



# SUBMISSION TO THE COMMONWEALTH REVIEW INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

Victorian TAFE Association  
Level 3, 478 Albert Street  
EAST MELBOURNE 3002

Ph: 9639 8100  
Fax: 9663 7566

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**SUBMISSION TO THE COMMONWEALTH REVIEW INTO HIGHER EDUCATION**  
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***Principles***

The Victorian TAFE Association has consistently demonstrated a commitment to developing working relationships with the school and university educational sectors to implement educational reform while maintaining autonomy, diversity and integrity. The public TAFE sector understands the needs of learners and industry and considers a cooperative approach will serve the best interests of Victoria to enhance its social and economic capability.

Any consideration of the issues currently facing universities should not be undertaken in isolation of the other partners in Australia's tertiary education sector and the learning beneficiaries. The solutions sought will inevitably impact on both the secondary and tertiary education providers by virtue of the alliances that are increasingly being formed to meet the needs of those who are demonstrating their desire for greater articulation between the various educational institutions. In Victoria, this is particularly evident in the current arrangements that exist with the multi sector organisations in RMIT, Swinburne University of Technology, University of Ballarat and Victoria University. Much has been learnt from these structural arrangements resulting from amalgamations in the 1990's.

The themes and issues for consideration raised by this Review open up opportunities for greater collaboration between TAFE and universities and we look forward to building the capacity of an inclusive public provision for tertiary education in Australia.

***Themes and issues for consideration***

Although we have provided a response to four key themes outlined below, the Association has chosen to focus primarily on the interface between TAFE and higher education as we see an interrelationship with all other themes identified.

***1. The role of universities as public institutions:***

▪ **ALIGNMENT WITH GOVERNMENT POLICY**

The Discussion Paper and the subsequent public debate raises a number of fundamental issues and recommendations that, if adopted, would dramatically change the position and purpose of Australia's universities. Such is the magnitude of the potential change that it should not be contemplated in isolation of the public TAFE sector, given the inextricable nexus between university and TAFE provision. Whatever direction is contemplated, Government must constantly reaffirm and commit to the value of learning for all members of the community.

▪ **ACCESS**

Whether school leavers or mature-age students, as life-long learners, Australians will continue to access academic university qualifications. Both the specificity and generic nature of those qualifications will not only ultimately determine the role of Australia's universities, but also the role and structure of the entire tertiary sector. Safeguarding appropriate access to key educational services promotes social justice, minimizes discrimination and allows for timeliness and affordability for individuals, industries and communities.



- **SUSTAINABILITY AND EFFICIENCY**

Performance monitoring and benchmarking within Australia and globally will improve the educational service and ensure a focus on outcomes. Applying a balanced scorecard approach to reporting will better ensure accountability while meeting triple bottom line responsibilities.

- **GROWTH AND CHANGE**

Growth that focuses on future research activities will very much be a consequence of the new direction of universities. Developing innovative solutions for existing and emerging industries will continue to be the primary drivers that enrich capability and investment to improve products and processes in changing environments.

2. *Regional higher education provision and university specialisation:*

- **REGIONAL COMMUNITIES**

Alignment with the needs of regional communities including TAFE institutes, workplaces and industries will continue to be a critical factor. It is imperative that communities have ready access to a wide range of relevant educational services, programs and qualifications but duplication must be avoided and diversity encouraged. The model of establishing an integrated 'educational precinct' should be included in any consideration of the issues.

- **SPECIALISATION**

Specialisation and greater product differentiation by universities will invariably lead to rationalisation. For TAFE, the consequent workforce issues will necessitate a different approach to work structures, functions, industrial arrangements and staff competence. It may also include the necessity to establish mechanisms to enable staff to work across sectors.

- **ONLINE ACCESS**

A variety of delivery modes are required to meet the diverse needs of learners. This will generate a need to significantly reform the way learning is facilitated.

3. *The interface between TAFE and higher education:*

The interface between TAFE and higher education is defined by a number of interrelated factors which are summarized as follows:

- **CROSS-SECTORAL PROVISION**

Students demand seamless learning and educational structures that allow articulation beyond the rhetoric. There are issues with local, interstate, national and global recognition of qualifications, assessment and reporting policies, funding models, retention, credit transfer, entry requirements, and others and these need to be addressed in the context of the discussion.

- **COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS**

Increasingly the community, especially employers, expresses frustration with the confusing jargon and inconsistent terminology used by the education sector. Academic; Vocational; Generalist; Competence; are terms that are perceived to categorise the learning context, the organisational purpose, the 'standing' or 'value' of the subject matter, resulting in little more than jargon for the



educationalists, disengaging those we are trying (and retain) to attract into learning.

- **MARKETS**

Clearly TAFE and universities service discrete markets with specific educational products. An understanding of market segments, current and future demographics, client needs and expectations underpins effectiveness. Monitoring the satisfaction levels of students, industries, regulators and communities is required with appropriate levels of resource provision to undertake these activities.

- **TRANSITION**

To encourage student participation in life learning, the Government has invested considerable resources. However, there are obvious differences in learning environments encountered by students as they move between educational institutions. To maximize the investment, students must be supported by services that ensure an improvement in retention and monitor withdrawals and graduate destinations.

- **PATHWAYS**

The continuation of strategies to remove structural barriers and creating opportunities within the tertiary sector as well as creating connectivity with schools must remain a priority for government. The lack of understanding exemplified in the diagram on Page 45 of the *HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE CROSSROADS: MINISTERIAL DISCUSSION PAPER* perpetuates a perceived barrier that TAFE is not an integral part of the learning continuum. Just as there is scope to enhance the areas of course design and delivery, resource development and workforce development, there is a need for those within Government to better understand the role of TAFE.

- **WORKFORCE**

Workforce development issues including industrial relations staff development have surfaced as a major issue in the sector. With the increasing incidence of interaction between TAFE and universities through co-operative delivery arrangements where classifications and conditions are disparate, it has to be anticipated that these issues emerge as significant matters to be resolved in the immediate future.

#### 4. *University funding:*

- **FUNDING MODEL/S**

Disparate models across educational sectors create inequities. Particular difficulties are exacerbated where students are enrolled across sectors at any one time. This leads to pressure to develop alternative revenue generation arrangements that in turn may impact on the business and quality of teaching and learning with the organisation.

- **FINANCIAL CONDITIONS**

There is an urgent need to address a range of funding issues associated with a diverse student cohort particularly where simultaneous study in TAFE and university is being undertaken. Students are classified as continuing, full fee paying, undergraduate, post graduate, international students, full-time, part-time,



industry sponsored scholarship holders. Levels of student contributions and loans schemes raise social justice issues that require careful consideration.

- **COMPETITION**

To varying degrees, competition within and across sectors for students, industry sponsorship, government funding and status exists to the detriment of learners. Developing and fostering collaborative relationships may address this issue. Demands for competing public expenditure cannot be sustained.

### ***Conclusion***

The broad educational policy framework is lacking alignment to develop seamless and coordinated learning environments that meet the increasingly articulated needs of the community. It is timely to establish education as an industry in its own right, enabling cross-sectoral provision that will bring benefits to learners, industry and workforces.

The outcome of this review must align the governance of our educational institutions with market research findings, strategic planning, knowledge, innovation and design, in order to build workforce capability, professional practice and highly valued centres of quality teaching and learning in an innovation economy.