

REPORT

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**TRIAL OF THE ENGAGEMENT MATRIX – COMPONENT 1  
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LABELS**

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Prepared for the  
**South Australian**  
**Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS)**

By



**Australian Council *for* Educational Research**

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## **Trial of the Engagement Matrix (EM) – Component 1**

### **The Effectiveness of Labels**

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The trial of the engagement matrix (EM) consists of two components. While the first component is aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of the EM labels the second component seeks to examine the reliability and validity of the EM by way of Rasch analysis. This interim report covers the first component.

The examination of the effectiveness of labels in the EM proceeded in two parts. In the first part, cognitive interviews were conducted to guide some of the decisions regarding the design of the second part, the online survey.

The overarching issue to be addressed was to ascertain the effectiveness of the EM's labels. More specifically, the aim was to identify labels and intensifiers that would a) cover the full range of engagement, b) differentiate between different levels of engagement and c) have little overlap.

In line with this aim, the findings from this first component can be summarised as follows.

- The engagement scale is clearly bipolar, ranging from being fully disengaged to being fully engaged, rather than being unipolar with a range from no engagement to full engagement.
- Respondents find it easier to differentiate between labels describing engagement than between labels describing disengagement. They also use a greater percentage range when assigning labels to different levels of engagement.
- The labels 'Active' and 'Compliant' attract the largest number of respondents who consider them inapplicable to the three dimensions of learning, well-being and relationships.
- For labels that describe engagement, 'Enthusiastic' is judged by respondents to describe the highest level of engagement, followed by 'Active', 'Engaged' and 'Interested'.
- For labels describing disengagement, very little differentiation can be noted. Respondents attribute a slightly higher level of disengagement to 'Resistant' and 'Disengaged'.
- In general, the space which a certain label is considered to cover along the scale is very similar for the three dimensions of learning, well-being and relationships.
- As regards intensifiers 'Partly' and 'Moderately', describe distinctly different parts of the scale from about a third to two thirds. At the higher end, 'Extremely' and 'Completely' overlap considerably with 'Extremely' allowing for a greater range than 'Completely'. 'Very', 'Highly' and 'Very highly' reflect increasing intensity with some overlap in meaning.
- Concerning the current labels of the EM, namely 'Significantly disengaged', 'Partly disengaged', and 'Moderately engaged' cover the lower and middle parts of the scale well. 'Highly engaged' and 'Very highly engaged' cluster together at the top of the scale. Results suggest that the labels 'Very engaged' and 'Extremely engaged' would cover the upper part of the scale more appropriately.

Component 2 of the EM trial will focus on the reliability and validity of the statements that are currently used to describe the different labels and explore further issues of dimensionality and purpose of the EM.

## **BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION**

The Engagement Matrix (EM) was designed by the Department of Education and Children's Services in South Australia to measure engagement levels of students enrolled in the Innovative Community Action Networks (ICAN)/ Flexible Learning Options (FLO) program once a term. Innovative ICANs work with young people (year 6-age 19), families, schools, community groups, businesses and different levels of government to encourage young people to finish their secondary education. Flexible Learning Options (FLO) was first introduced in 2006 as an enrolment option in ICAN schools which is funded by DECS. FLO is an approach that is more flexible than the traditional full-time enrolment in school to support young people most at risk to successfully complete their secondary education (DECS, 2010).

In its current form, the EM is a high-level inference instrument that requires raters to provide one overall rating of a student's engagement in (a) well-being, (b) relationships and (c) learning in five categories. These categories' previous labels of 'Resistant', 'Disinterested', 'Compliant', 'Enthusiastic' and 'Proactive' have been changed to 'Significantly disengaged', 'Partly disengaged', 'Moderately engaged', 'Highly engaged' and 'Very highly engaged'.

This report describes an initiative to ascertain the effectiveness of the labels of the EM. To this end, an online survey was designed to obtain information on the levels of engagement and disengagement current and potential users of the EM associated with different labels (e.g. 'Disinterested', 'Active') and different intensifiers (e.g. 'Very', 'Moderately') as well as a combination of intensifiers and labels as currently proposed in the EM. Cognitive interviews were conducted to inform the online survey.

### **Part 1: Cognitive interviews**

#### ***Objectives***

In the literature on questionnaire design, cognitive interviews are recommended to precede any survey in order to obtain information on whether the questions are understood by potential respondent group in the way they are intended (Drennan, 2003; Jobe & Mingay, 1989; Willis, 2005). In this study, the principal aims of the cognitive interviews were fourfold:

1. to reduce the number of potential labels
2. to reduce the number of potential intensifiers
3. to ascertain if interviewees have different associations for the labels and intensifiers across the different Engagement Matrix dimensions: learning, well-being and relationships
4. to ascertain the preferred response scale for the online survey

Initially, it was intended to ascertain if respondents had different associations for labels and levels of engagement depending on the young people's age and the region where they lived. Furthermore, DECS had sought to test how the EM might work across a wider range of young people than the group for which it had been designed originally. Upon further discussion between ACER and DECS, it was decided not to differentiate by year level and region, and to restrict the study to people currently working in the ICAN/FLO program.

#### ***Design***

In order to reduce the possible number of potential labels and intensifiers, the labels and intensifiers were tested separately. Intensifiers themselves affect how subjects rate and perceive labels. DECS provided a list of labels and intensifiers that ACER used as the

basis for generating 13 labels and eight intensifiers tested in the cognitive interviews (see Table 1). Two additional labels were included for consideration in the cognitive interviews: 'Involved' and 'Uninvolved'.

**Table 1** *List of labels and intensifiers in cognitive interviews*

Labels	Intensifiers
Active	Completely
Apathetic	Extremely
Compliant	Highly
Disengaged	Moderately
Disinterested	Partly
Engaged	Significantly
Enthusiastic	Very
Interested	Very highly
Involved	
Passive	
Proactive	
Resistant	
Uninvolved	

As the same response scale may yield different results depending on the familiarity and interest that the respondents have with a certain topic, it was important that a heterogeneous sample informed the results of the cognitive interviews. Therefore, the sampling framework for the online study to test the effectiveness of the labels involved a sample of ICAN staff that was heterogeneous in terms of experience with the EM, gender, region, age and position within the program (see Table 2).

**Table 2** *Engagement matrix cognitive interview sample (N=10) characteristics*

Engagement Matrix Experience	Female	Male	Rural	Metro	Older	Younger	Case Manager	Teacher	Neither Case Manager/Teacher
Experience with EM (N=4)	3	1	0	4	2	2	4	0	0
Limited Experience with EM (N=2)	2	0	1	1	2	0	1	1	0
No Experience with EM (N=4)	2	2	1	3	2	2	0	2	2

The cognitive interviews were conducted in the ACER Adelaide office on 17, 18 and 19 November 2010 on a one-on-one basis. The individual cognitive interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes.

The interviewees completed four tasks during the cognitive interview. In the first task, the interviewees ordered 13 labels according to a young person's involvement in each of the three Engagement Matrix dimensions: learning, well-being and relationships. This task was designed to reduce the possible number of labels as well as to ascertain if interviewees have different associations for the labels across the different Engagement Matrix dimensions.

In the second task, the interviewees ordered eight intensifiers for the same three Engagement Matrix dimensions to reduce the possible number of intensifiers.

Furthermore the second task was designed to ascertain if interviewees have different associations for the intensifiers across the different Engagement Matrix dimensions.

For the third and fourth tasks, the interviewees rated a list of combined labels and intensifiers (terms) using two alternative methods: a Q-sort or listing percentages. The Q-sort is a method used to scale the meaning of words according to a concept using a number point scale (Stephenson, 1953; Wolf, 1997; Müller & Kals, 2004). In the cognitive interviews, interviewees rated the terms on an eleven-point scale from one to eleven, with increasing numbers indicating increasing levels of engagement. The interviewees rated each term by selecting the number on the Q-sort for the level of engagement that each term represented.

For the listing percentages task, interviewees indicated a percentage value or range of engagement that they associate with that combination of words. These tasks ascertained which of the two response scales to be used in the online survey afforded interviewees the opportunity to easily and clearly communicate the level of engagement associated with each term.

The complete schedule of the cognitive interviews is provided in Appendix A.

## **Results**

### *Task 1: Ordering of labels for learning, well-being and relationships*

All Interviewees first ordered the labels according to a young person's involvement in learning. Examining all label orders produced by the interviewees, the majority of orders established were hierarchical in nature. These hierarchies at times were more loosely ordered than other, stricter hierarchies. In general, these hierarchies moved from grouped negative words to grouped positive words. For the majority of interviewees, the positive and negative groupings were the same (photographs that were taken during the interviews are available upon request). For the interviewees, the labels 'Proactive', 'Active', 'Engaged', 'Interested', 'Involved' and 'Enthusiastic' were associated with varying levels of involvement in learning. The labels 'Passive', 'Resistant', 'Disinterested', 'Uninvolved', 'Apathetic' and 'Disengaged' were associated with varying levels of being disassociated from learning.

Within the general positive and negative groups of labels, Interviewees 4 and 5 overlapped, or grouped similar labels which they considered to be synonyms. When interviewees were provided with the explicit opportunity to overlap similar labels, the remaining 8 interviewees chose to do so.

The label 'Compliant' was ordered as a zero point between the positive and negative labels. Several interviewees used space to physically convey the associations between words. 'Compliant' was often placed between the groups of positive and negative labels, as well as farther apart from the groups (as evident in photographs taken during interview 4, 5, 6, 7). Furthermore, several interviewees used other labels as modifiers to connote different ways of being involved or uninvolved in learning. For example, Interviewee 7 used both the labels 'Involved' and 'Uninvolved' to modify the label 'Compliant'. Therefore, the interviews suggest that those who use the Engagement Matrix may consider 'Compliant' to be a zero point, neither indicating engagement with nor disengagement from learning.

Two interviewees actively excluded words from the potential labels as not being applicable to involvement in learning. Furthermore, as mentioned in the preceding paragraph, three other interviewees used labels to modify other labels. Considering the exclusion of labels, and their use as modifiers, 'Involved' and 'Uninvolved' were consistently excluded or used as modifiers across these interviewees. The degree of

involvement in learning associated with the labels 'Involved' and 'Uninvolved' was ambiguous for many interviewees and therefore these two labels, added by ACER to the pool of potential labels, were excluded from the online survey.

Analysing the positive and negative labels, and 'Compliant' as a fixed zero point, all the interviewees grouped the 13 labels as a bipolar scale. The majority of interviewees selected 'Proactive', followed by 'Enthusiastic' or 'Engaged', as the endpoints of the scale for involvement in learning. Rather than constructing a unipolar scale indicating involvement or the absence of involvement in learning, all interviewees constructed a bipolar scale with polar opposite labels. For the negative labels, the majority of interviewees selected 'Resistant' followed by 'Disengaged' as end points. The label 'Resistant' was described as connoting active uninvolvedness from learning rather than an absence of involvement. Interviewees described both the positive and negative endpoints of the scale as connoting the same amount of energy or action on the part of the young person being rated. Furthermore, DECS conceptualises the Engagement Matrix as a bipolar scale, presenting polar opposites from 'Significantly disengaged' to 'Very highly engaged'.

Considering the ordering of potential labels across the three different dimensions, six interviewees thought that the order of labels for involvement in learning did not apply in the same way to involvement in well-being. Five interviewees thought that the order of labels for involvement in well-being did not apply in the same way for involvement in relationships. For well-being, three interviewees actively excluded potential labels from their order, and two of the same interviewees actively excluded potential labels from their order for relationships. These findings suggest that the potential users of the Engagement Matrix may have different associations for different labels across the three dimensions. This means that a group of labels may have a different scale for different dimensions.

Lastly, a general theme that emerged from the cognitive interviews was whether the labels were measuring attitudes or behaviours, and how they differ in levels of engagement across the three dimensions. The interviewees who differentiated between attitudes and behaviours grouped the labels separately and associated different levels of engagement/disengagement whether it was perceived as an attitude or as behaviour. Therefore, it would be unwise to further limit the potential list of labels if potential respondents may view labels as describing different concepts.

#### *Task 2: Ordering of intensifiers for learning, well-being and relationships*

All interviewees first ordered the intensifiers according to a young person's involvement in learning. The majority of interviewees ordered the intensifiers hierarchically. These hierarchies established a general order of intensifiers that started with words that were associated with lower levels of involvement in learning to higher levels of involvement in learning. Examining the order of intensifiers, the majority of interviewees associated 'Partly' with the lowest level of involvement in learning. Furthermore, the majority of interviewees associated 'Completely' with the highest level of involvement in learning, closely followed by 'Extremely'.

Unlike the ordering of labels, the ordering of intensifiers did not vary much across dimensions. Three interviewees changed the order of the intensifiers for well-being from learning, and one interviewee changed the order of the intensifiers for relationships from well-being. As there was less variability in the order of intensifiers across dimensions, it was possible to reduce the potential list of intensifiers. The placement of 'Significantly' varied more than other intensifiers when analysing the intensifier orders for involvement in learning. Thus, some interviewees put 'Significantly' just above 'Moderately' whereas others put it above 'Very Highly', indicating very different levels of intensity for this intensifier. During the cognitive interviews, interviewees frequently narrated their difficulty



in placing 'Significantly' in an order with other intensifiers. Interviewees 5 and 7 removed 'Significantly' from their orders and placed it in relation to all intensifiers, meaning that 'Significantly' could modify other intensifiers. This ambiguity surrounding the placement of 'Significantly' prompted it to be removed from the list of other potential intensifiers. Yet, as the other intensifiers did not greatly vary across interviewees, ACER did not further eliminate potential intensifiers.

#### *Tasks 3 and 4: Preferred response scale for online survey*

All interviewees first completed the Q-sort then the listing percentages task. They then provided feedback regarding which task they preferred and found easiest. In this task interviewees rated the same terms using the Q-sort and listing percentages.

Many interviewees stated that the Q-sort was easier to perform, but overwhelmingly interviewees preferred the listing percentages response scale. According to the interviewees, the listing percentages response scale was more valuable than the Q-sort, as it enabled interviewees to provide ranges or single values for terms. The Q-sort forced interviewees to select single values for terms. The listing percentages response scale enabled the interviewees to more accurately provide information about the level, or levels of engagement, that each term represented.

#### ***Implications for the online survey***

ACER designed the online survey based on findings for the labels from the cognitive interviews. The positive and negative labels were presented separately to reflect that the Engagement Matrix considers two concepts on a bipolar scale: engagement and disengagement. Rather than have the online survey respondents rate the positive and negative words according to engagement in learning, the online survey asks respondents to rate the positive words thinking of engagement in learning, while the respondents must think of disengagement in learning for the negative words. Furthermore, as interviewees associated the label 'Compliant' as being a zero point, it was included with both the positive group of labels, as well as the negative group of labels.

As explained previously, the labels 'Involved' and 'Uninvolved' were excluded from the list of potential labels as they were excluded by several interviewees across the three dimensions or used as modifiers for other labels across the three dimensions. In order to further reduce the list of potential labels, the interviewees were given the explicit opportunity to group and/or overlap any of the labels for involvement in learning that may be synonyms or similarly related. The 'best' labels that form a scale may vary across the three dimensions as over half of the interviewees changed the order of the labels for well-being from learning, and five interviewees changed the order of the labels for relationships from well-being. Therefore, it was decided not to further exclude potential labels as they may be rated differently across dimensions. Based on these findings, the online survey was designed to include the option for participants to rate a label as not applicable to learning, well-being or relationships. The prefix of the potential label 'Disinterested' was also changed to 'Uninterested' to further distinguish it from the label 'Disengaged'. However, the ways in which interviewees grouped labels and thought about similar words may better inform the results of the online survey and the selection of the most appropriate labels.

ACER also designed the online survey to incorporate the findings for intensifiers from the cognitive interviews. 'Significantly' was dropped from the potential intensifiers, but the remaining intensifiers were included in order to find the intensifiers that had the narrowest range and least overlap with other intensifiers. ACER did not include an option for the online survey respondents to exclude labels as the majority of orders were hierarchical. As the majority of interviewees did not have different associations for the

intensifiers across dimensions, the online survey had respondents associate percentages with intensifiers regardless of dimension.

ACER used the listing percentages scale for the online survey. The online survey required respondents to assign percentages to labels across dimensions as well as to intensifiers. This response scale allowed ACER to best select the combination of labels and intensifiers that have the narrowest ranges and least overlap. To avoid cognitive overload on the online survey, ACER used the Q-sort response scale to measure the current Engagement Matrix terms. The Q-sort will allow ACER to gather information about the overall range of the current labels. The listing percentages response scale for labels and intensifiers will provide information about individual ranges for the separate labels and intensifiers used in the current Engagement Matrix labels.

### **Summary**

As a result of the cognitive interview results, 'Involved' and 'Uninvolved' were excluded from the list of potential labels for the online survey. Yet, as the interviewee label orders changed across the three Engagement Matrix dimensions, the number of potential labels was not reduced further as an excluded label may potentially be more applicable in one dimension and not another. There was a function available for participants to rate a label as not applicable to a dimension instead of providing their associated percentage range or value.

The number of potential intensifiers was also reduced by excluding 'Significantly' from the online survey. As the ordering of intensifier did not vary greatly across dimensions, it was decided for the online survey not to have respondents consider the intensifiers for the three dimensions separately but only once.

Unlike the finding for intensifiers, the cognitive interview revealed that interviewees had quite different associations for labels across dimensions. Most interviewees changed label orders from learning to well-being, but less so from well-being to relationships.

Interviewees found the Q-sort response scale easy to complete, but preferred the listing percentages response scale as they were able to more accurately convey the amount of involvement associated with each term by way of a percentage value or range, rather than the Q-sort method of selecting a single number.

Lastly, the cognitive interview results indicate that the majority of interviewees conceptualise the Engagement Matrix scale as being bipolar, rather than unipolar. In other words, disengaged and engaged represent clear opposites of the scale which ranges from being fully disengaged to fully engaged (bipolar), rather than from having no engagement to being fully engaged (unipolar). Thus, the online survey was designed to reflect this bipolar scale. The negative labels were rated according to disengagement from learning, well-being and relationships. The positive labels were rated according to engagement in learning, well-being and relationships. ACER included 'Complaint' for both engagement and disengagement as interviewees considered it a fixed zero-point or a mid-point between engagement and disengagement.

## **Part 2: Online survey**

### **Objectives**

To ascertain the effectiveness of the Engagement Matrix labels, the objectives of the online survey were to obtain information from a representative sample of current and potential EM users regarding the meaning...

1. ...associated with the labels - separately for each of the three dimensions which the EM seeks to cover, namely, learning, well-being and relationships;
2. ...of intensifiers and;
3. ...of the currently proposed terms (i.e. combination of intensifiers and labels)

Based on this information, the aim was to identify those labels and intensifiers that...

4. ...apply similarly well to the three dimensions;
5. ...cover the greatest possible range on the continuum from disengagement to engagement, and
6. ...provide the least overlap between labels and intensifiers.

### **Design**

To test the effectiveness of the labels, ACER designed an online survey whose design had been informed by the cognitive interviews. The full text of the online survey is provided in Appendix B.

To examine how well the labels and intensifiers applied across the sample, the online survey asked respondents to first report whether or not they had used the EM. If they had used it, they were asked about how long they had been using it and with how many young people they had used it over the past twelve months. At the end of the online survey, ACER further collected demographic information for the sample regarding gender, age and position within the ICAN program.

In order to address the identification of labels with the most desirable characteristics (largest range as a set, smallest range for each label, and the least overlap between labels), ACER designed the online survey to use the listing percentages response scale. As the results from the cognitive interviews indicated that the Engagement Matrix uses a bipolar scale, the online survey asked respondents to record the percentage range or value (from 0 – 100%) associated with each label for engagement and disengagement across dimensions (see Table 3 for labels). The online survey also included the option to rate a label as not being applicable to learning, well-being or relationships.

The positive end of the scale for engagement included the labels 'Active', 'Compliant', 'Engaged', 'Enthusiastic', and 'Interested'<sup>1</sup>. Respondents then recorded the percentage range or value associated with each label for disengagement from each dimension. The negative end of the scale for disengagement included the labels 'Apathetic', 'Compliant', 'Disengaged', 'Passive', 'Resistant' and 'Uninterested'. ACER included 'Compliant' in both engagement and disengagement as interviewees considered it a fixed zero-point.

**Table 3** *Labels in the online survey*

Labels describing	
<i>Engagement</i>	<i>Disengagement</i>
Active	Apathetic
Compliant	Disengaged
Engaged	Passive
Enthusiastic	Resistant
Interested	Uninterested

Like for the labels, respondents were asked to indicate the range of percentages they associated with the different intensifiers. Furthermore, as the cognitive interviews had

<sup>1</sup> The label 'Proactive' was unintentionally excluded from the online survey. If deemed necessary, the information regarding 'Proactive' can be collected during the online data collection for Component 2 of the EM trial, the Rasch Analysis.

shown no differences for intensifiers depending on the dimension, information for the intensifiers was sought without reference to each of the three dimensions separately but instead 'globally'. Therefore, participants also were not given the option of rating an intensifier as being not applicable to a particular dimension.

**Table 4** *List of intensifiers in online survey*

Completely  
Extremely  
Highly  
Moderately  
Partly  
Very  
Very highly

After the item related to intensifiers, ACER included a Q-sort using the current Engagement Matrix labels. Respondents used the eleven point Q-sort scale to rate the best level of engagement for each term.

**Table 5** *List of current Engagement Matrix terms in online survey*

Highly engaged  
Moderately engaged  
Partly disengaged  
Significantly disengaged  
Very highly engaged

Demographics information concerning age, gender, and staff position were included at the end of the online survey. The final question allowed respondents to provide any information they would like to share about the online survey or the Engagement Matrix.

#### *Participants and Administration*

Two-hundred participants were drawn from a larger sample of 298 people employed in the DECS ICAN/FLO program. ACER randomly selected 200 participants who varied across region, position, and school level. There were approximately ten redundancies in the sample for which ACER substituted other participants with similar characteristics (position, region, school level). DECS electronically sent the identified 200 participants the online survey address. Participants were able to access the online survey from December 1<sup>st</sup> 2010 to December 10<sup>th</sup> 2010, ending on the last day of Term IV for DECS employees. DECS sent electronic reminders to all participants to complete the survey on December 6<sup>th</sup> 2010 and December 8<sup>th</sup> 2010. Participants were able to login and complete the survey at their convenience.

Data were cleaned and checked for consistency. Free response items ('Length of time using the Engagement Matrix' and 'Other Position') were re-coded into discrete values. When a free item response was not able to be recoded into a discrete value, the item was dropped from the dataset (e.g. a response to the 'Length of time using Engagement Matrix' was 1).

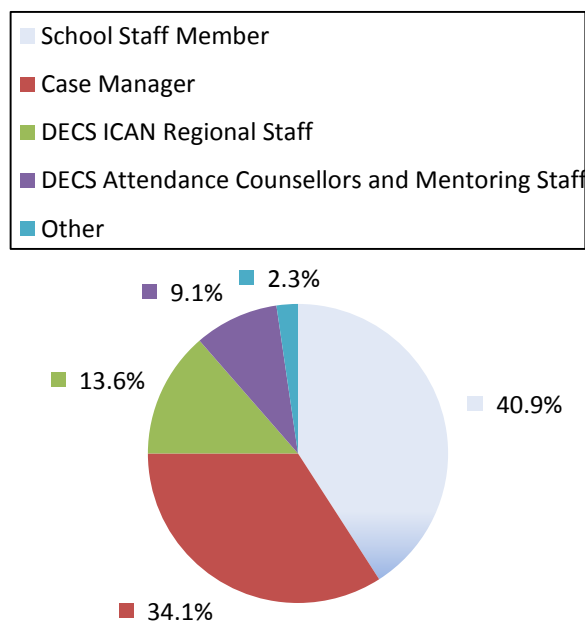
ACER received 164 responses from the 200 identified participants which was a response rate of 82 percent. Of these 164 responses 53.7% of the total sample were complete (N=88) and 46.3% (N=76) of the respondents had left the survey prior to completion.

Of the participants that reported their experience with the Engagement Matrix (N=159) just over half (54.3%) indicated that they had previously used the Engagement Matrix to record a young person's level of engagement whereas less than half had not (42.7%).

In order to assess the participants experience with the Engagement Matrix, participants were asked to report the length of time (in months) that they had used the Engagement Matrix (N=85). They were also asked to specify with how many young people they had used the Engagement Matrix within the last twelve months (N=87). There was a wide range of experience, from 1 month to 48 months. The average length of time respondents reported having used the Engagement Matrix was just over a year (15 months with most participants reporting having used it for twelve months). The average number of young people with whom respondents had used the EM was 21. However, this ranged from one to 70 young people within the last 12 months.

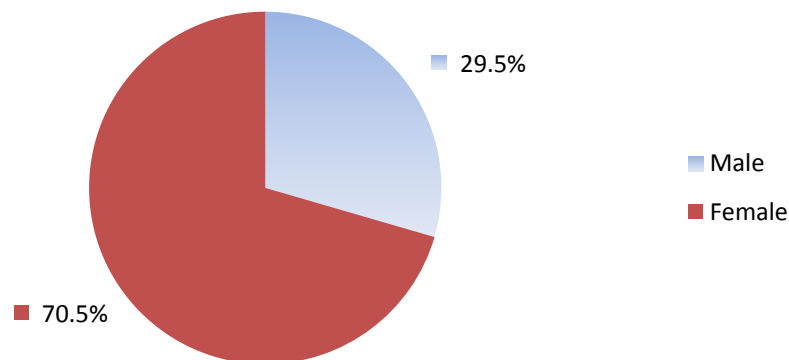
Respondents were asked at the end of the survey about their gender, age and position. The largest group that responded to these questions (N=85) were School Staff Members with just under 41 percent (40.9%, N=36) of participants, followed by Case Managers (34.1%, N=30). In addition, 13.6% (N=12) were DECS Regional ICAN Staff and 9.1% (N=8) were DECS Attendance Counsellors and Mentoring Staff. Approximately two percent of respondents (2.3%, N=2) recorded themselves in the 'Other' category (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1** *Position within ICAN*  
(N=88)



Eighty-eight participants reported their gender and age. Less than three-quarters of the participants were female (70.5%) and less than one-third were male (29.5%). The respondents ranged from 21 to 70 years of age. Slightly less than one-third (31.8%) of the respondents were between 51–60 years of age. The remaining two thirds of the respondents were distributed as follows in terms of age: 15.9% were 21-30 years old, 22.7% were 31-40 years old, 23.9% were 40-50 years and 5.7% were 61-70 years old.

**Figure 2** Gender of online survey respondents  
(N=88)



### **Results**

Results of the online survey are presented first for the labels, followed by the currently used terms of the EM and finish with the findings regarding the intensifiers.

### **Labels**

Results for labels describing engagement are illustrated in Figure 2 while results for labels describing disengagement are presented in Figure 3.

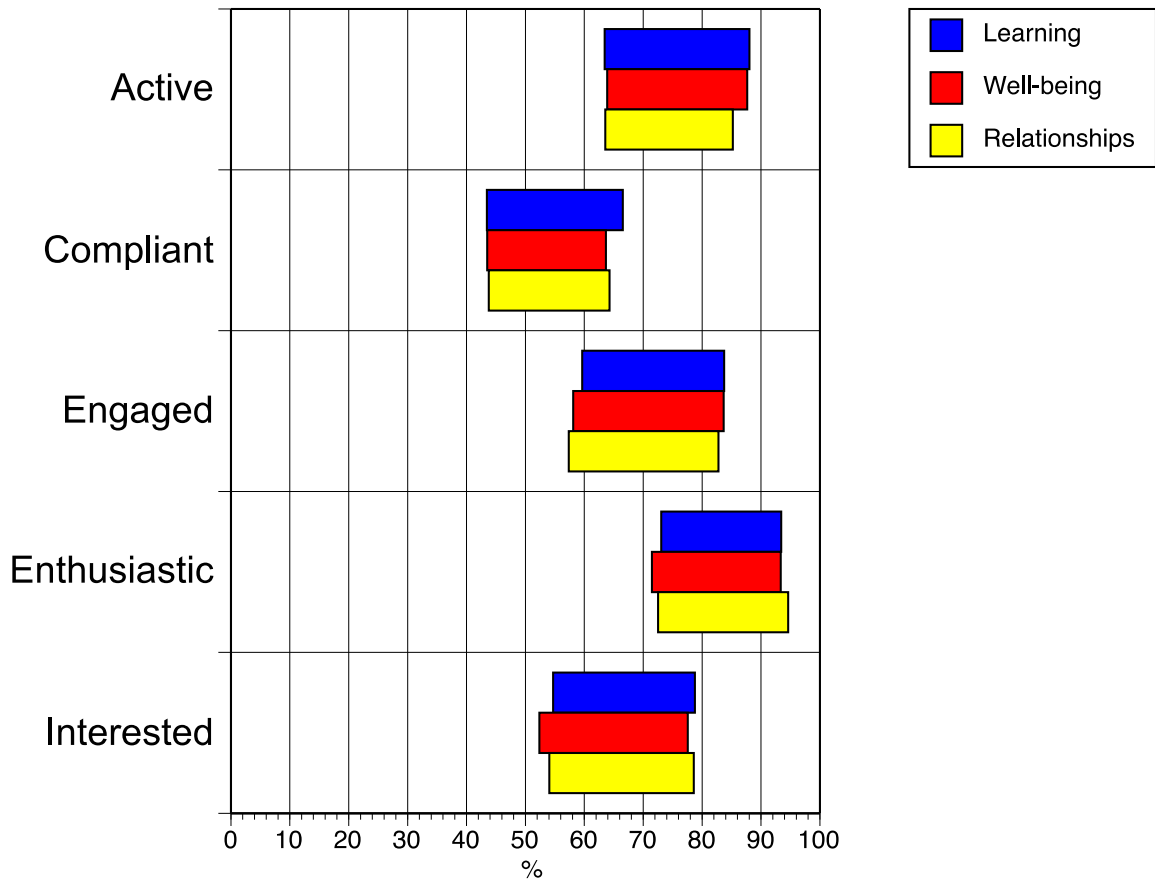
The greater differences in percentages allocated to the different labels in Figure 2 compared with Figure 3 show that, in general, respondents find it easier to differentiate between labels describing levels of engagement than between labels describing levels of disengagement.

Figure 2 shows that the highest level of engagement is associated with 'Enthusiastic', followed by 'Active', with the latter covering a greater range in strength of engagement as indicated by the longer bars. 'Engaged' and 'Interested' cover a similar space on the scale with 'Engaged' being slightly more positive than 'Interested'. 'Compliant' covers the space around the half-way mark.

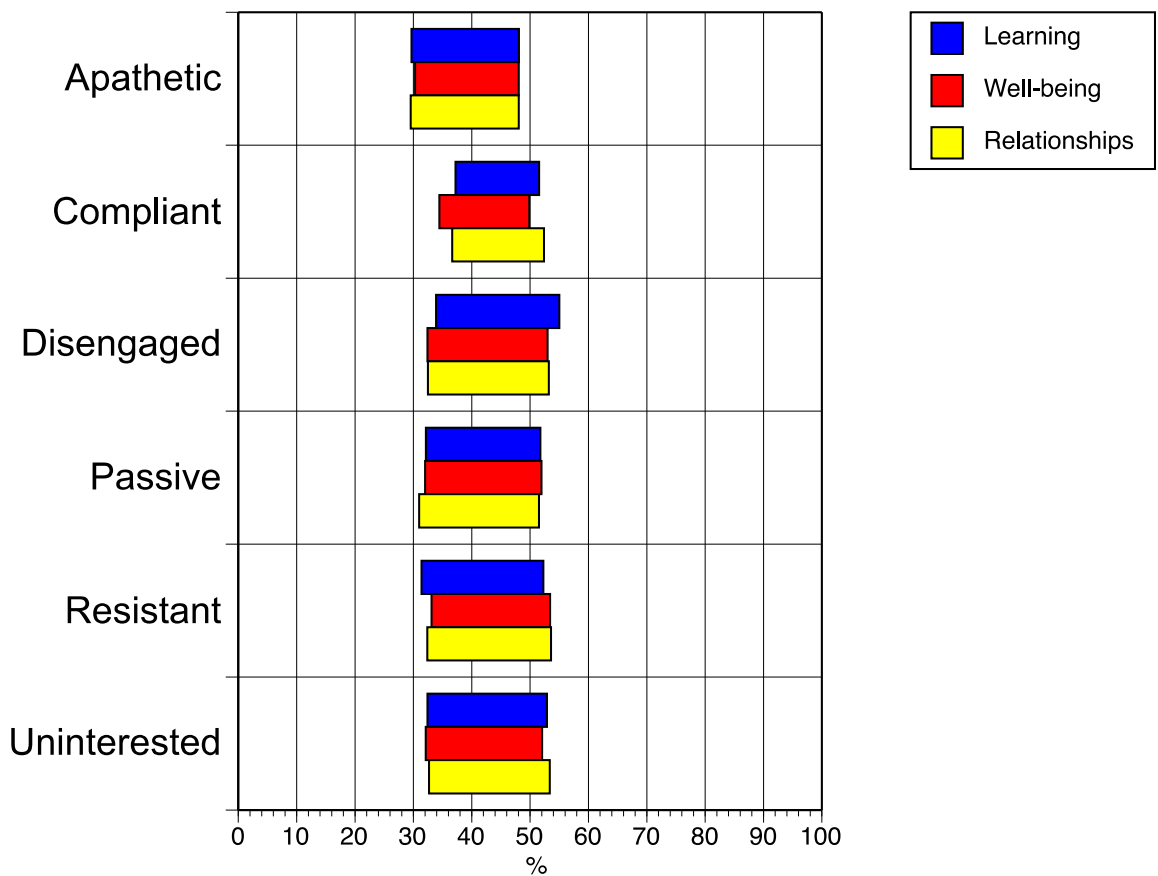
Figure 3 illustrates that for labels describing disengagement very little differentiation can be noted. Still, respondents attribute a slightly higher level of disengagement for 'Resistant' and 'Disengaged'.

In general, respondents consider the labels for both engagement and disengagement to cover very similar ranges of levels of engagement and disengagement for the three dimensions of learning, well-being and relationships. Finally, analyses comparing results for respondents with EM experience and without EM experience yielded similar results for the two groups.

**Figure 2** Results for labels describing engagement



**Figure 3** Results for labels describing disengagement



**Table 6** *Number of respondents judging a label not to apply to a dimension*

Label\Dimension	Learning	Well-being	Relationships
<i>Engagement</i>			
<b>Active</b>	6	10	8
<b>Compliant</b>	7	19	17
<b>Engaged</b>	4	8	6
<b>Enthusiastic</b>	3	5	5
<b>Interested</b>	8	10	8
<i>Disengagement</i>			
<b>Apathetic</b>	13	16	14
<b>Compliant</b>	15	21	19
<b>Disengaged</b>	5	9	11
<b>Passive</b>	9	9	11
<b>Resistant</b>	3	9	8
<b>Uninterested</b>	5	6	6

Respondents were also asked to indicate if they thought that a label did not apply to a particular dimension. Results are given in Table 6. Several findings emerge. The lowest number of respondents who consider that labels do not apply is recorded for the labels describing engagement with learning. For the relationship dimension, the number of respondents who find that the engagement labels do not apply is slightly higher than for learning. The well-being dimension receives the highest number of not applicable ratings for labels. Across the three dimensions, 'Compliant' is judged not to apply the most frequently, followed by 'Active' and 'Interested'.

Compared to the labels describing engagement, the labels describing disengagement are considered by more respondents as inapplicable across all dimensions. 'Apathetic' and 'Compliant', in particular, are viewed as inapplicable descriptive labels for disengagement from learning, well-being or relationships. The labels 'Disengaged', 'Passive', 'Resistant' and 'Uninterested' attract the lowest numbers of respondents indicating a greater acceptability of these terms when describing disengagement across the three dimensions.

### **Current terms of the Engagement Matrix**

Results of the Q-sort of the terms (i.e. combinations of intensifiers and labels) currently used in the EM are provided in Table 7. The blue colouring is used to illustrate the spread of the responses. The darkest coloured cell with the number of responses in bold signifies the mode. The mode indicates that number on the scale from 1 to 11 which is selected by the most respondents, whereby higher numbers indicate higher levels of engagement.



**Table 7** *Current terms of the EM – Q-sort results*

	Level of engagement increasing →										
Stimulus	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Significantly disengaged	24	39	12	2	-	-	1	2	4	1	1
Partly disengaged	-	3	15	32	22	6	5	1	1	-	-
Moderately engaged	-	-	1	1	11	45	23	5	1	-	-
Highly engaged	-	1	-	-	-	-	2	13	29	33	8
Very highly engaged	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	3	9	19	49

Table 7 shows that the first three terms, namely ‘Significantly disengaged’, ‘Partly disengaged’ and ‘Moderately engaged’ work quite well in terms of differentiation and spread. In terms of differentiation, all three have a clear mode which, at the same time, is two scale points apart from the next. They also show a reasonable spread in that the Q-sort scale points around the modes are selected by considerably fewer people. In addition, not too many different points of the Q-sort scale are associated with these terms, although ‘Partly disengaged’ shows a slightly wider spread.

This finding is interesting considering the results from the cognitive interviews which suggested a high degree of ambiguity surrounding the intensifier ‘Significant’. However, it can be explained by the fact in the online survey (and the EM), ‘Significant’ is coupled with the term ‘Disengaged’ and put in combination with the other EM terms. This provides evidence that with sufficient context, a term that, otherwise, can be quite ambiguous can be ascribed a clear meaning by respondents.

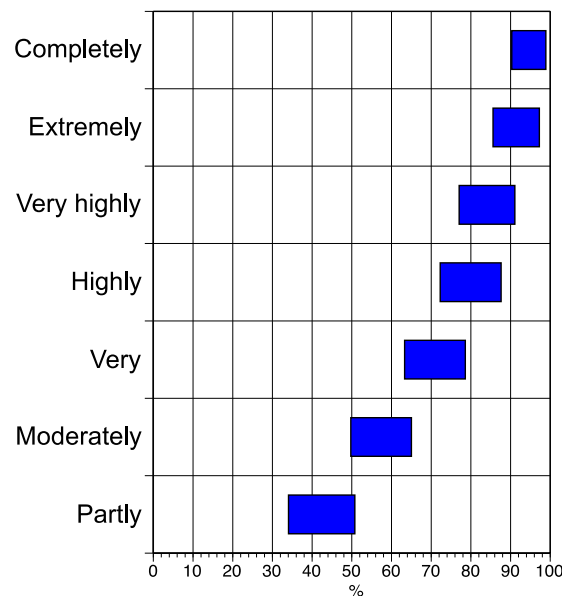
At the higher end of the scale, ‘Very highly engaged’ and ‘Highly engaged’ work less effectively. In terms of differentiation, ‘Highly engaged’ is nearly bimodal in that a similarly high number of respondents selects a ‘9’ or a ‘10’ for this term. At the same time, ‘Highly engaged’ is very close in meaning to ‘Very highly engaged’ which has ‘11’ as its mode.

Given these results, it would be desirable to find terms that have clear modes at ‘8’ and ‘10’ respectively. A look at the information gathered concerning the coverage of the different intensifiers in the next section might shed some light on this issue.

### ***Intensifiers***

Responses regarding the percentages respondents associated with various intensifiers are summarised in Figure 4. Results show that respondents associate proportions of between about one third (34%) and a half (50%) with ‘Partly’ while ‘Moderately’ covers the space from just below half (49%) to about two thirds (65%). ‘Very’, in turn, draws associations between about two thirds (63%) and a quarter (78%).

It can be seen that the percentages associated with the intensifiers ‘Highly’ (72%-87%) and ‘Very highly’ (77%-91%) overlap. This supports the finding for the Q-sort that when these intensifiers are paired with the label ‘Engaged’, respondents rate ‘Highly engaged’ and ‘Very highly engaged’ closely together.

**Figure 4** Percentages associated with intensifiers

On the one hand, the percentages associated with the intensifiers 'Extremely' (85%-97%) and 'Completely' (90%-98%) also overlap. On the other hand, the two words are distinct in kind. When looking at the mode, it is clear that 100 per cent is most frequently associated with the word 'Completely' whereas for the word 'Extremely' both 90 per cent and 100 per cent emerge as modes. This supports the literature on questionnaire design (Bartram & Yelding, 1973; Saris & Gallhofer, 2006) which considers 'Completely' to be a fixed end-point and 'Extremely' to be representing a range – albeit towards the end of a scale.

These results indicate that 'Extremely' covers the top end of the scale quite well. In order to describe the space between 'Moderately' and 'Extremely', three intensifiers can be considered, namely 'Very', 'Highly' and 'Very highly'. Of these, 'Very highly' is closest to 'Extremely' and is likely to result in a similar clustering as occurred for 'Highly' and 'Very highly'. Likewise, 'Highly' has a certain overlap with 'Extremely'. Hence it is suggested to use 'Very' in order to cover the space between 'Moderately' and 'Extremely'.

### Summary

In summary, results of the online survey show that respondents find it easier to differentiate between labels describing levels of engagement than between labels describing levels of disengagement. In addition, more of the labels describing disengagement are considered not to apply to one or more of the three dimensions. For both engagement and disengagement, fewer labels are considered applicable to the dimensions of well-being and relationships than to the dimension of learning.

A couple of other issues were raised in both the cognitive interviews and the open-ended question at the end of the online survey. First, it emerged that the EM is considered to address different purposes by different people. One of these purposes is as a monitoring tool which tracks young people's progression in terms of their levels of engagement in learning, well-being and relationships in the ICAN/FLO program. This may include a decision regarding when a young person is ready to leave the program. The other purpose is diagnostic in kind. This purpose considers the EM to provide information that assists mentors with the task of identifying how best to support a young person. With regard to this second purpose, the desire of obtaining more specific information from the EM was expressed. Lastly, some respondents expressed the strong view that it is not helpful or appropriate to label young people at all.

## Conclusion and outlook

The findings presented in this report indicate that it is a challenge to find labels that cover the full range of young people's engagement while applying equally well to learning, well-being and relationships. In particular, findings suggest that it is more difficult to cover the disengagement part of the continuum. Results also indicate that intensifiers assist in specifying which parts of the continuum are covered.

The current labels of the EM, namely 'Significantly disengaged', 'Partly disengaged', 'Moderately engaged', 'Highly engaged' and 'Very highly engaged' have been shown to work well. A slight modification is suggested to improve differentiation at the higher end. Here, replacement of 'Highly engaged' by 'Very engaged' and 'Very highly engaged' by 'Extremely engaged' is likely to yield clearer differentiation.

The next step in the Engagement Matrix trial will focus on the reliability and validity of the EM. To this end, the statements that are used to describe the different levels of engagement and disengagement will need to be further refined, tested and analysed using the Rasch method (Rasch, 1966). At the same time, the dimensionality of the EM will be examined to explore the extent to which the dimensions of learning, well-being and relationships are separate or related. Finally, information obtained from the EM will be related to other data in order to provide further evidence regarding the validity of the instrument.

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## APPENDIX A INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR ENGAGEMENT MATRIX TRIAL COGNITIVE INTERVIEWS

First, the Interview Administrator will present interviewees with 3 previously selected labels, printed on cards, and will be asked to place the labels in an order on the table. No specific instructions will be given as to how interviewees shall order the labels. Next, the Interview Administrator shall present the subject with more printed labels one by one and again will ask the subject to order the labels as a group. This shall be repeated until all of the labels have been placed in order.

Order:

1. Compliant
2. Disinterested
3. Enthusiastic
4. Passive
5. Engaged
6. Resistant
7. Proactive
8. Disengaged
9. Interested
10. Uninvolved
11. Involved
12. Apathetic
13. Active

If the subject asks if labels can be grouped or overlapped, the Administrator shall respond that they may, but the Administrator shall not give this instruction unless prompted by the subject.

If the subject asks if labels may be excluded from the order, the Administrator shall respond that they may.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Subject ID: \_\_\_\_\_ Interview Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_

*Instructions (labels):*

1. For our interview today, I would like to record our session with this digital recorder for our data analysis and to better record your responses. Is this okay with you? If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you may switch off the recorder. Also, I would like to take photographs of the work you produce to aid us in our data analysis. Is this okay with you?

Today I will have you complete 4 tasks regarding a scale related to a student's involvement in various dimensions, which we are testing. We would like you to perform the tasks and to get your feedback. In total, it shall take approximately 45 minutes to complete the 4 tasks. For the first task I have three words printed on cards that I am going to give you. I would like you to put the words in order here on the table under the label 'Involvement in Learning'. If you would like, you are free to rearrange the words at anytime. I would like for you to think aloud as you consider the words and their ordering.

*Probe: How did you arrive at this order?*

2. I am going to give you more labels 1 at a time, and I would like you to place these labels in order with the labels that you have already placed on the table. As you order the words, again please feel free to think aloud and to rearrange the words at any time.

*Probe: How did you arrive at this order?*

*Probe: Now that you have ordered all of the words, do you feel happy with how the words are ordered?*

3. At this stage I need to take a photo of the words before we proceed to the next task.  
[TAKE PHOTOGRAPH OF ORDER]

Photograph # \_\_\_\_\_

Note: If the subject has not asked the Administrator if labels can be grouped or overlap, the Administrator will give the subject a set of further instructions, to provide the participant with the opportunity to group or overlap the labels.

4. If I could give you the opportunity to group or overlap any of the labels, would you like to make any changes to the order of the labels that you have established?

YES/NO

If yes:

5. Feel free to think about your order and rearrange the words. Please think aloud as you rearrange the words.

*Probe: Could you please comment on how you reordered the words?*

6. At this stage I need to take a photo of the words before we proceed to the next task.  
[TAKE PHOTOGRAPH OF ORDER]

Photograph # \_\_\_\_\_

Note: Now, to assess if the labels have other associations with the different dimensions of the Engagement Matrix the Administrator will ask the participant if s/he would rearrange the established order of the labels in consideration of a student's involvement with well-being and relationships.

7. Considering the order of words that you have now, would you rearrange the words if you were considering a student's involvement in well-being? (Student goals, beliefs about capabilities, responsibility and attitudes).

YES/NO

If yes:

*Probe: Could you please comment on how you reordered the words?*

8. At this stage I need to take a photo of the words before we proceed to the next task.  
[TAKE PHOTOGRAPH OF ORDER]

Photograph # \_\_\_\_\_

9. Considering the order of words that you have now, would you rearrange the words if you were considering a student's involvement in relationships? (Student's connection to the community and community groups, interpersonal interactions and treatment of others, etc).

YES/NO

If yes:

*Probe: Could you please comment on how you reordered the words?*

10. At this stage I need to take a photo of the words before we proceed to the next task.  
[TAKE PHOTOGRAPH OF ORDER]

Photograph # \_\_\_\_\_

Note: Repeat with intensifiers.

11. Now I am going to have you complete a similar task with different words. Again I have three words printed on cards that I am going to give you. I would like you to put the

words in order here on the table under the label 'Involvement in Learning'. Again you are free to rearrange the words at anytime and I would like for you to think aloud as you consider the words and their ordering.

*Probe: How did you arrive at this order?*

**12.** I am going to continue to give you more words 1 by 1 until you have ordered all of the words. As you work, please feel free to think aloud and to rearrange the words at anytime.

*Probe: Now that you have ordered all of the words, do you feel happy with how the words are ordered?*

**13.** At this stage I need to take a photo of the words before we proceed to the next task.  
[TAKE PHOTOGRAPH OF ORDER]

Photograph # \_\_\_\_\_

**14.** If I could give you the opportunity to group or overlap any of the labels, would you like to make any changes to the order of the labels that you have established?

YES/NO

If yes:

**15.** Feel free to think about your order and rearrange the words. Please think aloud as you rearrange the words.

*Probe: Could you please comment on how you reordered the words?*

**16.** At this stage I need to take a photo of the words before we proceed to the next task.  
[TAKE PHOTOGRAPH OF ORDER]

Photograph # \_\_\_\_\_

**17.** Considering the order of words that you have now, would you rearrange the words if you were considering a student's involvement in well-being? (Student goals, beliefs about capabilities, responsibility and attitudes).

If yes:

*Probe: Could you please comment on how you reordered the words?*

**18.** At this stage I need to take a photo of the words before we proceed to the next task.  
[TAKE PHOTOGRAPH OF ORDER]

Photograph # \_\_\_\_\_

**19.** Considering the order of words that you have now, would you rearrange the words if you were considering a student's involvement in relationships? (Student's connection to the community and community groups, interpersonal interactions and treatment of others, etc).

If yes:

*Probe: Could you please comment on how you reordered the words?*

**20.** Now I need to take a photo before we proceed to the last two tasks.  
[TAKE PHOTOGRAPH OF ORDER]

Photograph # \_\_\_\_\_

**21.** You have just given us feedback about ordering words for a scale measuring student involvement in various dimensions. For an online study that we will undertake, we would like to get your feedback about which of two alternatives is easiest. I will hand you a sheet and I would like you to first read the instructions, then to think aloud as you complete the task.

**22.** Now you will complete the last task that is the other presentation alternative. Again, I would like you to read the instructions first, then to think aloud as you complete the last task.

*Probe: Can you comment on which of the two alternatives you found to be easier and why?*

**23.** Do you have any questions before we complete the interview? If you are interested in the results of these interviews, you can leave your e-mail address and we will send you a summary report of the results. Thank you for your participation. We greatly appreciate your help.

## APPENDIX B THE TEXT OF THE ONLINE SURVEY

South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS)

### Engagement Matrix Survey Part 1

Welcome to Part I of the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) Engagement Matrix survey. The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) has been commissioned by DECS to test the reliability and validity of the Engagement Matrix.

This first part is designed to obtain information regarding the labels of the Engagement Matrix. Part II, to be conducted in Term 1 next year, will collect data regarding other aspects of the matrix. Participation in the survey is anonymous and any demographic information collected will only be used in group comparisons.

The survey should take about 15 minutes to complete. If you would like to save your responses and return to complete the survey later, please remember to note down the login details the system will provide.

The Engagement Matrix is used by DECS to assess a young person's (9-19 years of age) engagement in three different dimensions: learning, well-being and relationships. Labels are used to describe different levels of engagement and disengagement in each dimension.

This survey is to help identify the most appropriate labels for the Engagement Matrix. We greatly appreciate your participation.

There are 15 questions in this survey

### Familiarity with the Engagement Matrix

1 [1]First, we would like you to tell us about your level of familiarity with the Engagement Matrix.

Have you ever used the Engagement Matrix to record a young person's level of engagement? \*

Please choose only one of the following:

Yes

No

2 [2]For approximately how long have you been using the Engagement Matrix?

Please indicate whether your response is in days, months or years.

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

° Answer was 'Yes' at question '1 [1]' (First, we would like you to tell us about your level of familiarity with the Engagement Matrix. Have you ever used the Engagement Matrix to record a young person's level of engagement?)

Please write your answer here:

3 [3]Over the past 12 months, for how many young people have you used the Engagement Matrix?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

° Answer was 'Yes' at question '1 [1]' (First, we would like you to tell us about your level of familiarity with the Engagement Matrix. Have you ever used the Engagement Matrix to record a young person's level of engagement?)

Please write your answer here:



**Definitions of engagement terms**

4 [4]For each of the words below, please indicate the range of engagement in learning, as percentages, that you associate with that word.

For example, if you thought that the word 'immersed' was equivalent to a young person being 70% to 100% engaged in learning, but the word 'involved' was equivalent to being somewhat less engaged, say 40% to 80% engaged with learning, you would complete the questions like this:

	% from	% to
Immersed	70	100
Involved	40	80

If you thought that 'immersed' was the equivalent of a single percentage, rather than a range, you could put the same value in each of the spaces:

	% from	% to
Immersed	40	40

If you believe that a word does not apply to engagement with learning, please write 'X' in the appropriate space.

Now, please consider the words below thinking about a young person's engagement with learning. Learning includes a young person's participation in, and attitudes toward, structured learning. This might be in an educational institution, a workplace or another learning environment.

	% engagement in learning (from)	% engagement in learning (to)	Does not apply
Active			
Compliant			
Engaged			
Enthusiastic			
Interested			

5 [5]Next, please consider these same words but now thinking about a young person's engagement in their own well-being.

Well-being includes a young person's capacity to be happy and confident, to be physically and mentally healthy, and to have a generally positive outlook on life.

	% engagement in well- being (from)	% engagement in well- being (to)	Does not apply
Active			
Compliant			
Engaged			
Enthusiastic			
Interested			

6 [6]Below, please consider these same words but now thinking about a young person's engagement in relationships with others.

Relationships include a young person making connections with other

members of the community, their interpersonal interactions, and their treatment of others.

	% engagement in relationships (from)	% engagement in relationships (to)	Does not apply
Active			
Compliant			
Engaged			
Enthusiastic			
Interested			

Definitions of disengagement terms

7 [7]Now, we would like you to consider some words describing disengagement from learning.

For example, if you thought that the word 'bored' was equivalent to a young person being 10% to 20% disengaged from learning, but the word 'reluctant' was equivalent to being somewhat more disengaged, say 15% to 40% disengaged from learning, you would complete the questions like this:

	% from	% to
Bored	10	20
Reluctant	15	40

If you thought that 'bored' was the equivalent of a single percentage, rather than a range, you could put the same value in each of the spaces:

	% from	% to
Bored	10	10

If you believe that a word does not apply to disengagement from learning, please write 'X' in the appropriate space.

Now, please consider a young person's disengagement from learning.

Learning includes a young person's participation in, and attitudes toward, structured learning. This might be in an educational institution, a workplace or another learning environment.

	% disengagement from learning (from)	% disengagement from learning (to)	Does not apply
Apathetic			
Compliant			
Disengaged			
Passive			
Resistant			
Uninterested			

8 [8]Now, please consider the same words but thinking of a young person's disengagement from their own well-being.

Well-being includes a young person's capacity to be happy and confident, to be physically and mentally healthy, and to have a generally positive outlook on life.

	% disengagement from well-being (from)	% disengagement from well-being (to)	Does not apply
Apathetic			
Compliant			
Disengaged			
Passive			
Resistant			
Uninterested			

9 [9]Below, please consider the same words but now thinking of a young person's disengagement from relationships with others.

Relationships include a young person making connections with other members of the community, their interpersonal interactions, and their treatment of others.

	% disengagement from relationships (from)	% disengagement from relationships (to)	Does not apply
Apathetic			
Compliant			
Disengaged			
Passive			
Resistant			
Uninterested			

**Definitions of intensifiers**

10 [10]

What is the difference between 'interested', 'very interested' and 'extremely interested'? How much is 'very'? People can hold different ideas about what these sorts of words mean.

For the following list of words, please indicate the percentage range that you associate with that word. For example, you might think that 'strongly' means 75% to 95%, while you might think that 'slightly' is more like 20% to 35%.

	% (from)	% (to)
Completely		
Extremely		
Highly		
Moderately		
Partly		
Very		
Very highly		

11 [20]Finally, we would like to ask you about some combinations of words.

Next to each combination of words below are the numbers 1, 2, 3...9, 10, 11 with higher numbers indicating higher levels of engagement. For each combination of words, please select the number that you feel best describes the level of engagement it represents. While you might like to select a range of numbers, please select the one number that best indicates where this term fits for you.

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Highly engaged											
Moderately engaged											
Partly disengaged											
Significantly disengaged											

Very highly engaged

Demographics

12 [11]Please select the label from the list below that best describes your current position. \*

Please choose only one of the following:

- School Staff Member (e.g. FLO Coordinator, Principal, Teacher)
- Case Manager (e.g. Case Worker)
- DECS ICAN Regional Staff (e.g. ICAN Curriculum Manager, Regional Program Manager, Project Officer for Flexible Learning)
- DECS Attendance Counsellors and Mentoring Staff (e.g. Attendance Counsellor, Local Community Mentor Coordinator, Project Manager for Secondary Mentoring)

**Other**

13 [12]Are you female or male? \*

Please choose only one of the following:

- Female
- Male

14 [13]What is your age? \*

Please choose only one of the following:

Younger than 20 years of age

- 21 to 30 years of age
- 31 to 40 years of age
- 41 to 50 years of age
- 51 to 60 years of age
- 61 to 70 years of age
- Older than 70 years of age

15 [50]If you have any comments regarding this survey or the Engagement Matrix, please tell us in the space provided below.

Please write your answer here:

Submit Your Survey.

Thank you for completing this survey.