

National Board of Employment, Education and Training

Future Directions

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Foreword

During 1991–92 the National Board developed a framework which allows its priorities and future work program to be better assessed. This *Future Directions* statement redefines the Board's Mission and Objectives then analyses the impact of the external environment on its activities and its strengths and weaknesses. From this a structured approach to priority setting has been developed, starting with a number of themes identified as overlying all the work undertaken. These cover such things as employment impacts, quality, equity, disadvantage and the need to take a national and cross-sectoral view on issues.

The program areas, within which specific projects will be undertaken, are selected to represent the major issues facing employment, education and training at the present time. Activities are being undertaken in, among other topics, post-compulsory education and training, science and technology in education, resource allocation between portfolio sectors and improved articulation and credit transfer. Formal references from the Minister will continue to provide the major direction for the work program.

The *Future Directions* paper has been prepared mainly for members' use, as a basis on which the work program can be developed so as to maximise the effectiveness of the Board's activities and to optimise the use of its resources.



Mission Statement

- To promote public discussion of issues, and to provide independent advice to relevant Ministers, on national policy matters in employment, education, training and research.
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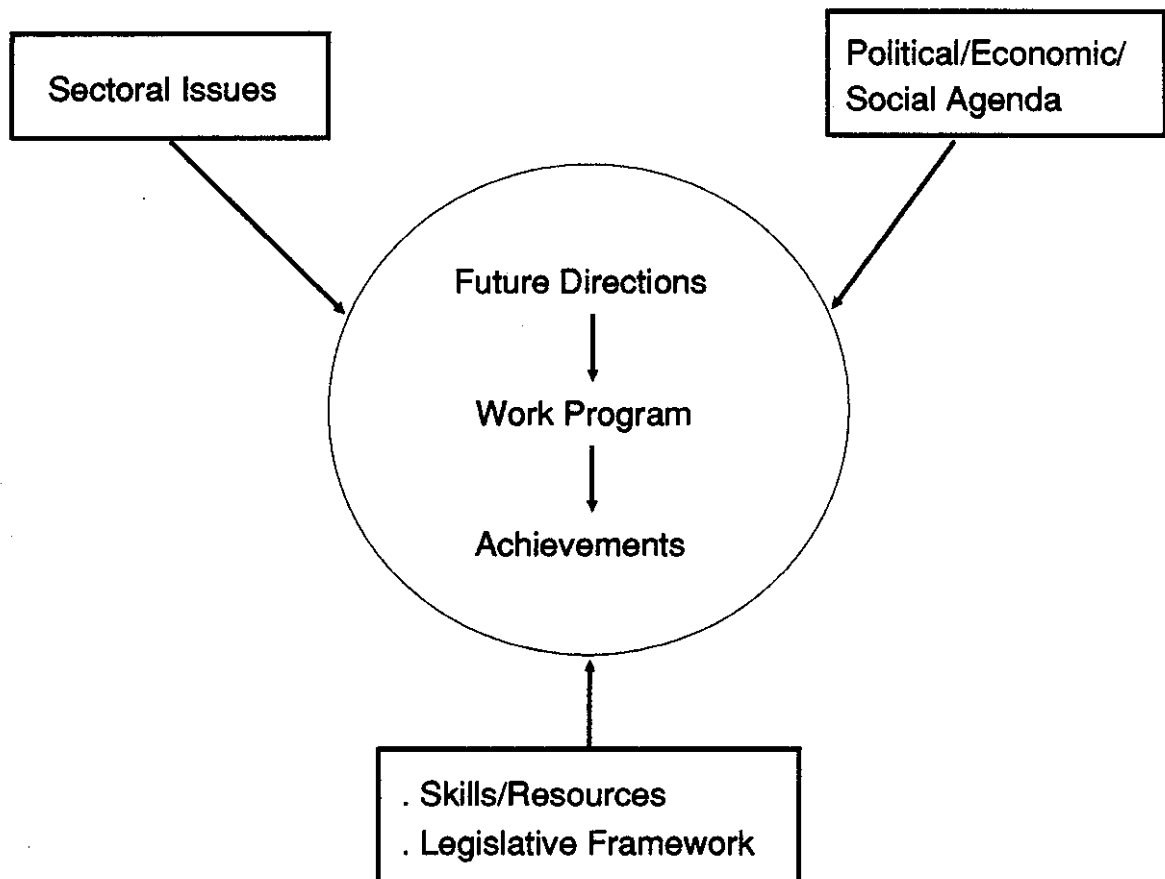


Objectives

- To provide timely advice on matters covered by Ministerial references.
 - To initiate studies or collate and analyse available information and opinions in relevant policy areas with a view to providing advice to Government.
 - To coordinate recommendations to Ministers from Councils.
 - To promote public discussion of employment, education, training and research issues.
 - To discharge statutory obligations with respect to reporting on its own activities, schools, technical and further education grants, higher education profiles and the operation of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme.
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External Environment

- The challenge is to define future directions and a work program which accommodates and balances the various, frequently conflicting, pressures exerted on NBEET.



Sectoral Issues

Different sectors covered by the Board are affected differently by:

- the extent to which funds are derived from Commonwealth or State sources;
- degree of autonomy of institutions;
- degree of unionisation of workforce;
- industry policy in relation to research and training;
- relationship with industry—particularly private industry; and
- different levels of involvement with other Government Departments.

All sectors are influenced by:

- low esteem in which educators are generally held;
 - activity of lobby groups;
 - responsibility for delivery of programs lies elsewhere;
 - constant pressures for groups to break away and form new Councils;
 - debate about mass versus elite systems;
 - major industrial relations decisions; and
 - pace of change in EET and definition of 'long term' advice.
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Political/Economic Agenda

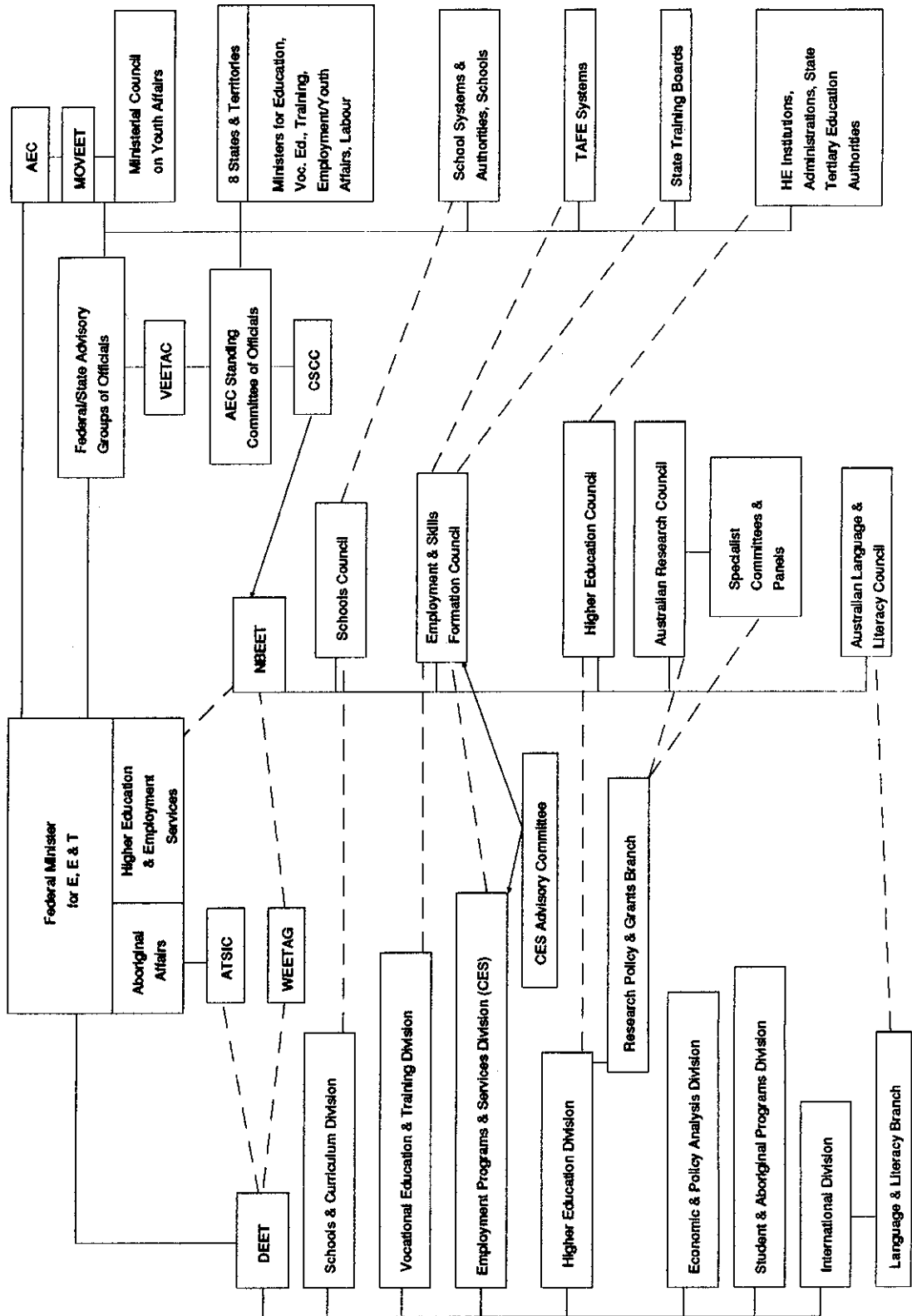
Factors currently influencing the directions which might be taken by NBEET include:

- limited scope for further increased funding allocations to the portfolio (outside already announced programs)
 - proportion of GDP devoted to education is declining;
 - the Government's 'Clever Country' and One Nation agendas;
 - expansion pressures on all systems only partly explained by the job market
 - the world of work and entry to it is changing,
 - shift towards, and acceptance of, lifelong education, and
 - rising expectations about educational outcomes;
 - unemployment growth;
 - completion of Higher Education White Paper and other reforms
 - expansion in numbers in the systems,
 - difficulty in finding 'quality' indicators, and
 - diversity of teaching and research in higher education;
 - constitutional pressures
 - Australia's Asian/Pacific context.
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Resources/Legislative Framework

- Dependency on DEET for provision of additional resources (e.g. for major references) and for implementation.
 - Potential for conflict of interest between the allegiance of Secretariat staff to DEET (longer term career opportunities) and the independence of NBEET (particularly officers on short term secondment to Secretariat).
 - Legislative framework imposes some inflexibilities:
 - resources need to be directed to meeting the reporting requirements of the Act; and
 - structural rigidities enshrined in the Act.
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Government Policy Setting Environment—Employment, Education and Training

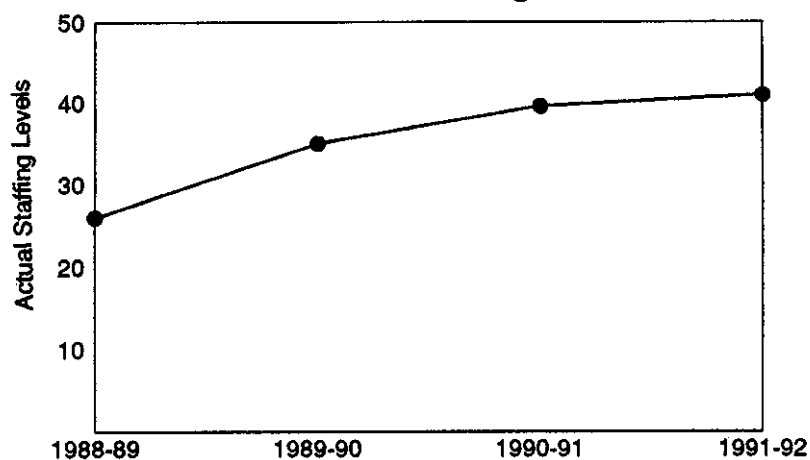


Resources

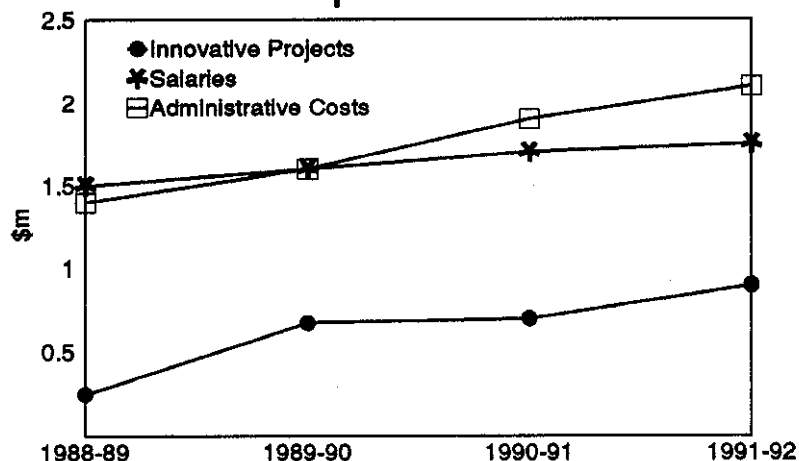
Resources available to NBEET and its Councils are limited and need to be managed in such a way that:

- they are used efficiently;
- they are used only on the highest priority projects;
- their use is monitored so a proper assessment of needs can be made and a case prepared to justify changes.

Secretariat Staffing Level *#



Expenditure**



- * Additional staff in 90-91 and 91-92 are due largely to devolution of administrative functions from DEET to Secretariat.
- ** Excludes ARC grants and administration.
- # Additional assistance is obtained for particular references from DEET. This is related to particular projects and in the 90-91 year has been estimated at 2½ person years or around \$150k.

NBEET Competitive Advantages—'SWOT'

Strengths

- Independent source of policy advice
 - Broad-based membership representing 'the community' view
 - Experienced, dedicated people with good balance of sectoral views and independence particularly its Working Parties
 - Direct access of Executive members to Minister(s)
 - Ability to credibly consult broadly in the community
 - Ability to take a long term and cross-sectoral view on issues
 - Access to information resources of DEET
 - Turnover of membership—Board/Councils—balance of experience and 'new blood'
 - Ability to influence Minister's thinking
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Opportunities

- Potential to shape long term education and training policy to meet diverse requirements of the different parts of the community
 - Provide improved articulation between different education and training sectors
 - Provide better links between education, training and employment
 - Reduce the Federal—State divisions in the portfolio by taking a 'national' approach to issues
 - Potential to influence program delivery within DEET
 - Opportunity to bring together the portfolio elements ie employment, education, training and research
 - Promoting and engaging in debate on a wide range of portfolio issues
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Weaknesses

- Limited resources
- Need to rely on DEET for resources, information, statistics so potential for bias towards 'their' agenda
- Potential for being dragged into short term issues at the expense of long term issues
- Need to respond to Ministerial requests
- Statutory constraints on freedom to act
- Federal body needing to work frequently with State systems
- Need for consensus, meaning potential for compromise positions on hard or polarised issues
- Limited opportunities for full Board to meet with Minister(s)
- Time interval between meetings hinders ability to respond quickly
- Potential for irrelevance—dependence on Ministerial priorities

Threats

- Credibility undermined if seen as close to Minister or DEET
 - Credibility undermined if unable to add value to work of Councils
 - Potential to be 'politicised'
 - Competition from other advisory bodies
 - Seen as sectoral lobby group
 - Reduce operating effectiveness approaching federal election
 - Role of NBEET not well understood publicly
 - Quality of advice threatened by resourcing issues
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Priority Setting

In a broad field such as Employment, Education and Training some guidelines for priority setting need to be developed. These need to be applied with considerable flexibility.

	Priority Rating				
	High				Low
	*****	****	***	**	*
<i>Source of Project</i>	Legislative requirement	Ministerial reference	Board/ Council members	Departmental request	External request
<i>Fit with Agreed Priority Issues</i>	Falls within two or more issues	One issue	Relevant to at least one	Marginal relevance	Outside agreed issues
<i>Use of NBEET 'Competitive Advantage' in Undertaking Project</i>	Clearly the only relevant body	Most relevant body	Some good reasons for using NBEET	Could just as easily be done by other	No discernible advantage
<i>Availability of NBEET Resources</i>	Appropriate people and funding available	People and funding could be available	Resources available if help provided from DEET	Resources restricted	No resources currently available
<i>Availability of Financial Resources</i>	Reduces required outlays or improves outputs for same outlays	Budget outlay neutral	Requires intra-sectoral resource allocation	Requires inter-sectoral resource reallocation	Major Government budget spending initiative

Current Portfolio Issues

Program and project areas currently identified as having the highest priority are as follows:

Quality

- Higher education
- Teaching and professionalism

Cross-sectoral Issues

- Articulation
- Credit transfer
- Post-compulsory education/training review
- Resource allocation and sector size

Industry Interfaces

- Career guidance
- Management education
- Post-compulsory education/training review
- Competency based training

Access/Equity/Disadvantage

- Disadvantaged jobseekers and students
- Rural education
- Continuing education
- Community/adult education

Sectoral Issues

- Education exports
 - Curriculum coordination
 - TAFE directions
 - Science and technology
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Structure of NBEET Work Programs

To ensure priorities can be properly assessed and NBEET can build a coherent and at least partly structured work program, it would be desirable to develop a framework by which various references, projects and advisory activities can be classified.

Themes—At any one time there will be several concurrent themes which apply to all work undertaken. They should be seen as representing areas which apply to most of the work undertaken, a check list to ensure that particular aspects have been considered in preparing the recommended approach.

Issues—NBEET needs to aim at focussing on a fixed number of priority issues representing the most topical items on the current agenda and their assessment of likely future areas of interest. The Board and each of the Councils would be unlikely to be managing any more than two or three at one time. Priority issues need to be critically reviewed at least once each year.

Projects/References—For each priority issue there would normally be a number of projects some of which would be covered by Ministerial references. Some projects may fit within more than one priority issue but it would be undesirable to have any project that did not fit within a currently agreed issue.

Work Programs

Themes

Employment

Work organisation
& management

Access/Equity/
Disadvantage

Issues

*Statutory
requirements*

*Post-
compulsory
education
& training*

*Manage-
ment
training*

*Portfolio
resource
allocation*

*Articulation
&
recognition*

*Higher
education
quality*

*TAFE
directions*

Projects/References

- ARC funding
- Preliminary advice on Finn Report
- Overseas mission follow-up –input to management task force
- Ministerial reference
- Ministerial reference on credit transfer –working party
- Ministerial reference
- Ministerial reference & consultation program

- HEC profiles, funding & HECS
- Vocational certificate training system –follow-up to initial advice –reference on ASF levels 4–6
- Report on S&T in management education
- Annual advice on portfolio Budget
- Ministerial reference on competency based tertiary entrance

- TAFE resource advice
- Ministerial reference on adult & community education

- Schools resource advice
- Ministerial reference on lifelong learning

- Annual report

Follow-up mechanisms

Various monitoring steps, follow-up projects, conferences, government action steps, etc

Quality Cost implications Cross-sectoral & interface

Disadvantaged groups *Teachers, teaching & schools* *National research policy* *Modes of delivery* *Languages & literacy* *Science & technology* *Labour market issues*

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|--|---|---|---|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up to reports on –rural education –disadvantaged jobseekers • Broad-banded equity program • SC social justice discussion paper • Schools & infrastructure • Schools & welfare links • HEC equity working party | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SC compulsory years of schooling project • Quality of teaching • Professional body for teachers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministerial reference on balance of funding among disciplines • Ministerial reference on internationalisation • Research priorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministerial reference | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministerial references | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministerial reference –working party | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESFC working group on employment & labour market issues • Ministerial reference on retirement policies and older workers |
|--|---|---|---|--|--|---|
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Desirable Characteristics of References/Projects

- Within agreed priority issue
 - Proactive rather than reactive
 - Long term perspectives
 - Ministerial support
 - Departmental support
 - National rather than Commonwealth, State or local
 - Broad rather than narrow scope
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Action Plans

■ Management of NBEET Resources

- estimates of resource requirements and availability to be made before references/projects accepted;
- identification of the *sources* of funding/resources;
- additional resources obtained for a particular reference/project (e.g. from DEET) should be clearly *controlled* by NBEET.

■ Innovative Projects

- define parameters for use of grants for innovative projects and avoid needing to use funds for work program by changing basis for budgeting if necessary;
- explore possibility of combining budget allocation for grants for innovative projects with administrative money to provide more flexibility.

■ Restructure Board/Council Papers

- summary statements of key points, problems, action steps, recommendations, etc, to be prepared for each agenda item—maximum three pages per item so Board/Council members are not obliged to read any more than the summary, even though more details are available;
- streamline Board documentation and procedures for meetings.

■ NBEET Staff Structure

- implement personal appraisal and development plan for all staff;
- appraise staff requirements in view of Melbourne office, changed personnel, part-time Chairs, etc;
- adopt flexible approach to staffing, for example, by taking a *project* approach
 - secondment of specialists where appropriate,
 - rotation of staff on regular basis.

- **Formalise Priority Setting and Review Systems**
 - ensure work program is managed according to agreed priorities and overall work areas periodically reviewed;
 - Board Executive to regularly review work program and provide management role.

- **Report/Advice Follow-up**
 - ensure that at the time of completing an advice/report some ideas have been developed as to how it should be followed through after tabling in parliament;
 - one year after tabling a routine assessment of impact (including impact on Government policy) must be made and reasons for success and failure identified to assist future work.

- **Public Relations**
 - proactive, carefully considered, achievement oriented public relations campaign to be developed, concentrating on outcomes rather than process;
 - improved bulletins, speeches, letters to editors, publications, press releases, mission statements.

- **Meetings with Minister**
 - plan well in advance for the Board to meet with the Minister on a regular basis.