approach. Providers in some other regions were appreciative of support to attend the Ballarat Flexible Learning Forum. This gave them a valuable opportunity to attend a large PL event with other providers from regional areas.

FLV supported 12 professional learning events from December 2015 to December 2016. Details of the events and the type of support provided are listed in figure 11.

Figure 12: Professional Learning events supported by FLV

Date	Event	Who For	Type of FLV Involvement
11th Dec 2015, 9am - 4pm	Ballarat Flexible Learning Forum 2015 This event started the previous year, prior to FLVs existence, and has become an annual event.	60 people attended from 31 organisations	FLV Project Manager helped with organisation of speakers etc. and presented at the forum.
14th April 2016, 10am - 2:30pm	Inner Gippsland Networking Event	Flexible Learning Teachers, Tutors, Trainers, Program Coordinators, Centre Managers and School Principals working in Flexible Learning Organisations and Schools In the regions of Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN & South Gippsland Bass Coast LLEN 37 attendees from 23 organisations 41% from Learn Locals[5]	Provided funding, organised and ran (in conjunction with the LLENs) this networking, PL & network forming / scoping event.
10th June 2016	Inclusive Learning Conference - Frankston	Education Sector Approximately 155 attended 33 from "alternative education and Learn Local settings", 9 from TAFES, 57 from secondary schools, 18 from disability specialist services, 35 from community organisations and programs 12% from Learn Locals	Provided funding On the organising team (with NDCO - [National Disability Coordination Officer Program] & SkillsPlus) Ran a mentoring workshop on the day
28th June 2016, 9am - 3pm	South East Melbourne Flexible Learning Network PD Workshop	39 attendees from 8 organisations Flexible Learning Providers connected with SEM Flexible Learning Network	Provided funding, presented and organised the event together with South East LLEN

[5] Data on Learn Locals was collected in the evaluation. Figures on the percentage of attendees from Learn Locals in this table relate just to the people who completed the evaluation.

Date	Event	Who For	Type of FLV Involvement
		Held in Narre Warren At least 56% from Learn Locals	
18th Aug 2016 8am - 12:30pm	At Risk Forum: A morning of learning and networking (This annual event started prior to FLV)	Teachers, youth workers, case managers, mentors and youth agencies supporting at-risk students in secondary school settings In the municipalities of Bayside, Glen Eira & Kingston 60 - 70 organisations attended Wider than just the flexible learning sector 12% from Learn Locals	Provided funding Facilitated coordinating committee meetings, support to event prep & delivery, engaged FLNs Lead organiser of the event together with BGK LLEN (and alongside the 3 local councils and Holmesglen TAFE) Similar level of support from BGK LLEN FLV Project Manager was MC
15th - 16th Sept 2016	Doing School Differently National Conference	Flexible & Inclusive Learning Providers and those interested in the sector - National Conference	Sponsored people from Gippsland to come to the conference and bring the learning back to their region (Champions of Change) Presented at the conference
11th Oct 2016	Geelong Region Flexible Learning Network Scoping and PD Meeting	Flexible Learning Providers in the Geelong LLEN region 19 attendees	Provided funding, organised (in conjunction with the LLEN) & ran the event.
25th Nov 2016, 9am - 4pm	Ballarat Flexible Learning Forum 2016 This is an annual event (in its 3rdyear) started prior to FLV. FLV has been involved for 2 years.	Professional sharing for all educators For all who work with young people and want to learn more about flexible learning. At least 15% from Learn Locals	Provided funding Organised together with Highlands LLEN Project Officer Also sponsoring up to 10 local practitioners to attend from Geelong, Surf Coast, Highlands regions.
29th Nov 2016, 9:30am - 4:30pm	North West Victoria Flexible Learning Network Scoping & PD Meeting	Flexible Learning Providers in the regions of Murray Mallee LLEN, Northern Mallee LLEN & Northern Central LLEN 25 attendees, including some from Bendigo (Goldfields LLEN region) 20% from Learn Locals	Provided funding, facilitated the meeting and organised the professional learning. Organised the event in conjunction with the LLENs
2nd Dec 2016, 9:30	Flexible Learning: An introduction to the neurobiology	Flexible Learning Providers in the region of South Gippsland Bass	Provided funding

Date	Event	Who For	Type of FLV Involvement
- 1pm	underpinning learning behaviour	Coast LLEN	
7th Dec 2016	Southern Metropolitan Region PD Event	This is an event that is strongly linked to the Frankston-Mornington Peninsula FLN, but was also offered to providers from the SELLEN, BGKLLEN and IELLEN 38% from Learn Locals	Funded the event, key role in organising - on the organising committee
9th Dec 2016, 10:30 - 1pm	North Eastern Victoria Flexible Learning Network Scoping Meeting	Flexible Learning Providers in the regions of Goulburn Murray LLEN, Campaspe Cohuna LLEN & NE Tracks LLEN (operating in Benella, Wangaratta and Mansfield LGA)	Ran and organised the meeting, in conjunction with the LLENs

In reflecting on the successes of FLV, the Consortium Committee members noted a combination of the ability to listen to people's needs and then to provide professional learning support in flexible ways based on people's needs, and the ability to add value to what is already happening, without having a large amount of time (just one project manager 3 days a week spread across various tasks), or large sums of money.

> *It's always difficult when you are going out and trying to spread something new, to fall into the trap of assuming that you know what everybody needs ... what FLV has done very well is listen to what people's needs are and try and address them through the professional learning. Because it's not been a one-size fits all approach, the diversity on offer that people have been able to access, whether its attending conferences, specialised professional learning, local events or whatever ... it's had that ability to be able to cater to people's and regional needs.*
>
> *…*
>
> *The area of PD [professional development] … not necessarily about re-inventing the wheel, or re-creating the PD that is required, it's leveraging the existing framework of PD in the sector, and then that's about ensuring fair access to it. So the best example would be the Ballarat annual forum, Flexible Learning Forum ... it's not necessarily that FLV created the project, or the annual day, it's that FLV was able to provide access for people from Gippsland, and up north ... so it's not necessarily re-inventing the wheel, it's adding value to the whole sector, and connecting all of those providers.*
>
> FLV Consortium Committee

In a similar vein, Steering Committee members commented that FLV has been successful in helping to "coordinate" professional learning events better across providers and the sector, and in helping to reproduce opportunities available in one area to another area. Along with this, the Steering Committee mentioned that being able to provide financial support for FLN events has been important.

Perceived relevance and benefit of the Professional Learning

FLV collected evaluations for 8 of the professional learning events that they supported. These evaluations show a high level of satisfaction with the relevance of most of the PL events that FLV supported and a similarly high level of people saying the PL would or might lead to change in their practice. One of the events had a different form of evaluation; for this event, where people were asked just about their overall level of satisfaction, 90% were either extremely satisfied or very satisfied. A summary of the evaluation questions relating to relevance and change in practice, is shown in figure 12 (the conference which was evaluated slightly differently is included with a note).

Figure 13: Relevance and Benefit of Professional Learning

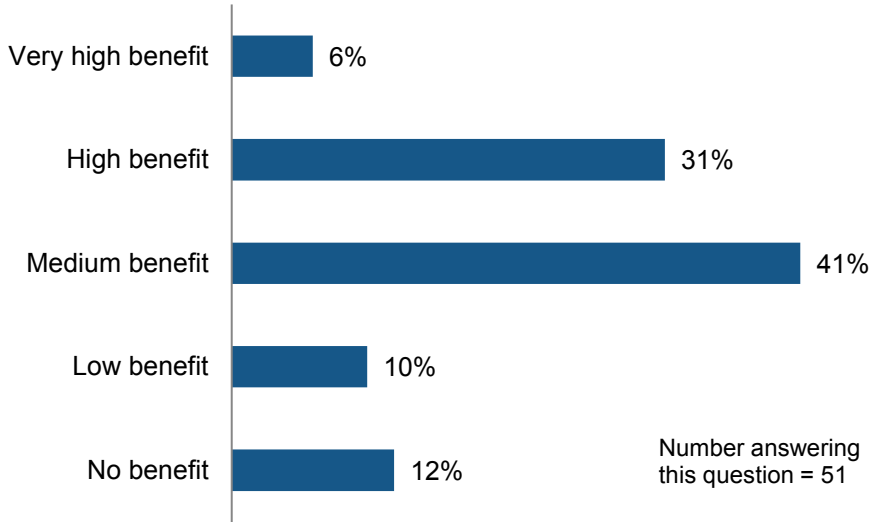
Event	Number of Evaluations	Percentage who were Satisfied or Very Satisfied[6] with the Relevance of the professional learning	Percentage who said the professional learning would or may lead to change in their practice
Flexible Learning Forum Ballarat 2015	30	100%	87%
North West Victoria FLN Scoping & PD Meeting November 2016	17	100%	88%
At Risk Forum	76	96%	96%
Flexible Learning Forum Ballarat 2016	13	92%	92%
Frankston Inclusive Learning Conference	51	90% Extremely or Very Satisfied with the conference overall[7]	-
South East Melbourne PD Day, June 2016	34	85%	79%
Inner Gippsland Networking Event, April 2016	17	71%	71%
Southern Metropolitan Region PD Day, December 2016	13	54%	62%

Turning now to the FLV stakeholder survey. Of the 51 survey respondents who answered the question relating to how much FLV's role in supporting professional learning supported their work, 88% said it was of some benefit, with 37% saying the benefit was high or very high (figure 13). It is worth noting that the survey was sent out before several of the professional learning sessions occurred, in the final weeks of 2016.

Other survey items elicited strong support for FLV to continue to have a role in supporting professional learning activities for providers. Professional learning was the highest ranked of FLV roles, with nearly 87% of respondents expressing support for this role. Professional learning was also the highest ranked aspect of stakeholders' interest in terms of their future involvement with FLV, with just under three quarters of respondents (73.6%) prioritising professional learning relevant to local providers.

[6] These were the top two ratings on a five point scale
[7] This conference evaluation form was slightly different, and did not ask about relevance, so the overall satisfaction is included instead

Figure 14: FLV's role supporting "Professional Learning - relevant to local providers"
Level of benefit to your work



Steering Committee members identified broad benefits of professional learning activities made available through the FLNs, such as facilitating connections and working with other providers, sharing resources, and getting affirmation from other providers about the work they are already doing.

3.3 Facilitating connections among providers

This section looks at how successful the FLV network has been in facilitating connections, such as partnerships and collaborations, among providers. With around 40% - 50% of providers being Learn Locals, we can assume that these comments relate in equal measure to Learn Locals. In future surveys, it may be of interest to ask respondents not only the type of role they hold, but also details about the type of organisation, such as whether they are a Learn Local, in order to reflect on the involvement of different types of organisations and FLPs.

… providers are now working together collaboratively in these networks rather than seeing each other as competition. … that's arguably one of the biggest successes of the project, and could be an ongoing success of the networks if they were to stay formed and in good communication.

FLV Project Manager

In a FLV evaluation discussion held as part of the December 2016 Consortium Committee meeting, the first discussion point was the power of the genuine connections between providers that FLV has facilitated. The collegial nature of these connections was emphasised.

> *One of the strengths has been the collegiate atmosphere between providers. People who are in a responsible position or charged with managing programs, the middle management, have come together and enabled that sharing of best practice - whether it be resources, or understanding each other's programming challenges. The space can be*

> *a quasi-competitive space, those organisations and roles may not have come together, but in an informal way they have developed their own little community of practice to share challenges, resources and opportunities across the sector.*

Members of the Steering Committee made similar comments:

> *FLV has led to barriers being broken down between providers, pre-existing ideas about other providers have changed and been challenged – people have been supportive of other providers and have seen others doing some great stuff.*

In a variety of aspects, FLV has opened up "a streamline of communication". They have provided "a line of communication that did not exist before for the LLENs ... they did not previously have this connectivity in the regions and FLV has formalised this" (Steering Committee members).

Not only are providers talking more to each other within regions, but also between regions, noted a FLV Consortium Committee member. "Because of the reach [of FLV] we've got providers from Ballarat talking to providers on the Mornington Peninsula, which is definitely relevant and core to the purpose of FLV". The Consortium Committee explained that these connections between regions have come about it a combination of ways:

1. Through the Consortium group themselves, which includes members from MCM based in inner and western Melbourne suburbs through to Skills Plus, based in outer south locations such as Frankston, Dandenong, Pakenham and the Mornington Peninsula;

2. Through the Steering Committee members, whose members came from a diverse range of providers (including Learn Local, TAFE, school, LLEN, community college, not-for-profit community services organisations, private RTO providers, and others) across the breadth of the southern metropolitan region, including Hastings, Narre Warren, Dandenong, Frankston, Moorabbin, South Melbourne, inner and western Melbourne.

3. And through the FLV Project Managers - "If the project manager identifies an opportunity or an issue in one area, they aim to share it with another area. Which I think is really key to the project" (Consortium Committee member).

The quarterly FLV newsletter was also a vehicle for increasing communication among FLPs across Victoria. The newsletter, which had a mailing list of over 300, served several functions, including: sharing information about professional learning events, such as conferences and forums; sharing other information relevant for the sector, such as recent research and government initiatives; sharing information about the development of FLV; and building the identity of the sector.

Partnership and Collaborations undertaken with support of the FLV network

Partnerships take time to develop, emphasised the Consortium Committee members and the FLV Project Manager. This is important to bear in mind, in the context of a project that has been going for just over 12 months, with many local FLNs having just started within the last few months. Having said this, providers are often keen to develop partnerships and relationships, as evidenced in the range of survey responses commenting on new relationships or partnerships begun, or their excitement about the potential, so having

FLV organise PL events and support people to come together, can provide a good context and impetus for action.

> *What I've found is that overall people have been keen to get these sorts of partnerships and connections off the ground, but often it's been a nice thought that hasn't happened. And then FLV has come along and there's been a bit of professional development money and a bit of brokerage and so forth, and that's been the thing that's got the momentum.*
>
> FLV Project Manager

While providers are often keen to build partnerships, the tightness of funding for projects, and the difficulties with getting funding, can lead to a sense of competition between providers, as the FLV Project Manager explains.

> *So in the same way that schools look at neighbouring schools I suppose as a rival for enrolments, well because the funding is even tighter for flexible learning providers, really if you don't have a class of however many numbers you need to run it, whether it's 15 or 20, then there's no extra money sitting around.*
>
> *And so that's often the lens through which providers have looked at other providers, you know, "oh that mob down the road". And the other thing is if you get a kid coming from that mob down the road you often only hear the horror stories about the provider because the kid hasn't fitted in well there and so they've left.*

Bringing providers together in flexible learning networks, focused on professional learning, networking and advocacy for the sector, can be powerful for moving away from that sense of competition and towards a sense of unity of purpose and shared understandings.

> *So the flexible learning networks have, I think, enabled conversation and dialogue to step beyond that and to start to step towards what are our commonalities? What do we both want to achieve? How do we want to - what are our issues that we're facing? And you get people together and suddenly they go oh, okay, we've got the same challenges. We don't know how to work with kids with Asperger's who are highly traumatised or you know, we don't know what this new Navigator program means for us. Let's get the Navigator coordinator down for our region and talk to us all as a network. Or, gee we've had a spate of near suicides recently, what about you guys?*
>
> *So, I think there's been a lot of anecdotal commentary that that's been really positive. …*
>
> FLV Project Manager

Some of the strongest existing partnerships are ones that started in the southern metropolitan region, where the FELN and FLaCA were already operating, and have at the point of writing this report, been operating for 3 or more years. These partnerships operate as a model of what is possible for other regions.

> *When I was in Geelong ... working at a scoping meeting in October, they actually said, "Who is doing this well"? And I said, "Frankston/Mornington Peninsula are doing it really well, if you want to know more, get in touch with the LLEN EO there and have a chat about how that is happening." So even just the opportunity for the FLV Project Manager*

to know what is happening where, just through conversations and so forth, and to be able to easily share that, accelerates some of this practice.

FLV Project Manager

It is important to note that FLV itself arose out of the partnerships that developed in FLaCA and the FELN. "…the birth of FLV came from a conversation where providers wanted to work together instead of competing in the same space" (Consortium Committee member). These existing partnerships have continued to grow and flourish, in powerful ways, supported now by FLV along with the LLEN. A Consortium Committee member explains this evolution:

Everyone was seen as the poor cousin in that particular area. They were just getting dumped with the kids that didn't fit mainstream schooling. And they thought actually, enough is enough, in our region we can come together, share resources, referrals, make sure the kids get into the right program. So fast forward two years later maybe and it's the local area partnerships, so it's the network of VCAL providers on the Frankston/Mornington Peninsula that do excursions together, have activities together, hire buses together; that local level engagement where we are saving money, but the kids are actually involved in interschool sports now, which wasn't done previously, cooking competitions and that kind of stuff. But the LLEN has responded to the need of the network and said actually this is a priority, how can we help manage this and make it better. It's just grown and evolved to the point now where The Brotherhood and SkillsPlus are almost seen as the one VCAL provider, and they help each other with referrals – actually that kid suits you, that kid suits us; sharing wellbeing resources, counselling techniques; that kind of stuff. So that local area partnership we know takes time, so I can imagine what that will look like in areas where it's not happening. … this project [FLV] can use that as a case study, say we can actually work together, not necessarily compete but actually be stronger together.

FLV Consortium Committee

The experience of the pre-existing networks in the southern metropolitan region explained the FLV project manager, is that over time, providers start to change the way they see themselves, from individual providers struggling alone, to part of a network of providers, working together. The relationships that are built over time, then allow for new possibilities and conversations, and different responses to government initiatives or other events or changes.

Sometimes the potential for partnership, and the role of the local FLN as a key part of that, develops quickly. In the following example, FLV helped to facilitate this development, not just through the initial FLN scoping meeting, but also through providing sponsorship for several workers to attend the Ballarat Flexible Learning forum together. While the professional learning provided is important, the possibilities coming together affords for building relationship and partnerships can be equally important.

When I was in Geelong recently there were a few key players in Geelong who work in the youth space who came along to the first meeting and had some of those conversations. And then I caught up with them again at the Ballarat Flexible Learning forum where they were talking about how they were progressing those partnerships and what role the Flexible Learning Network could play in that into the future. They saw an opportunity for

the Flexible Learning Network to cement their partnership as part of the ecosystem of what's provided in Geelong.

FLV Project Manager

In an evaluation discussion, the Steering Committee members provided many examples relating to the building of collaboration and partnership, to detail the impact and value of FLV to their own settings. A number of these related to breaking down a sense of isolation, and the benefits that come from feeling a sense of connection or unity with others. For example:

- No longer working in isolation or mistrusting others. Previously providers may have felt in competition with each other for students but as a result of getting together and getting to know each other, they are now making good referrals across to each other.
- Opportunities to share practice and knowledge. For example, one member commented, "Having met people in person through the FLN, I now feel comfortable to pick up the phone and speak with them when we have a specific challenge in our provision, find out what other people have done."
- Opportunities to see the innovations of other programs. This provides a sense that "I am not doing things on my own, not innovating on my own. This is quite an optimistic thing which helps to feel good about the state of education in Victoria rather than thinking 'oh my god' all these challenges. It has a positive impact on staff morale as see that people all over Melbourne are doing similar things to me, part of something bigger as all have a common goal about working with young people". (Steering Committee member)
- For one LLEN, talks are in progress about setting up a kind of CRT (casual relief teachers) type arrangement so that setting can access staff from other similar settings as need, so trying to ensure staff availability in the context of small resources education settings.

The FLV Project Manager observed that it can be hard to attribute particular partnerships directly to FLV, because there may also be other factors involved. However results from the evaluation survey indicate that a number of organisations did in fact attribute their new partnerships to FLV or their local FLN. That organisations were attributing new partnerships or collaborations to FLV is particularly significant given the short time that most of these FLNs have been in operation. One could expect, that given more time, more partnerships and collaborations would develop. This was also anticipated by stakeholders as indicated in the survey responses.

Stakeholder survey results

The stakeholder survey asked both about the level of benefit to participant's work from FLV's role with regard to "networking - sharing resources and knowledge", as well as with regard to "partnerships – strengthening local providers". 51% of respondents reported a high or very high benefit from networking, and a further 30% of respondents reported a medium benefit (see figure 14). 44% of respondents reported a high or very high benefit from partnerships, and a further 26% reported a medium benefit (see figure 15). Given the very recent initiation of most of the local FLNs, with 61% of stakeholders having been involved for less than 12 months, the level of benefit from partnerships is surprisingly high.

The following question asked people to describe any new partnerships or collaborations that are a result of involvement in a flexible learning network. Some people expressed excitement about seeing the possibilities after their first network meeting or seeing the creation of the network in itself as a form of partnership / collaboration. In addition to mentions of formation of a new flexible learning network, there are over 25 new partnerships and collaborations, outlined in figure 16. The benefits of these connections include new programs, closer liaison, new relationships and links and professional development - including conferences. Additionally, for a significant proportion of stakeholders, collaboration within FLN's has a direct impact on their or their organisation's work with young people. Over 71% of respondents indicated that being involved with FLNs is important or very important to their work with young people. This is most likely the result of sharing resources and expertise as this theme was reiterated across several survey item responses, including stakeholders' priorities for future involvement in FLNs and with FLV.

Figure 15: FLV's role supporting "Networking – sharing resources and knowledge"
Level of benefit to your work (n=50)

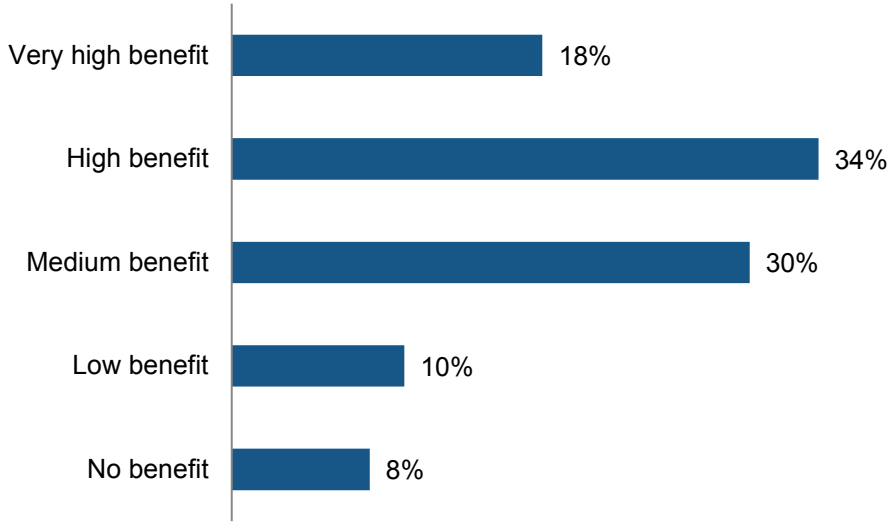


Figure 16: FLV's role supporting "Partnerships – strengthening local providers "
Level of benefit to your work (n=50)

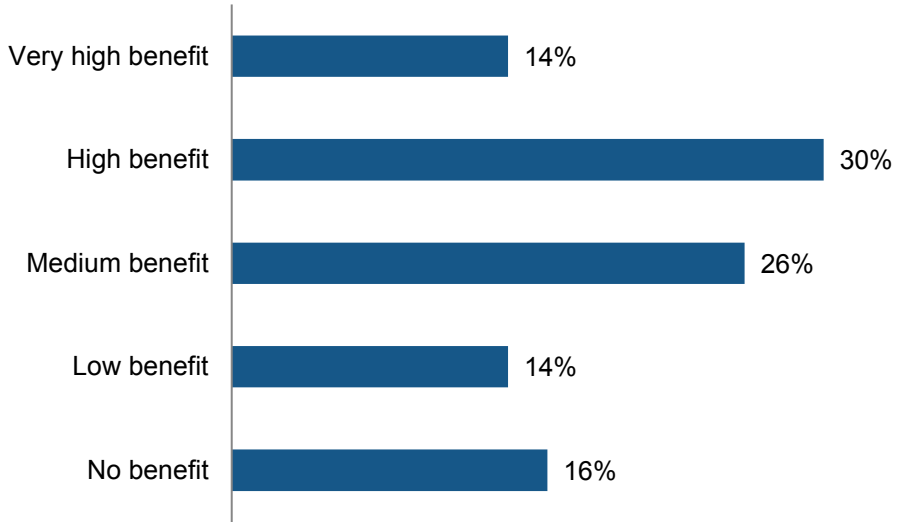


Figure 17: New partnerships or collaborations as a result of involvement with an FLN

Type of partnership or collaboration	Number of respondents
Professional learning - organising a conference / Forum / Workshop	6
Sharing or development of curriculum, resources or strategies	6
Closer liaison or new relationships with other providers or local services	6
Connection or collaboration with a Department of Education program – Link Up, Navigator or Reconnect	4
Advocacy	1
"Too many to mention"	1
Development of a new program (A Koori Specific Art and Culture program involving Berry Street, Federation University and VACCA)	1

Looking to the future, stakeholders see an important role for FLV in linking providers to each other via networking, enabling partnerships between providers and enabling providers to share expertise and excellent practice within and beyond the sector. Stakeholders are "supportive" or "very supportive" of these three priorities, with the percentage of respondents expressing support being 85.3%, 80.3% and 85% respectively.

3.4 Platform for advocacy

This section looks at how successful the FLV network has been as a platform for advocacy on behalf of the flexible and inclusive learning sector in Victoria. As mentioned previously, with around 40% - 50% of

providers involved in an FLN being Learn Locals, we can assume that these comments relate in equal measure to Learn Locals.

Advocacy on behalf of the FLP sector can be thought about in a couple of ways. On the one hand, it is about helping providers to see themselves as a sector.

> *… that is a piece of advocacy work in and of itself to help providers to know that they're not alone in the work that they're doing. And that even though we come from a range of funding streams and all sorts of things that there's a commonality, there's a strong thread between what we all do. So really getting us to understand and see that yes, we are a sector and therefore we're going to work as a sector.*
>
> FLV Project Manager

There are many benefits to flexible learning providers and others recognising FLPs as a sector.

> *FLV contributed to the celebration, acknowledgement and professionalisation of work being done in flexible learning, it has helped to validate and legitimise it. This is important, as previously this was an undervalued community.*
>
> Steering Committee Members

> *… It is also valuable for the students to know that are part of something bigger than their provider, something they can belong to also.*
>
> Steering Committee Members

Hand in hand with helping the sector to see itself as a sector, is advocating to the Department of Education and other stakeholders around what flexible learning is, its needs and views.

> *FLV sees its role as being able to pull together the voices of different flexible learning providers to hear their needs and their points of view and to feed that up to the Department of Education.*
>
> FLV Project Manager

> *FLV has also provided a platform to recognise what providers do, that there is a need for this provision and that those who work in the sector are professionals. The biggest thing is that it has "given a voice in a formal way" that the providers did not have previously, and that comes through the collaborations.*
>
> Steering Committee Members

FLV's mission and ability to advocate on behalf of providers, combined with FLVs central coordination and communication role, gives FLV and the local FLNs added strength and purpose, greater than "simply another network" to belong to. This was commented on in various ways, during the Steering Committee evaluation discussion.

> *FLV provides an important structure for providers, a peak body to represent them. There is a credibility and integrity to setting up a new network, providers have to make a commitment and there is something "structured" behind that commitment.*

Whilst providers may have been involved in other networks before, this … provides the "big picture stuff".

FLV has also provided a clear statement about what we do – this is where its advocacy role has also come in.

Going forward it is felt that FLV has potential to be a strong advocate for the sector.

Steering Committee Members

Advocacy activities undertaken or supported

FLV has undertaken or supported a range of activities that are all part of building a platform for advocacy. These activities have focused on gathering stakeholder views on what should be the advocacy priorities for FLV, meetings with stakeholders at local (FLN) and system level (leaders in education and related government departments) and in various forums such as conferences. These activities have promoted awareness of FLPs as a sector and include:

Gathering stakeholder views on advocacy priorities for the FLP sector

- Running an advocacy focused workshop (aiming to draw advocacy input from the sector) at the Flexible Learning Forum in December 2015, which was attended by 13 providers.
- A survey of flexible and inclusive learning providers (conducted December 2015) to inform the development of FLV. The survey report identified areas of advocacy being sought and a recommended approach.
- Advocacy issues identified at Highlands Flexible Learning Forum 2015 for Steering Committee consideration.
- Inner Gippsland flexible learning networking event held April 2016, provided opportunity for providers to share issues affecting the provision of programs and engagement of young people. Advocacy issues identified and documented for further discussion, informing development of FLV advocacy platforms.

Research as a tool to inform advocacy platform

- FLV has conducted a research project, focused on "defining the measures of success for young people in flexible learning programs" in the Southern Metropolitan Region, as a tool to inform the FLV advocacy platform (as well as for the value of the research itself).

Building recognition of a flexible learning sector

- Development of a logo and other materials (such as an information flier) for FLV
- Conversations around shared language and dialogue through FLN meetings.
- Advocacy discussion held with Steering Committee.
- Presented at the Doing School Differently conference (15-16th Sept 2016).

- Asked by key organiser of Doing School Differently conference to promote FLV as part of proposed national Flexible Learning advocacy platform.
- Professional learning activities that help people come together as a sector, and recognise that they are a sector.
- Discussions with university lecturers in pre-service teacher education courses regarding improved awareness of FLOs [Flexible Learning Options] in pre-service teacher education
- Discussed options of pre-service students doing teaching placements in FLO programs

Supporting local Advocacy activities

- Supporting the development of a FLN who then goes on to undertake advocacy on their own behalf.

Meetings with system level stakeholders

- Conversation with senior managers within the DET/DHHS Vulnerable Children's Branch about what FLV is doing and the work for FLPs.

> *... because they're across a number of those new Education State initiatives such as Navigator, School Focused Youth Service, LOOKOUT centre, and the LLEN contracts now. And in addition they're doing some kind of a flexible learning options review … They're very key people to talk to.*
>
> FLV Project Manager

- Conversation with the Director of the DET TAFE and Participation Branch about FLV and the work of FLPs.

Outcomes of advocacy activities

The different aspects of advocacy are often intertwined. This section outlines a range of different advocacy outcomes and stories, to give a broader understanding of what was achieved.

The work of FLV overall, in gaining the understanding and active support of LLENs, bringing together providers and building local flexible learning networks, has been in itself significant advocacy *for* the sector, and has led to further advocacy *by* the sector.

> *… one of the things I've got a sense of from the LLEN EOs is that they have really valued having FLV to get the ball rolling and that without FLV to get the ball rolling that the result wouldn't have happened. So I got a strong sense of that from Swan Hill, got a strong sense of that from Shepparton. Same in Geelong. So a range of areas where conversations have led to action, and FLV has been critical to that happening. And a part of that action has been that we are advocating for this sector to come together, work together, support each other, and move forwards together.*
>
> FLV Project Manager

FLV has worked towards recognition of a sector, and there is evidence that this is happening.

The thing that really stood out for me was the idea of the recognition of a sector, an education sector. So no longer being just a flimsy group of organisations who are doing their best to pick up some kids that have fallen through the cracks, these are everything from Berry Street to small tiny ten kid programs in Ballarat, are recognising each other for the specialist work they do. That's really important.

FLV Consortium Committee

In fact, beyond recognition of a sector, Consortium Committee members have noticed a change in how flexible learning is being thought about.

… Taking it away from an alternate space ... a lesser program, to a more refined, usually therapeutic, but if not, very aware of things like trauma and mental health, and very flexible in how they work with young people being affected by something. So it's not always that these are the bad kids that have been kicked out of school, its young people who can't deal necessarily with the school environment for whatever reason. That's a really important one, because the Department, especially, needs to know that.

FLV Consortium Committee

Partnerships or collaboration between flexible learning providers, can lead to their own advocacy. Here the work of FLV is not to do the advocacy work, but working with the LLEN or LLENs to bring together the providers to form an FLN, and in their first meeting giving them a sense of what they could do together, and a space to share their needs and experiences. The following example, told by the FLV Project Manager, is about an advocacy collaboration in a large regional area that arose directly out of an FLN meeting, which the FLV project manager attended:

And they were very clear that one of their number one issues, was how to represent their data back to, and their successes, to the school. And that the school very much drove the agenda for the way that the FLO [flexible learning option] ran. And it seems as though that's the case in a lot of regional Victoria …

… So I think in terms of an advocacy outcome that was a really positive thing that they were able to identify, hey, we're all experiencing similar things here, so let's think collectively about how we're going to respond to this with our schools.

Meeting with senior bureaucrats may have a variety of direct and indirect outcomes. The FLV Project Manager talks about shifts in thinking he is hearing when speaking with these individuals. He also notes the power of speaking with FLPs before such a meeting, and bringing their concerns as a sector, directly to people in the Department of Education.

… there's been a couple of great opportunities with quite senior bureaucrats to talk about what flexible learning providers do. And even just starting to hear back the language from them about understanding the sector.

So talking about a sector has been very encouraging and it's meant that as well as that when I've been at the different Flexible Learning Network meetings, either the scoping meetings to start a network or the actual meetings themselves, I've been able to say well, look in a couple of days I'll be meeting with such and such a person. What would you like

to say to them? So a good one was for instance in Swan Hill we had people saying we just really want recognition. We want recognition for the work we do.

And so I was able to feed that message directly to the Director of the TAFE and Participation Branch and he said "Yes, great", so I'm really hearing that.

FLV Project Manager

The Consortium Committee reflected on the unusually speedy building of broad recognition and respect amongst FLPs and other stakeholders for FLV, and the importance this has had for being able to advocate and lobby on behalf of the sector.

Now that FLV has a brand and a consistent group of high profile providers, there have been a number of meetings with the Vulnerable Children's Branch, with the TAFE and Participation Branch, which I think if we were to go to as individual providers it would be a very different conversation. But the Department has actually been quite welcoming of more providers coming together.

Given the short timeframe that FLV has been running, what it has achieved in the advocacy space in terms of being able to get contacts with those people, meetings and all the rest of it, I think it's starting to really gather some momentum. It's unusual for a group or an organisation to really build that up so quickly. That's probably recognition of the important role that it's played for other providers really. A lot of people are talking about it. And when you speak to the providers everybody is aware of it. ... People have really engaged with it.

FLV Consortium Committee

Advocacy results however, can be hard to gauge:

… on the one hand you are having some conversations and they're good conversations, but you're sitting in a bureaucrat's office for an hour or something and you've got no real idea of the impact of that.

FLV Project Manager

Two research projects undertaken by FLV were seen as part of building the advocacy platform (FLV, March 2016a). Initially research was done to understand the needs and views of the sector in terms of professional learning and advocacy issues (FLV, 2015c). And at the time of writing this evaluation report, FLV is completing a larger research project, looking at how success is measured and viewed in FLPs in the southern metropolitan Melbourne region. As a tool for advocacy, this research will be able to be shown to the Department of Education and others. It can be used to look at a range of measures of success, "in contrast and alongside the mainstream perception of success" (FLV Project Manager).

[Through the research] FLV will have an opportunity to tie together those conversations, those anecdotal stories, bits and pieces that we hear time and time again in the sector. … both the value of the research as research in itself … and the value of the research to advocate more clearly again, this is the point of difference of the sector.

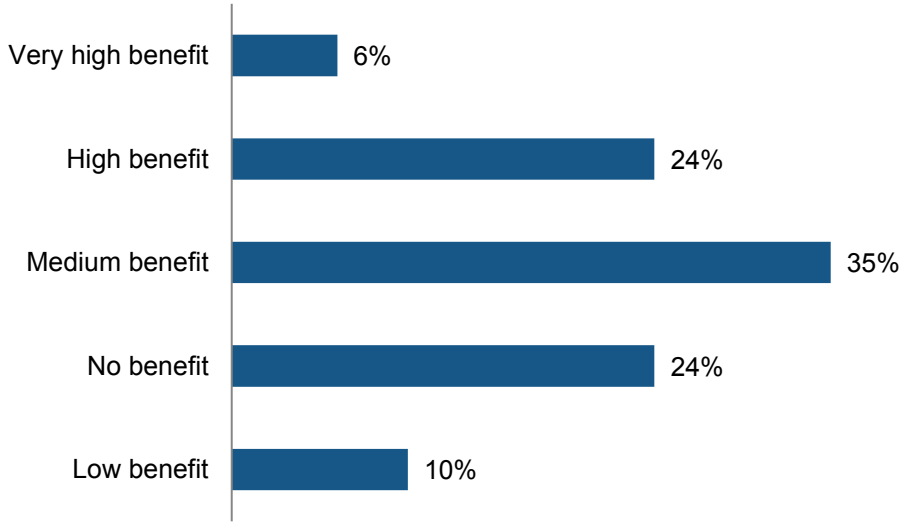
Bringing providers together for conferences and other professional learning activities is an important aspect of helping to build identity and voice as a sector.

> *And as well as things like just being able to promote the Doing School Differently conference and sponsor people to attend the Doing School Differently conference as a key moment of the year that, as well as professional learning, was really I think you know about advocacy as well. It was about saying we are a sector, we're coming together as a sector, we're supporting each other as a sector, and thinking about our future as a sector.*
>
> FLV Project Manager

Stakeholder survey results

Almost two thirds of respondents (65%) felt that FLV's role supporting "advocacy on issues important to local providers" had benefited their work to some degree. Just under one third (30%) perceived high or very high benefits while just over one third (35%) of respondents indicated medium benefits related to advocacy.

Figure 18: FLV's role supporting " Advocacy – on issues important to local providers" Level of benefit to your work (n=50)



These responses also appear to relate to stakeholders' perception of the current and future roles and value of FLV. For example, a repeated theme across responses to several survey questions was that professional learning and networking are more important than advocacy for stakeholders who are involved with networks that are in the process of being established or are very recently established. Going forward, advocacy is perceived by more stakeholders to be an important FLV activity that will be of benefit to their work. This was evident in stakeholders' responses to other survey questions, including their interest in being more involved with FLV in future. Whereas 30% of stakeholders perceived important present benefits of advocacy (high or very high), over 45% are "particularly interested" in advocacy in terms of their future involvement with FLV. One response sums up the anticipation of increasing importance attached to advocacy. The stakeholder had not to date seen any significant impact of involvement with FLV on their direct work with young people, but added: "I anticipate it will through advocacy on funding and compliance issues". Other stakeholders also identified the most crucial advocacy issues as resources and funding.

3.5 The Future of FLV

The documentation of FLV's development and achievements also includes perspectives on the future of FLV. Feedback on the survey, as well as other sources, speaks to the importance of FLV's four objectives and roles as an umbrella network, in supporting professional learning, facilitating connections amongst providers and as a platform for advocacy on behalf of the FLP sector. Feedback on the stakeholder survey was given regarding individuals' future involvement with FLV and levels of support for nominated FLV future roles.

Professional learning and networking

Stakeholders nominated professional learning, networking and enabling providers to share their expertise and practice as their most highly valued future roles for FLV.

- Individuals expressed interest in being more involved with FLV, particularly in professional learning (most highly ranked), networking (ranked second) and building partnerships (ranked third).
- 87% of stakeholders are supportive or very supportive of FLV's future role in increasing support between providers via shared professional learning.
- 85.3% of stakeholders are supportive or very supportive of FLV's future role in linking providers to each other via networking.
- 85% of stakeholders are supportive or very supportive of FLV's future role in enabling FLP providers to share their expertise and excellent flexible learning practice within and beyond the sector.
- Stakeholders also highly ranked enabling partnerships (80.3% were supportive or very supportive) in FLV future roles.

These results are consistent with how stakeholders value FLV's work to date and especially reflect the priorities of FLP providers going forward with FLV.

Most stakeholders readily identified their priorities for FLV future work in terms of building on FLV's current achievements. However, there were some issues raised that perhaps reflect the different levels of involvement with FLV and FLNs but are expressed as considerations for FLV. Some stakeholders suggested that FLV needs to clarify what its main role/s will be going forward and how it will complement existing structures such as LLENs and well established FLNs. Other issues that individual stakeholders raised include how FLV can effectively support 'disparate sectors' operating in the FLP space (e.g. TAFE, RTOs, not-for-profits, schools); the need to clarify lines of communication between FLV, LLENs and providers; and how FLV can expand opportunities for more direct contact with providers. There was some frustration amongst a few stakeholders who said they wanted to see more action resulting from FLV's work at the FLP and local level. However, they also acknowledged that as the project is in its initial phase, with just one part-time worker, their expectations needed to take these contextual constraints into account. For example, this stakeholder commented on issues related to communication:

> *Direct contact made with the LLENs was a bit ad hoc and there seemed to be an assumption that information would be passed on, which wasn't always the case - I know*

you're [the FLV Project Manager] limited by hours of work and distance ... a phone is quite a good way to introduce the network to everyone :-)

Peak body role

Additionally, 82% of stakeholders support or are very supportive of a future role for FLV in collecting data and analysis from and for the sector. This high ranking appears to suggest that stakeholders envisage a growing 'peak body' role for FLV and this is also evidenced in the expectation that FLV will 'strengthen advocacy, networks and partnerships' (Stakeholder, survey). There is an expectation that into the future FLV will be a strong and successful advocate for funding and resources for the sector. As one stakeholder put it:

FL programs… have generally been grossly under-resourced and under-valued. They have existed on the professional and often unsustainable goodwill of many involved. This sector must be adequately supported and resourced "from the top".

4 Supporting the Flexible Learning Sector to Support Young People

Through the Leading Practice and Leading Change in Youth Education project, and the creation of FLV and local Flexible Learning Networks, a growing number of FLPs around Victoria are more supported in the work that they do. This has been achieved through FLV's strong support to professional learning, networking, partnership and collaboration opportunities and advocacy work. Young people who are students in FLPs benefit from the support to workers, FLPs and the sector.

This concluding section provides a summary of results, organised around the four main research questions. In considering how successfully FLV has met the goals were set in the start-up phase in late 2015, it is important to keep in mind the time-frame and context of the development of FLV and FLNs. FLV is in its early establishment phase and the state-wide project has been led by a Project Manager in a part-time position. The Project Manager and Steering Committee's work toward the aims of establishing the umbrella organisation and supporting network connections and partnerships, professional learning and advocacy has really been underway for only a little over 12 months.

The summary of results is followed by a section on looking towards the future of FLV.

4.1 Summing up

The establishment of Flexible Learning Victoria emerged from the recognised need to link providers of flexible learning programs and to build capacity of the sector. FLV's purposes ultimately are concerned with enhancing young people's educational and life opportunities. National research on flexible learning programs (Te Riele, 2014) has identified their significance in providing successful educational pathways and improving the life chances of young people who experience barriers to completing secondary education in mainstream contexts, mainly due to social marginalisation or socioeconomic disadvantage. FLPs thus play a vital role in supporting the Victorian government's efforts to significantly reduce the number of early-school leavers. Moreover, FLPs showcase innovation that is more widely applicable to mainstream education (Te Riele 2014; Wirenga & Taylor, 2015).

Overarching body

A key recommendation of Te Riele's (2014) national study and of reports on flexible learning provision in metropolitan regions of Victoria (Ellum & Longmuir, 2013; Waugh, 2014) was the need to recognise and develop FLPs as a sector. This was argued to be important in breaking down the isolation that was common amongst FLPs, to encourage FLPs to share resources and expertise and to create a forum for advocacy for the sector.

This evaluation finds that FLV has been highly successful in developing FLP and FLN identities as belonging to the sector and this has been achieved in a very short period. Across the broad constituency, stakeholders

are now referring to “the sector” and FLV’s key role as a “peak body”. There is strong support from the highly diverse membership who see the value of FLV as an organising body that is committed to developing the sector at the local, regional and state levels.

FLV has been highly successful in establishing an overarching body for providers of youth education for students not in mainstream education in Victoria.

Key achievements include:

1. Merging a clear and cohesive organisational structure with a Communities of Practice approach to networking. As an emerging peak body, FLV has effectively melded these two important dimensions, reflecting FLV's responsiveness to its constituency, the highly participatory processes of development and the premium placed on local FLN distinctiveness and empowerment.

2. Growth of membership beyond the original FLACA network, with 14 active or developing FL networks now established across Victoria, supported by 27 LLENs and reaching over 200 FLP providers. In addition to the first two networks that were formed out of 3 existing networks, FLV facilitated the development of 12 new networks.

3. Diversity of membership. A broad range of providers have engaged with FLV in the formation of FLNs. The diverse membership includes Learn Locals, schools (State, Independent and Catholic), non-school senior secondary providers, TAFEs, Adult Community Education providers, not-for-profit community services organisations and private RTOs. Of the 200 plus providers involved in FLNs, it is estimated that up to 50 percent are Learn Local providers.

4. Awareness and understanding of the network amongst relevant organisations. There is a high level of provider awareness and engagement with FLV across Victoria. Interest in FLV also extends beyond the membership of FLNs and includes allies such as School Focused Youth Services, Wellbeing Coordinators, local councils and community organisations that have partnered with FLPs.

5. Level of ownership and leadership of the network amongst relevant organisations. The letters of support from several LLENs and another stakeholder organisation, and the level of enthusiasm for the potential of local networks, and commitment from the Consortium and the Steering Committee, certainly shows ownership from more than just a few. This success in gaining widespread buy-in has largely been achieved through the support of LLENs and the Project Manager's face-to-face networking across Victoria. Given the short length of the project, however, it is to be expected that there would not yet be across the board ownership and leadership developed. This presents a strong need for the project to continue, at least during the developmental stage, with a further period of hands-on input from a project manager.

Professional learning

The diversity of the FLP sector in terms of funding security and sources, staffing and resources, combined with a history of limited recognition within broader systems of education have all contributed to delimit the scope of communication within the sector, advocacy and quality assurance of programs (Te Riele, 2014; Wirenga & Taylor, 2015). In this context, opportunities for professional learning (PL) are critical to supporting

providers and creating student success. Plows and Te Riele (2016) found that PL needs to reflect the diversity of FLPs, in PL content and a range of types of PL and recommended that barriers to providers' access to meaningful PL needed to be addressed. The most common constraints were costs and the availability of time and relief staffing. PL access was most challenging for providers in smaller, more recently established or isolated FLPs. Additionally the report recommended closer collaboration across the sector and with funding bodies and government agencies "to access and leverage existing supports and remove barriers to PL participation" (Plows & Te Riele, 2016, p. vi).

The need to undertake professional learning as key to individuals' professional development and optimal provision for young people was similarly strongly expressed from all sources in this evaluation. Almost half the survey respondents nominated PL as their reason for getting involved with FLV and providing relevant PL was deemed to be amongst the most important purposes of FLV, second only to networking.

FLV has been highly successful in supporting professional learning activities for providers of youth education for students not in mainstream education in Victoria.

Key achievements include:

1. The number of events – FLV supported 13 PL events; that is on average more than one per month.
2. Listening to and working with FLNs, LLENs and providers in regional and metropolitan areas, to provide flexible approaches to PL that fit with different local contexts and complement existing offerings.
3. Developing and implementing a diverse range of ways of approaching the PL. This included supporting existing events, creating new events for local FLNs, supporting local FLNs with their own events, sponsoring regional providers to attend larger PL events in other regions.
4. Providing relevant and useful PL events for a broad range of providers. This was emphasised and highly valued by stakeholders. Feedback on PL events indicated, on average, 86% participant satisfaction and in the stakeholder survey, 88% indicated that FLV's support to PL benefited their work.
5. FLV's brokerage fund for PL was important to successfully supporting PL activities.

Facilitating connections

Networking has been a fundamental aim and means of realising FLV's remit. Networking is the chief means of bringing people together to establish new FLN's and to strengthen those already existing. The Project Manager's role in these processes has been effective because it has involved much face-to-face contact with the constituency at all levels and especially with LLEN EOs and FLP providers. Other dimensions of FLV work have supported networking within and between FLNs. For example, providing professional learning opportunities has contributed to FLV's achievements in growing sector awareness. Alongside more "formal" PL activities, providers have highly valued the informal networking that occurs at PL events.

A focus of networking has been the formation of links and partnerships within FLNs. FLV's support in this area has been effective because the Project Manager is able to bring the broad knowledge of individuals and organisations in the FLP space to providers and because there is a reciprocal exchange of information occurring at this level, strongly supported by the LLENs.

“Fruitful collaboration with suitable partner organisations enable the work of flexible learning programs” (Te Riele, 2014, p. 71). Partnerships with businesses, employers, inter-agency networks and community organisations are all important contributors to FLPs’ capacity to respond to young people’s needs and interests and to facilitate successful pathways. To date, FLV has achieved remarkable results in supporting the development of connections and partnerships across the sector. A high proportion of stakeholders who completed the survey indicated they had found the new linkages and partnerships beneficial.

FLV has been highly successful in facilitating connections among providers.

Key achievements include:

1. Initiating a wide range of partnerships and collaborations. This includes building new relationships and welcoming in new workers, sharing of information and resources, collaboratively developing PL events and conferences, working in with current government initiatives (which was attributed to links made at an FLN meeting), and other specific projects and initiatives.
2. Facilitating FLN connections. As new networks have been established, the broader reach of FLV has encouraged communication between as well as within FLNs.
3. Over 25 new partnerships or collaborations were identified by stakeholders.
4. Significant outcomes of collaboration within and between FLNs include shared knowledge of good practice models in program design and delivery; greater emphasis on complementary rather than duplicating services and this has facilitated more direct delivery time for some FLPs; and efficiency gains where joint use of facilities, resources and relief staff has been practicable.
5. Strengthening a culture of cooperation across the sector. FLV's support to networking, collaboration and partnership building has emphasised cooperation and fostered a collegiate atmosphere between providers. By providing relevant information, including through the quarterly newsletter, and facilitating the sharing of resources, FLV has helped to alleviate some of the pressures that have tended to foster a competitive environment.
6. Benefits to FLPs. 81% of stakeholders identified tangible benefits to their work as a result of networking facilitated by FLV; and, in the short time-frame, 60% identified benefits of new partnerships.

Advocacy

Advocacy is crucial to the FLP sector’s development and is recognised by the constituency as a key role of FLV. Because the FLP sector is large, diverse and characterised by varied levels of resourcing, advocacy is necessary to build capacity for its development: to assure continued provision for educationally marginalised young people and ensure their opportunities for success in education and post-school pathways; and to enhance the already substantial social and financial returns accruing from the sector’s work (Te Riele, 2014).

The importance of advocacy to FLV stakeholders was apparent in the mixed survey responses regarding advocacy. On the one hand, advocacy was not highly rated as a reason for getting involved with FLV. On the other hand, it was highly ranked in stakeholders’ perception of FLV purposes. Clearly, stakeholders are now seeing FLV as a peak organisation that will embrace the role of advocacy on their behalf. There was also

evidence found in the evaluation that the focus on advocacy by FLV may support individual FLNs' self-advocacy work. The most commonly prioritised advocacy issues are funding and resources. Recognition of the sector also remains an important focus for advocacy.

FLV has been highly successful in developing itself as a new platform for advocacy on behalf of the flexible and inclusive learning sector in Victoria.

Key achievements include:

1. Establishing itself as a credible umbrella or peak body organisation, speaking on behalf of the sector, evidenced by several high level consultative conversations with people in the Department of Education.
2. Having been a significant factor in FLPs coming to see themselves as a sector. In the Steering Committee, the Consortium Committee and the stakeholder survey, people talked about "a sector". Several mentioned that it was new for providers to see themselves as belonging to a sector in this way.
3. Having been effective in gathering views and concerns of providers, through the FLN forming meetings, and other conversations along the way, as well as the surveys at the start and end of the project.
4. Developed among providers a perception that FLV has good potential to be a strong advocate for the sector in the future.

4.2 FLV going forward

FLV has already had significant impact in achieving its goals over the past twelve months and across the sector there is strong support for FLV's continuation and development. Most stakeholders are saying that FLV is very important for the FLP sector and that they are excited about moving forward with FLV. There is strong evidence that FLV should take a leading role as an umbrella organisation or peak body of the FLP sector, to continue to work in the key areas related to the original objectives of the Leading Practice and Leading Change in Youth Education project and to develop further goals to build on successes to date.

Successful attainment of FLV goals is overwhelmingly evidenced in this evaluation report. Collaboration with LLENs, FLNs and FLPs, as well as the Consortium Committee and the Steering Committee, have all been key contributing factors to FLV's accomplishments. However, not all benefits of FLV's achievements have been experienced by all across the sector. How long people have been involved with FLV and in FLNs clearly influences perceptions of the value and potential of FLV. Overall, there is great enthusiasm for FLV to continue and build its work into the future. This is based on recognition of how important the role is for the whole sector going forward.

There is strong support across the sector for FLV to continue to work in the four key areas of establishing an overarching body, supporting professional learning, facilitating connections and advocacy. Networking and professional learning are the highest priorities for FLP providers, with a focus on FLV enabling providers to share expertise and resources and to build and strengthen partnerships. This work may bring into consideration how to best tap the contributions of what are perceived to be different sectors within the FLP sector and how to create more space for direct contact of FLV with providers. Additionally, many FLNs are only recently established and further development work with them is another priority. Advocacy is also now

expected of FLV and seen to be a key role going forward. As FLV future roles, these priorities represent time-consuming activities and while the achievements of FLV to date are quite remarkable, it will take time to further build capacity, particularly where FLNs are in early stages of development and potentially through the establishment of additional new networks.

Going forward, FLV will need further funding to enable it to develop and build on the substantial achievements of the first twelve months. The following recommendations pertain to the findings of the evaluation. They include recommendations from the Steering committee and stakeholders.

1. Ongoing project manager role

- There is strong support across the sector for FLV to continue to its work in establishing an overarching body, supporting professional learning, facilitating connections and advocacy.
- The project manager role is vital to continue the work begun in the first phase of FLV's establishment.
- In addition to the first two Flexible Learning Networks formed from three existing networks, the project manager has led the establishment of FLNs covering 70% of Victoria. It will take time to fully operationalise most of the new networks and there is potential for additional networks to complete state-wide coverage.
- The Steering Committee has expressed concerns about what will happen without a dedicated project manager in place to continue FLV work. They expressed the view, as did other stakeholders, that FLV needs a leader to propel it forward, for the ongoing development of the networks – providing organisation, support, leadership, focus.

Both FLV Project Managers achieved significant gains for the sector in building relationships, gathering support and bringing people together. This is both a great strength, but also a potential vulnerability, in that the project's success has depended to a significant degree on the ability of the Project Manager. The power of having many local networks state-wide is that as time goes on, and with appropriate support, networks will become more established and impactful and there will subsequently be many sources of power and energy to further advance the sector and potentially share in the leadership role of FLV.

2. Advocacy

FLV has been successful in establishing itself as an umbrella organisation and is seen by stakeholders as an emerging peak body with key responsibilities in advocacy.

- Funding and resourcing of the sector are key advocacy issues.
- FLV is well placed to continue to raise awareness and provide and seek information from government departments and community, philanthropic and relevant funding organisations.
- FLV is well placed to advocate on policy matters affecting the sector. This will be important to enhancing recognition of the sector as a whole and FLP providers.

- The kind of infrastructure usually associated with a 'peak body' is very limited in FLV's case and strengthening the resources and systems available to FLV leadership will enhance its capacity to effectively advocate for the sector.

3. Coordinating roles

There is strong support for FLV as an umbrella organisation or peak body for the sector. Constituents have articulated their support for the four key areas of FLV's work and additionally, there are some specific coordinating roles that are being seen as the remit of FLV in order to progress the sector.

- Collecting data and analysis for and from the sector is one of the most pertinent roles for FLV going forward. Constituents want to see FLV develop a role in supporting sector governance as well as advocating on behalf of the sector. Collecting and analysing relevant data will be important to maintaining a profile of the sector, advocacy and support to effective distribution of resources.
- Developing an accurate membership database has to date been a challenge, as FLV does not have 'memberships' as such and is reliant on several different and incomplete information sources. Establishing an accurate profile of the sector will be necessary for the recommended data collection and analysis detailed above.
- The combination of these two strategies will enable FLV to track, document and differentiate statistics for particular groups. For example, the involvement and benefit for Learn Locals specifically; and the involvement of TAFE programs as part of FLNs and the sector.
- Stakeholders suggested a next step in building connections among providers, and especially for connecting across geographic borders, is to develop the use of online communication. Stakeholders are keen to see development of the FLV website and further utilisation of Yammer (online connection of providers). The latter suggestion includes developing protocols around who can join and gaining buy-in of key people in the sector to engage, support and develop it.

4. Membership

There has been some discussion amongst the Steering Committee, Consortium and other stakeholders around whether FLV should move to paid memberships. The evaluation findings suggest that it may be too soon to take this idea forward. As noted by members of the Steering Committee, the first phase of FLV has featured a Project Manager in place to lead FLV and a small brokerage fund to provide money to FLNs for events when they join. Moving to paid membership when many FLNs have only very recently commenced could be risky. However, once FLV has been in place longer and people are more cognisant of its value at local, regional and state level, seeing results and growing involvement, the move to a paid membership system may be feasible.

5. Funding the next phase

The Steering Committee, Consortium Committee and Project Manager are clearly aware of the need for funding to continue FLV work and that it is imperative to address this issue in the immediate short-term and for the longer-term.

- If constituents now see FLV as a peak body then it needs some resourcing / funding to keep it growing and make it sustainable.
- As the Leading Practice and Leading Change in Youth Education project draws to a close, the need to identify further funding is imperative.
- Longer-term funding will be needed for FLV's effective development as a peak body.

The positive feedback, reflections and optimistic views on the accomplishments and future of FLV, from all constituent groups, suggest that FLV needs to be resourced to continue the excellent work begun in 2016. In terms of the future of FLV, perhaps its greatest value is in enabling providers a sense of belonging to something that is moving forward and championing their interests. This is particularly so for smaller schools and isolated FLPs that "absolutely need to be connected" but important for all providers, FLNs and the sector. Ultimately, this work is dedicated to young people's needs, interests, wellbeing, educational pathways and life opportunities. FLV's accomplishments are a strong track record for leading the sector.

5 Appendices

5.1 Appendix I - Flexible Learning Victoria Registration/Census Form

Flexible Learning Victoria Registration/Census Form

Flexible Learning Victoria
making a difference

Evaluation of Flexible Learning Victoria (FLV) – Information for Prospective Members

Please note that information provided in the registration form about your organisation will be stored in a membership database. Information in the database will contribute to evaluating and monitoring the growth, sustainability and applicability of FLV to professional working in the sector. Victoria University (VU) researchers Dr Vicky Plows and Professor Kitty te Riele are assisting with data analysis and reporting for the evaluation. The teams from FLV and VU may draw on your anonymised information in the database for a report that will be publicly available as well as other publications. If you have any questions about this please contact: Debra Parker, FLV Project Manager: flv@bgkllen.org.au 03 9584 8845

FLV was set up as part of the 'Leading Change in Youth Education' Project which is funded by ACFE. Consortia members are SkillsPlus (lead), Narre Community Learning Centre, Melbourne City Mission and the Brotherhood of St Laurence with Project Management under the BGK LLEN.

This is a (please mark☒)

☐ **New Registration** ☐ **Update of Information** ☐ **Census Report (due 31st May, 30th Nov)**

Name of Flexible Learning Network	
Network Contact details	**Name**
	Position
	Email
	Phone
LLEN Contact details (if different)	**Name**
	Position
	Email
	Phone
Meeting dates *e.g. first Wed mthly*	

Network engagement details

Number of member organisations registered with your network:

I have attached a current list of network members in the required format as at (please mark ☒)

☐ **formation of network** ☐ **last meeting dated: / /**

Number of network meetings held in the last six months:

Number of network meetings planned for the next six months:

Number of network activities/events held in the last six months: Number ( )

Please provide details:

Number of network activities/events planned for the next six months: Number ( )

Please provide details:

Member needs

Please provide details of any specific professional learning, networking, advocacy or partnership needs that your network has identified:

Office use

Entered into FLV database by: **Date:**

FLV Membership Form V1 22/03/2016

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