

Promoting Participation and Engagement for Koorie Learners in VET: Planning for Success



Victorian TAFE Association Response
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1. Introduction

The Victorian TAFE Association is the peak body for Victoria's public providers of Vocational Education and Training (VET), including 12 TAFE institutes, four Victorian dual sector universities, and an Associate member, AMES Australia.

The Victorian TAFE Association acknowledges the role of Aboriginal culture and the rich contribution to Victorian society. The Association shares the Victorian Government's commitment to both the development of a Treaty and Aboriginal self-determination. We consider that Victoria's public VET providers are in a unique position to help realise these goals.

The Association welcomes this opportunity to provide comment to *Promoting Participation and Engagement for Koorie Learners in VET: Planning for Success*. Our comments are structured around four areas, including:

- Maximising engagement
- Leveraging existing programs
- Community Service Obligation funding
- The strength of the Victorian TAFE model

2. Maximising engagement: TAFE across the state

The most recent Australian Census showed that Victoria's population is mostly centred in Melbourne, with about 75 per cent of Victorians calling the capital home. By contrast, a slight majority of Victoria's Koorie population is regionally based, with about 51 per cent living outside of Melbourne.

A major goal stated in the Discussion Paper is the need to maximise opportunities for engagement of Koorie communities and the subsequent development of "local, place-based approaches to improving learning outcomes".¹ Proximity to an educational institution is often a leading factor in decisions regarding further study, and so the attainment of this goal coupled with the findings from the Australian Census suggest that the engagement of Koorie Victorians requires the use and placing of resources and engagement activities across the state, in both metropolitan and regional settings.

Victoria's 12 TAFE institutes and four dual sector universities operate more than 100 campuses that span the state. Their existence and location is driven in large part to provide access to education and training facilities and resources for local communities, and is part of a tradition that sees educational "access as fundamental to the right of an individual to earn a living within the social and industrial framework of society".² Many of the communities that are served by TAFE campuses would otherwise go without, and their presence (particularly within regional areas) has a major role in increasing participation in tertiary education and training and providing access for disadvantaged groups who would otherwise be disenfranchised from further study.

¹Victorian Government Department of Education and Training (2019), *Participation and Engagement for Koorie Learners in VET: Planning for Success* [Discussion Paper]: 5

² Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education; Kangan, Myer (1974), *TAFE in Australia: report on needs in technical and further education* [Volume 1], Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, accessed from <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A38436> (10 May 2019).

Given this, the Victorian TAFE Association considers that strategies to raise participation should leverage and utilise the valuable resource that is the TAFE campus network. The Victorian TAFE network is a logical vehicle for this for a number of reasons, including: the low to negligible marginal costs of provision, which result from facilities and infrastructure that are already in place and the low costs of engagement made possible by the spread of campuses and facilities and their connectivity/proximity to Koorie communities; and the alignment between government and public services priorities and the public value foundation of TAFE. We recommend that a review of existing activities and resources be undertaken to determine what is already in place, to learn from best-practice and leverage and mimic where possible. The review should also explore the role of public VET providers in the life of Indigenous empowerment in other jurisdictions (such as Canada, the United States and New Zealand).

The Victorian TAFE Association also considers that specific funding should be developed and allocated to TAFE institutes to enable the implementation of strategies developed in concert with local Koorie communities to raise Koorie profile and participation. This funding should support activities from a localised level to network-wide. It would enable local Koorie communities to work with local TAFE campuses to develop strategies to maximise participation at a local campus level. At the network level, it would support activities to foster more coordinated effort of activities where this is deemed beneficial and/or practical.

The kinds of activities that could be funded would be multi-fold: from creating built environments that are inviting, respectful and celebrate Koorie communities and Koorie culture, including through physical structures that could be used to highlight Koorie contributions to Victorian society; to the development of outreach programs to maximise Koorie reach and participation; to ensuring that support systems and other resources enable ease of access for Koorie communities to TAFE offerings. Underpinning each activity should be the principle of self-determination, and it would be Koorie communities who shape and define the nature of the service and TAFE's responsibilities.

With respect to the built environment, the Victorian TAFE Association recommends instituting a program of funding to enable TAFE institutes to work with local Koorie communities to erect tangible and obvious representations and celebrations of Koorie culture on TAFE campuses.

3. Leveraging existing programs

The Victorian TAFE Association considers that Koorie participation in education and training could be leveraged by recasting or amending existing Victorian programs and activities. Examples of programs that could be leveraged include the Workforce Training Innovation Fund (WTIF), the Skills and Jobs Centres (SaJCs) program; the Regional and Specialist Training Fund (RSTF) and other initiatives to address thin market provision; and career advice. The review and tweaking of such programs should be undertaken with consideration to the role of TAFE in supporting social progression and to its mission to contribute to public and social good.

With respect to the WTIF, the Victorian TAFE Association recommends the introduction of a Koorie funding stream. This stream would be two-fold: first, the stream would include funding targeted at and available to Koorie Victorians only; second, the stream could include a new funding category open to both Koorie and non-Koorie Victorians that is focused on issues specific to Koorie Victorian education and training.

The Skills and Jobs Centres program provides job-seekers with expert advice on training and employment opportunities and assists industry and employers to meet workforce needs. The Victorian TAFE Association recommends reviewing the SaJC program to ensure that it maximises engagement of Koorie communities. One way to increase engagement of Koorie job seekers and employers would be to ensure that programs, materials and modes of transmission are written or presented in a manner appropriate a Koorie audience. The Victorian TAFE Association recommends that consideration be given to the development of non-fungible resources and funding for SaJC to develop said materials. While it is commonplace to refer to the 'Indigenous audience', as though there was one singular Indigenous culture, the reality is an Indigenous community that is highly heterogenous. This would necessitate working with local communities to ensure materials are culturally cognisant. TAFE is ideally placed to achieve this, given its spread and Victoria's decentralised TAFE model (see section 5).

'Thin markets' refers to a situation where there are "few learners (that is, there is low demand for VET) and/or VET providers (that is, there is limited supply of training)".³ In most cases, conceptions of 'thin markets' are limited to "occupational areas, industry areas and geographic regions (particularly in rural and remote locations)" which have either low demand for or limited to no supply of training. The RSTF and many other Victorian Government activities have been instituted to address this problem.

But thin markets could also be seen in cultural terms, where a market is 'thin' because a given cultural group is smaller in size resulting in low demand or a lack of supply. This conception would certainly apply to Koorie communities, particularly with respect to training that is culturally focused (such as the training of Indigenous languages) or where training is provided to small numbers of Koorie citizens. The Victorian TAFE Association considers that activities to address training delivery in thin markets (such as the RSTF) could be modified, so that thin markets due to this cultural dimension would also qualify for thin market treatment and support, including through the development of a thin market stream for training delivery to Koorie citizens. As with WTIF, we consider that the RSTF program could create funding streams dedicated to Koorie communities and to matters of relevance to Koorie communities.

Education and training is foundational in the role it plays in supporting the attainment of individual potential and to the underpinning of a successful career.⁴ It is therefore imperative that career advice services and the education and training advice offered to Koorie citizens be offered in such a way as to maximise access and success. This requires that career advice services be provided in a manner that is accessible, inviting, 'aware', driven to ensure that the best interest of the Koorie career advice user is achieved. The Victorian TAFE Association considers that the review should consider existing career advice programs to ensure that they are cast in a manner that maximises Koorie participation and success. This may require the development of bespoke career services for Koorie citizens.

There are many Victorian and government programs and policies additional to those outlined above that intersect with or have a role in achieving the outcomes outlined in the Discussion Paper. One example is the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which has

³ NCVET (2008), Vocational education and training providers in competitive training markets: 30

⁴ The World Bank describes education as a "human right, a powerful driver of development and one of the strongest instruments for reducing poverty and improving health, gender equality, peace, and stability". It goes on to say that education "delivers large, consistent returns in terms of income and is the most important factor to ensure equality of opportunities". See <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/overview>, accessed 10 May 2019.

implications for Koorie citizens across a number of dimensions, from the training and employment opportunities that arise from the NDIS, to the provision of NDIS services in a manner that ensures that the principles of self-determination are upheld. The NDIS is but one example and there are many additional government policies that would similarly be relevant. The risk is that these seemingly disparate activities are set in train without consideration for their implications for Koorie citizens. The further implication is that benefits for Koorie citizens are not maximised. The Victorian TAFE Association considers that this could be addressed by either instituting a body whose function would be to ensure that these interactions are not missed and that opportunities are realised, or to adjust or expand the scope of existing bodies (such as the Marrung Governance Committee).

4. Community Service Obligation funding

In 2018, the Victorian TAFE Association commissioned KPMG to undertake an analysis of the contribution made by Victoria's TAFE institutes to Victorian prosperity. The highly lauded outcome, *The Importance of TAFE to Victoria's Prosperity: Final Report*, outlined the innumerable ways in which Victoria's 12 standalone TAFEs and the TAFE divisions of its four dual sector universities contribute to Victorian social and economic prosperity.

The report demonstrated that TAFE made an economic contribution of almost \$3 billion to Victoria's Gross State Product, with every \$1 spent by Victorian TAFEs generating \$2.19 of value-add to the Victorian economy. But more than that, the report showed that the contribution made by TAFE is more than a matter of economics and finance and includes a large 'social footprint' that champions and delivers "equity and access to education and training for all Victorians".⁵ With respect to the matter at hand, the research showed that Victoria's TAFE network delivered training to four times as many Indigenous students as higher education providers and about three times as many students as private VET counterparts.⁶

The public contribution made by TAFE is driven by a social 'charter' that is a product of history and design, and is informed by a civic duty to the wellbeing of the communities in which they are immersed and serve. This charter enjoins TAFEs to act as a vehicle for social mobility and to help each individual Victorian realise his or her potential. It informs TAFE's obligations and energy to contribute to the attainment of government social policies, including to Aboriginal self-determination. Indeed, the community itself holds TAFE to a more exacting civic standard, with an expectation that TAFE institutes fulfil or contribute to the attainment of a suite of social and cultural indicators and to the maintenance of society.

In recognition of this social and civic mission, TAFE institutes are provided funding that enables them to deliver and meet their Community Service Obligations (CSO). However, current funding is given in one-year cycles that make planning and strategic development difficult. Further, the funding is of a general nature that is to be used to meet competing social obligations.

The Victorian TAFE Association therefore recommends that CSO funding be provided on cycles of more than one year to enable greater long-term planning and to both articulate and maximise TAFE's contribution to the attainment of government social values and goals. We

⁵ KPMG (June 2018), *The Importance of TAFE to Victoria's Prosperity: Final Report*, <https://vta.vic.edu.au/document-manager/research-applied/848-the-importance-of-tafe-to-victoria-s-prosperity-final-29-06-18>, accessed 8 May 2019: 8

⁶ KPMG (June 2018), *The Importance of TAFE to Victoria's Prosperity: Final Report*, <https://vta.vic.edu.au/document-manager/research-applied/848-the-importance-of-tafe-to-victoria-s-prosperity-final-29-06-18>, accessed 8 May 2019: 18

recommend that these cycles be provided on a triennial basis, at least. Further, we consider there is merit in the development of a stream designed to explicitly support programs that would facilitate community and social building activities for Koorie citizens, aligned with the Victorian Government's commitment to self-determination.

5. The strength of the Victorian TAFE model

In 2017, the LH Martin Institute undertook an analysis of the highly devolved structure of the Victorian TAFE network and compared it to more centralised approaches in other states.⁷ While other states (for example, NSW) have moved towards a highly centralised structure whereby formerly independent TAFE institutes are merged and centrally managed, Victoria has preferred to continue with an approach that establishes a series of independent TAFE institutes, each with their own CEO and Board of Directors.

The LH Martin research highlighted a number of features that were shown to convey an advantage to Victoria as a result of its decentralised approach:

- Victoria's TAFE system, which is more localised to regions within country and metropolitan Victoria, enables greater alignment with other bodies and institutions (such as those in local government), facilitating collaboration on social and economic development.
- The CEOs of Victoria's TAFE institutes are more connected to local communities, making them more able to respond to local realities and opportunities; and to make decisions and provide an easily identifiable figurehead for external stakeholders.
- The devolved nature of Victoria's public TAFE system results in a greater number of CEOs, Board Chairs and Board Directors than their centralised counterparts. This creates a number of benefits, including access to increased networks, a larger variety of experience and skill, and a greater pool of people to offer innovative and strategic thinking.
- The Victorian approach facilitates high profile industry specialisation and the formation of long-standing relationships with industry sectors.
- Victoria's system does not stipulate a requirement to have equal-sized TAFEs across the state. As a result, regional areas are better served by having local TAFEs, which are large enterprises for their regions, with the local authority of a CEO.
- Related to the point above, the system has great diversity in terms of scale and size, educational scope and mission that ensures greater alignment between the education and training needs of regions and a TAFE institute's training profile. With respect to this point, Victorian TAFE institutes have, where possible or required, worked collaboratively in the delivery of projects, policies or activities, drawing on the diversity and strength of each of the Network's parts.

The localised nature of Victoria's independent TAFE institutes has major benefits for maximising the participation and engagement of Koorie communities. Each of the benefits outlined above can and are put to effective use in working with local Koorie communities to deliver on and meet their needs, and maximises outreach and participation.

The Victorian TAFE Association therefore considers that the review should give consideration to the benefits of the Victorian model, to consider the benefits accruing from

⁷ Goedegebuure, Leo and Schubert, Ruth (January 2017), *Strengths and Benefits of the Victorian TAFE Model*, LH Martin Institute.

this model to Koorie communities, and to consider how it can be leveraged to maximise Koorie participation and success and deliver on the public mission of TAFE.

6. Key contact

The VTA welcomes the opportunity to speak further to the issues outlined in this submission. To do so, please contact:

Mr Andrew Williamson
Executive Director
Victorian TAFE Association
Level 3, 478 Albert Street, East Melbourne Vic 3002
Email: awilliamson@vta.vic.edu.au
Phone: 03 9639 8100
Mobile: 0400 403 755