

Back Door to University

OR

Front Door to Open Learning



Victorian TAFE  
*Association* Inc  
Reg.No.A37584B

Submission prepared in response to:  
Varieties of Learning: the interface between higher  
education and vocational education and training

S E P T E M B E R 2 0 0 2

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The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect the views of all of the members of the Victorian TAFE Association Inc.

## INTRODUCTION

The Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) is a respected peak employer body representing the publicly owned providers of vocational education and training in Victoria. These consist of fourteen TAFE Institutes, four universities with a TAFE division, the Centre for Adult Education and the Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES).

Collectively, these organisations manage 127 campuses and deliver in excess of 86 million hours of quality training through 3.74 million module enrolments to 316,000 students.

The Victorian TAFE system is generally viewed as among the most flexible, responsive, and innovative in Australia. (Noonan, 2002) Victoria is also acknowledged as being the most efficient and effective State in Australia for vocational education provision. Yet, in a climate of considerable growth and high levels of unmet demand, its TAFE system is under considerable financial strain as a result of it being the lowest funded in the nation.

The VTA seeks to progress a strong and vibrant public TAFE sector by demonstrating the guiding principles of professionalism, collaboration, integrity and autonomy. With careful consideration of global and local economic and social trends, the Association brings together diverse perspectives in the development of policy positions on educational, workforce development and governance issues, aligning each with social and economic objectives, community expectations, industry needs and the needs of its members. The Association actively leads and promotes informed discussion and debate with stakeholders and networks to build the capability of the Victorian public TAFE sector as a world class tertiary education provider.

This submission is in response to an issues paper prepared by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, *Varieties of Learning: the interface between higher education and training* ('the Issues Paper') and is the latest in a continuum of discussion papers and published monographs produced by the Association and available on our website, that advocate for the public provision of quality vocational education and training.

It has been written following consultation with a range of stakeholders in the vocational education and training sector in Victoria and subsequent extensive testing by our Members of the views expressed.

It was clear from our consultation that there is a divergence of views among our Membership, both in direction and intensity, and it is, as we have maintained through out the paper, because of that diversity, TAFE is able to readily respond to, and thereby represent, the views of the community. However, throughout the development of the paper, there was one clear and unwavering precept, that it is the educational well being of the learner and the need for coherent pathways to life long learning that must be paramount in our collective thinking and motivation.

The paper has been written to better inform the debate and to advance the level of understanding by the proponents of educational policy of the value of maintaining a quality, viable and publicly owned vocational education and training sector in Australia. While the paper argues that there are differences in the Mission and Purpose of TAFE Institutes and universities across the country, it does not purport to suggest that one is 'better than' the other. Rather, the argument is that that they are different and that to the extent that student choice is not diminished, that difference should be encouraged.

The VTA, while unashamedly critical of some aspects of the Government's thinking, remains a staunch advocate for the public provision of quality education through equitable, accessible and affordable pathways. Our history of objective criticism and support has seen many of the positions we have given air to, embraced in government policy and practice. For this reason, and with these credentials, we look forward to further contributing to the ongoing growth and development of vocational education and training provision in this country.

The construct of the arguments presented in this paper are around the connectivity of TAFE and university programs and awards. They touch not only on arguments of access and equity but call for a fundamental rethinking of the way we traditionally articulate our educational value system in Australia, modeled as it is on a bygone era. We have argued that traditionalist prejudices serve to enshrine the very structures that perpetuate barriers to learning. Following a brief discussion on the origins and principles of TAFE, we have adopted an approach that addresses four principal areas of concern that the TAFE sector in Victoria have with the propositions advanced in the Issues Paper.

In summary, those areas of concern are:

### **Fees and Charges**

The suppositions and accompanying propositions surrounding the articulation of TAFE students into degree level programs and the suggested anomalies that this presents are not alleviated by the reassurances of the Government in the Issues Paper, that it has no intention to introduce a Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) in TAFE *per se*. Clearly, the State based jurisdiction of TAFE would preclude this in any case, for some time to come, but what is disturbing, are the implicit suggestions that it is iniquitous that TAFE students accessing university degree programs after completing a Diploma and/or Advanced Diploma in TAFE, are given credit toward a degree without having to make a HECS payment for those Diploma courses, leaving us unconvinced that through future Commonwealth – State arrangements, there will not be an attempt to impose some form of cost recovery against the delivery of those particular level programs.

### **Articulation**

An important argument put in the Issues paper is the lack of suitable articulation arrangements between the two principal institutions of the tertiary sector, TAFE Institutes and Universities. We believe that many of the ideas raised in the Issues Paper are already being tested in Victoria. Current practice has come part way to address the many barriers to life long learning and is demonstrating benefits for the learner at the interface of TAFE and university where sound relationships exist. This is particularly evident in dual sector institutions and regional Victoria where learning precincts are being embraced by their communities.

However, the VTA has consistently advocated publicly and privately that much more needs to be done by Australia's education sector to develop a national vision and framework to unravel those articulation arrangements that confuse, dishearten and mystify the very people we are seeking to reach and thus remove the barriers to their life long learning.

### **The Interface**

The VTA is strongly supportive of the decision taken by the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training, The Hon Dr Brendan Nelson MP, ('the Minister') to undertake a comprehensive review of the structures that are currently in place to service Australia's educational needs and to call for comment on the many facets of the TAFE – University interface in particular. The VTA believes that it is time for all of the stakeholders in the sector to engage in a cogent and dispassionate discussion about how we, as a nation, can work together to enhance educational provision for all Australian's and how wasteful duplication and unproductive practices can be avoided without eroding student choice.

### **Barriers and Opportunities**

Finally, this paper urges, in the strongest possible way, that Federal, State and Territory Governments give due consideration to developing strategies that enable learners to better engage in the learning continuum. It is imperative that the current discussions about reforms in the university sector lead to strategies that include the removal of the barriers that inhibit the delivery and assessment of integrated and aligned tertiary programs.

The TAFE sector in Victoria has long recognised the mutual benefits of strong co-operative relationships

## THE ISSUES

with the school and university sectors, working to understand the needs of learners and industry through a cooperative approach that best serves the interests of Victoria and enhances its social and economic capability.

We believe that any consideration of the issues currently facing universities brought to light in the context of the Federal Government's 'Crossroads Review' should not be undertaken in isolation of the other partners in Australia's tertiary education sector and of course, the learning beneficiaries. The solutions sought will inevitably impact on all 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 within the dual sector universities, with much having been learnt from these structural arrangements following the amalgamations in the 1990's.

The themes and issues for consideration raised by the 'Crossroads Review' into Higher Education, if pursued, will provide further opportunities for greater collaboration between TAFE and universities and we look forward to contributing to the building of a more inclusive approach to the public provision of tertiary education in Australia.

## MULTIPLE MISSIONS OF TAFE

*TAFE Institutes play a broad role in helping to build and sustain Victoria's diverse communities*

(Kosky, 2002)

To fully appreciate the extent to which TAFE is an integral part of Australia's tertiary education sector, it is important to understand that TAFE does not exist or operate as a unicellular structure. It is a critical partner in the design and implementation of innovative community and industry based initiatives encompassing applied research, enterprise development and labour market programs that translate directly into job and wealth creation, for individuals, communities and the nation.

In response to the diversity of the community of interests that it serves, TAFE has become a multi-mission institution in Australia, founded on the following principles:

- Accountability to the Australian public;
- Educational and institutional autonomy;
- Building the capacity of Australian *industry* to compete innovatively and sustainably in the world market;
- Building the capacity of Australian *students* to realise their potential as full and active members of society;
- Building the capacity of *communities* to create sustainable, positive futures;
- Commitment to providing for the lifelong learning needs of students, communities and industries;
- Provision of an innovative pedagogy of engagement and practice; and
- Commitment to ameliorating hardship and ignorance by removing barriers that inhibit access to public education for all Australians.

These principles frame the importance of a strong and viable public TAFE sector in the provision of vocational programs. The work undertaken by Golding and Vallence (1999) demonstrated that university centred education is no longer the first choice for an increasing number of Australians.

If this is so, and it is strongly argued that it is, then the premise in the Issues Paper that asserts 'smart' students, are motivated by fiscal exigencies to exit the secondary system and choose TAFE as a 'cheap' pathway to a university education must be challenged.

Australia's publicly owned TAFE system is a longstanding community asset having its origins rooted in decisions taken in the early 1800s that established the proliferation of mechanic's institutes across Australia, as centres of social and intellectual engagement and recreation, providing workers and students with stimuli, gathering points and resources for learning.

Many argue that throughout its history, the provision of vocational education and training has been in a state of continuous transition, coming into sharp focus when, in the past two decades, Australia moved from an industrial to an innovation economy.

The public provision of vocational education also changed from being supply driven to become demand driven. In Victoria, TAFE has continued to evolve without relinquishing its originating community obligation to develop and enhance social capital while at the same time embracing the forces of change to become an innovative public instrumentality, focused on the needs of industry.

As Noonan (2002) reports, TAFE demonstrates a richness and diversity of activities to become crucial and enduring symbols of a community's capacity and sense of pride and purpose. We would argue that it is not the bricks and mortar of the TAFE Institute that is being referred to by Noonan, but the pride and sense of renewal instilled in the individual learners that collectively make up the fabric of the Australian community.

There is no doubt that public TAFE provision has made a significant and measurable contribution to Australia's economic competitiveness and an acknowledgment of its role in the quality of learning and employability of approximately 1.32 million Australians annually is well overdue.

## MULTIPLE MISSIONS OF TAFE

### **Recommendation 1**

That the Government acknowledges the critical role that Australia's public TAFE system has in maintaining and sustaining the non-linear patterns of learning undertaken by an increasing number of Australians.

The Issues Paper discusses the relative merits of students using TAFE as a conduit to an undergraduate degree. It postulates that there are a number of facets to be considered and questions whether higher education courses delivered through TAFE should be subject to differing (fees) arrangements. The courses referred to are the Diploma and Advanced Diploma.

Two points need to be made here.

Firstly, the Issues Paper at page 14, reports that the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) defines the Diploma and Advanced Diploma as 'higher education awards.' This is not reflected in the AQF Implementation Handbook (2002) nor the information displayed on the AQF website, nor is it representative of existing practice within the two sectors. The AQF material explicitly differentiates between the characteristics of these awards contingent upon the pathway chosen by the learner to attain them. Whereas the Issues Paper does not explicitly suggest that the Diploma and Advanced Diploma are 'exclusively' higher education courses, it appears to rely on this premise to advance the argument that the Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas that are being undertaken by students in TAFE are 'higher education awards' and thus the province of the university sector and that this therefore legitimises the hypothesis leading the discussion on 'differing arrangements'.

That assumption is totally rejected. The responsiveness of VET products to the needs of the community has been confirmed by the AQF in accrediting courses at these levels that '*recognise the capacity for initiative and judgment across a broad range of technical and/or management functions*'. (AQF 2002) It is acknowledged that Diploma and Advanced Diploma programs may be gained through multiple pathways with ample evidence to support the assertion that the Diploma and Advanced Diploma programs offered by TAFE are valued for their intrinsic vocationally oriented qualities as well as their extrinsic benefits to the learner.

When explaining those pathways, the AQF states:

*'When issued in the vocational education and training sector, Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas recognise skills and knowledge meeting national competency standards (or competencies consistent with these levels where the national industry competency standards are not applicable).'*

The acknowledgment that there are multiple pathways leads us to the next point of discussion. The inference could be drawn from the many references in the Issues Paper, that TAFE students are somehow 'defrauding' the system when they access and acquire the benefit of a vocational education for considerably less up-front fees than those levied on university students. Regrettably this suggestion is given some imprimatur through the reported comments of the Minister describing those students who have completed a Diploma or Advanced Diploma in TAFE and are seeking to articulate into an undergraduate degree as '*receiving a back door university degree on the cheap*.' It appears that the Minister is questioning the maintenance of affordable and accessible public education when he stated in the same address '*...and the question that I put to the Australian people – is that fair?*' (Nelson, transcript, 2002)

The point that needs to be understood is that these students are not exploiting the system. They are giving effect to, and demonstrating the benefits of, a publicly owned tertiary education system that has expended considerable energies to promote and facilitate life long learning. The Minister, in his summary of the missions of the sectors stated:

*'Well, one of the things that is fundamentally important to us is that we have a high quality higher education sector. University education is fundamentally about the development and transmission of knowledge, passing the soul from one generation to the next. TAFE and vocational education training on the other hand is about developing and transmitting skills..... There is a fundamental difference between the very high quality product offered in the university sector and the TAFE sector.'*

(Nelson, transcript, 2002)

The regrettable part of such specious, and when viewed in isolation, fallacious rhetoric is that it invariably

becomes the stuff of education policy and the foundation of public perception. The cultural assumptions that pervade the musings of those long since removed from the pragmatics of educating Australia's youth, have marginalised the importance of vocational education and training and would have us believe that the maintenance of the traditional pathways for approximately 30% of Australia's post-secondary students is more important to us as a nation than the life long learning experiences of a much larger cohort.

As the Minister acknowledges, an increasing number of discerning Australians are making the choice and they are doing so for reasons that are primarily of benefit to them. This should signal the need for the institutionalised educational bureaucracies to 'tear down the barricades'.

The second point relates to the discussion of what is referred to in the Issues Paper as the absence of any provision for TAFE students to access 'an income-contingent loan to pay fees' and that presumably, when compared to the university student, this is an anomaly.

The principle of affordable and accessible post compulsory education is now clearly more evident in TAFE than in the university sector for quite understandable and explicable reasons. The different missions, focus, teaching and learning styles and student target groups of both sectors have resulted in quite different cost structures and educational imperatives. The irony of this being that in many cases, those differences do not reflect the inordinately high capital costs associated with the provision of simulated or 'off-the-job' competency based vocational learning and are in turn, poorly represented in the resultant levels of government funding and policy support.

For reasons that are not criticized or questioned here, the percentage costs that are sought to be recovered from students in the university sector are considerably higher than that in TAFE. Consequently, there has evolved in that sector, a student support and cost recovery system to meet a need, the like of which, does not, and hopefully never will, exist in TAFE.

Commentators to date appear not to have appreciated that this is the mitigating factor in the whole debate about whether the government should seek to recover the cost of a TAFE education through a contribution scheme similar to HECS.

If the cost of learning through the publicly owned TAFE system is kept within the reach of those it is structured to serve, then there is no necessity for a recovery system of the magnitude of HECS. Equally, if the level of public support for, and participation in TAFE is matched by a similar level of fiscal support from government, there would be no need to even consider increasing the burden on learners to fund their education.

Finally, in this era of 'mutual obligation', governments of all persuasions – State, Territory and Federal - ought not overlook or deny the fact that TAFE not only enhances the skill acquisition of 1.3 million Australians annually, it actually enhances the skill itself, leading to greater wealth generation through both new product and practice. For 15-24 year olds, those skills are transferable in 77.3% of cases to direct employment within six months of completing their TAFE course. (NCVER, 2001) While the benefits to employees and employers alike is obvious, it does no harm to the standing of the government of the day, when it comes to those electorally sensitive issues of unemployment, welfare dependency and the economic growth of the country.

Countless reports, research papers and 'visions' have all postulated the need for seamless pathways between and within Australia's education system. What is important is that the student gains a useable outcome each time that they engage in, what is in fact, lifelong learning. The Issues Paper fails to recognize what is to many, a fundamental precept in the whole education debate and instead compartmentalizes educational opportunities by defining 'upper levels of TAFE' and 'higher education', perpetuating the belief that one must follow a sequential, linear pathway to educational fulfillment.

These silos of delineation are being successfully dismantled between the secondary school sector and TAFE, notably through the provision within the school environment of enhanced access for students to programs with vocationally orientated outcomes. They are being dismantled through the development of constructive partnerships and strategic alliances between schools, TAFE and universities demonstrably in

the establishment of education precincts. But more significantly, they are being dismantled by those students who value and subscribe to the global tenet of life long learning as they traverse the educational pathways in their pursuit of increasingly broader educational attainment. Meeting the needs of learners, communities and industry in this way demonstrates that academic integrity is not contingent upon the maintenance of traditional sectoral boundaries.

### **Recommendation 2**

That Government appropriately resources the public provision of, and access to, tertiary education for all Australians.

## CURRENT ARTICULATION: NEGOTIATING THE MAZE

The features and scope of articulation, in Victoria at least, are variable. The Issues Paper confirms that the levels of exemption granted by the university sector as a whole are relatively small notwithstanding the emphasis placed on the importance of articulation arrangements by dual sector institutions; dual awards across organisations; multi campus arrangements; and learning precincts. Many of these reported difficulties are being overcome in Victoria's dual sector institutions.

The issues paper itself states that in 2001, fewer than 500 of the 219,597 TAFE graduates commencing a university qualification received credit for more than half of their course. These findings are affirmed by Long and Burke (2002) in their data that clearly show that Australian universities rarely concede one year of a TAFE course to a one year credit towards a university qualification.

It has been arduous at best, for TAFE Institutes to establish formal articulation arrangements for their students and even more difficult to assure those same students that they will actually be granted the credit towards their university study, despite the mutual demonstration of goodwill.

To overcome these structural difficulties, Victoria's TAFE Institutes in conjunction with the university sector, have been working to redesign assessment mechanisms that better facilitate university selection processes. Victoria has been investigating educationally sound ways to apply graded assessment in a competency based assessment model since the early 1990's. Whereas there are many examples of successful outcomes in this regard, aligning competency based outcomes with a system of graded assessment continues to present difficulties for all concerned, contrasting the differences between vocationally focused outcomes and the academic focus. Whereas the underpinning analytical and conceptual knowledge is overt and embedded at all AQF levels, graded assessments that 'fit' the university entrance requirements may not be the solution.

In a competency based training system, it must be understood training packages don't readily fit with the current regime of university entrance requirements. The basis on which they have been constructed and their current design clearly precludes this and as a result the concepts are maligned. Arguably, the premise that graded assessment should be further trialled to determine its suitability as a measure to align vocational competencies with the entrance needs of universities, although contentious, must be fully explored. Proponents of such an approach must recognise that any alignment must respect the different styles of teaching, learning and assessment in TAFE and university.

Speaking recently on the difficulties being faced by those seeking to articulate between TAFE and university studies, the Chair of the Australian National Training Authority, Mr. Stuart Horner, AO was reported as having said:

*"The old distinction between university and TAFE study is blurring, with a growth in student traffic between university and TAFE systems. . . In 2000, 67,000 university graduates undertook VET while 20,000 went from VET to university! . . . National guidelines will make it easier for institutions to work out how their qualifications can work together and provide consistency for students across the country on issues like credit."*

(Educare News, September, 2002)

There may an argument to broaden the TAFE curriculum to recognise excellence and better align with university assessment requirements, however, interpreting results from either perspective is a challenge for both sectors. Even accepting the point made in the Issues Paper that more TAFE graduates enter university than the reverse, there is the contra question of how TAFE measures and accredits the practical skills of university graduates seeking access and presumably credit to TAFE courses.

What is needed is a commitment to move away from rationale solely driven by a graded assessment approach and explore new ground where there is a coming together of thought that produces outcomes based on mutual respect for the outcome sought by the learner and not the input sought by the provider.

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<sup>1</sup>NCVER data places these figures as 79,800 and 14,599 respectively. (NCVER, 2002)

### **Recommendation 3**

That the Government resource the establishment of a cross sectoral process to develop a transparent framework for determining credit.

### **Recommendation 4**

That the Government establishes an equitable National recognition system and an articulation registry to better promote opportunities for credit transfer on a National database.

### **Recommendation 5**

That Government policy on the reform of the university sector be informed by research of the educational attrition rates in the tertiary sector.

## OPTIONS FOR THE INTERFACE

An interface can be defined as the dynamic field in which two or more systems communicate. It need not be a physical construction; it can also be a convention that is used to allow communication between two or more discrete systems.

In this context, there is scope to explore other cooperative models within a framework that accepts and acknowledges TAFE and university, while different, are compatible. To be successful, there must be a clear understanding of each other's missions and goals, including an agreed interpretation of the frequently used and ambiguous nomenclature.

The concept of formal alliances across all elements of the education sector to develop a seamless interface is not new or untried. Where it has been achieved to acclaim is where the learner is kept as the focus; it requires a commitment by those in the power, both political and academic, to foster a culture and practice of life long learning for all Australians.

In the spirit of the definition cited above, the 'systems' operating on the interface that should continually capture and drive our collective concerns are the students, and it is important to understand that the TAFE student cohort is not homogeneous. It is drawn from vastly different backgrounds and motivated to learn for different reasons. Young - old; first time return to study after school - continuous learners; employed – unemployed; full time – part time; qualification orientated – module only; this is a complex demographic, any one of which is by no means exceptional. These characteristics must be understood and contextualised when looking at any data associated with TAFE participation rates, outcomes and destinations.

What can be said of the typical TAFE student is that the average age is 27 years. The majority are highly likely to be employed full time and study part-time with 22% continuing their learning in the university sector. They are also from a more diverse socio-economic background when compared to university students from which it may be concluded that TAFE students generally have a lower capacity to repay any debt incurred as a result of student fees and charges. For those who are employed, the impact of a qualification on their salary is negligible and for those who are not employed at the time of commencement at TAFE, they are more likely to gain employment after they successfully complete. (NCVER, 2001) Overall TAFE graduates are generally motivated by a desire to improve their employability by enhancing their skills and maximising their opportunities. They are sustained by the proven knowledge that learning through TAFE markedly improves their chances to do so.

As discussed in the Issues Paper, investigating the options to further clarify the interface between TAFE and universities will highlight the inconsistencies within and between the sectors and should address all of the following strategies:

- Formal articulation arrangements
- Shared projects
- Degree level programs in TAFE
- Specialisation
- Joint courses and dual awards
- Shared campuses
- Applied research
- Integrated/nested awards

The early development of new models, as evidenced through co-location, dual sector institutions and other innovative alliances and partnership arrangements, demonstrates that there is both scope and opportunity to preserve sectoral integrity while building on their combined strengths to enhance outcomes for students, communities and industry.

It is timely to further investigate the potential to establish the concept of a truly integrated system of *learning precincts*, particularly in regional areas, where the interface between schools, TAFE and university can be clearly understood and readily accessible to learners. One such example in Victoria is the Gippsland Educational Precinct. To be opened in 2004, this is a key educational development in the post compulsory

## OPTIONS FOR THE INTERFACE

sector that will establish a strategic partnership between university, TAFE, schools, Group Training and the Local Government Area to facilitate longer term economic growth for the region.

By building a learning culture and better utilising resources through the adoption of a collaborative approach, based on a philosophical rather than a structural framework, the needs of the learner will be brought to the forefront.

Further developing these options will help to remove the constraints of the existing system by facilitating local solutions.

### **Recommendation 6**

That the Government adopt a consistent nomenclature in relation to terminology such as credit transfer, articulation, joint courses, dual awards, recognition of prior learning and pathways.

### **Recommendation 7**

That Government provides greater support to encourage the development of the learning precinct model to integrate learning in the community.

### **Funding arrangements**

The Commonwealth has defined the scope of their Review of the *Varieties of Learning* to exclude the 'overall funding arrangements for the vocational education and training sector.'

The Issues Paper then proceeds to discuss the equity or otherwise of the existing system of student payments, anomalies in relation to the level and nature of student contributions to their study, the establishment of educational precincts and the issues surrounding the sharing of infrastructure. The Issues Paper at p38 summaries these complex matters when it states:

*in a society which is so committed to lifelong learning, and an economy which requires a flexible and adaptable labour force, it is crucial that there be clear and easy pathways between vocational education and training and higher education.*

To pose such fundamental issues and seek discussion on possible solutions that will benefit future generations of Australians without a discussion on the disparate funding models, sources of funding, tensions between commonwealth and state policy priorities and responsibilities and the inequities in market perception is as much the root cause of the problem as the problems themselves.

2001 data provided in the Issues Paper in particular, demonstrates alarming funding and regulatory anomalies. It shows that from recurrent government funding of \$6b for the university sector, there were 171,089 successful award course completions. Contrast this with a national TAFE budget of just \$3.5b, and there were 427,500 TAFE graduates, an outcome almost 2½ times greater for just over half the investment. Base operating grants for universities in Australia in 2000 was \$4,931.6 million and when extrapolated to funding per planned EFTSU, amounted to \$12,003. Contrast these figures with the TAFE sector and the figure is in the region of \$5,384<sup>2</sup>.

Even acknowledging the very obvious differences between the charter and modus operandi of the two sectors and the cost shifting between the states and the commonwealth, the investment that all governments are committed to make to produce a single university graduate is 225% greater than for a TAFE graduate. When measured against the contribution that the millions of successive TAFE graduates have, do, and will continue to make, to Australia's economic growth and global standing, the under-appreciation of TAFE is profound.

Is it too much to ask what the contribution made by vocational education to the innovation economy might have been, if the motivation for government investment in the sector was equity – or vision? It is perhaps not surprising, then many in the vocational education sector are of the view that the preparedness of governments, past and present, state and federal to invest in education in this country is more a barometer of their sensitivity to the political imperatives and opportunities that are embedded in the sectors and in many cases, their own lack of exposure to a vocational education, than a understanding of, and commitment to, Australia's place in the global economy.

### **Differentiating Missions**

*Changing the funding model alone will not resolve many of the issues. ....The traditional distinctions between the sectors are increasingly irrelevant as institutions attempt to meet changing student needs.*

(Watson, et al, 2002)

*Both the AVCC and ANTA posit an enriched view of learning that occurs in higher education and an impoverished view of learning in VET.*

(Wheelahan, 2001)

<sup>2</sup> It is acknowledged that the calculation of equivalent full time students in TAFE is subject to various approaches.

The figures quoted above are predicated on supporting data from NCVET that indicate the average TAFE student undertakes 201 hours per year and a full time student is taken to undertake 540 hours per year, thus giving a TAFE student population of 648, 148 EFT students in 2000.

In a study that critically examined the differences between the TAFE and university sectors, Wheelahan (2001) postulates that Tertiary education in Australia is still rigidly located within structures that were established in the 19th and 20th centuries, arguing:

*The development of education, tertiary education in particular reinforced the emergence of modern industrial capitalism in Australia and this system of industrial organisation. The purpose of higher education was to select and train social elites, while the purpose of technical education was to select and train skilled labour.*

As we have posited in this paper, and many before us have argued, such boundaries are being blurred as much by market pressure as a commitment to change from within, but there is ample reason to believe that they still form the basis of community perceptions and indeed, lead us to challenge the basic premise of the Issues Paper that presents vocational education and training as 'a form of broad non-university, competency based training'.

Whereas the Issues Paper acknowledges that the university and VET sectors have distinct but complementary roles, it fails to demonstrate a level of understanding of those roles through cogent supportive argument, leaving many to believe that its authors are no more appreciative of the 'distinct missions and profiles' than their predecessors.

There is no room for *hierarchically* based models of education provision in a learning society, just different models that offer choice and broaden outcomes. We must accept the different styles of teaching, learning and assessment in TAFE and university and celebrate the diversity and choices this affords all Australians. So the question to be answered is to what extent is it possible or desirable to effect changes to both the training packages and the entrance prerequisites to meet the needs of the increasingly more discerning learner?

What is clear is that the concept of a *higher order* of education as distinct from other segments of the education spectrum serves no purpose. It is divisive and outdated. It is time for this nation's leaders to re-direct their focus away from maintaining traditional hierarchies that have no place in a contemporary and progressive learning society and onto the outcomes of learning for students, employers, industry and communities.

### **Workforce opportunities and issues**

It must be acknowledged that there are significant differences in the employment arrangements across the sectors and that this factor alone constitutes a considerable impediment to structural change of the magnitude needed to give effect to some of the discussion above. This is not to say that the tensions are only between the TAFE and university sectors where the employment conditions of staff are markedly different. The current manifestation of Australia's industrial relations system implicitly encourages competitively driven differences between like organisations in the same industry, the result being that industrial, organisational and behavioural cultures will often preclude giving effect to co-operative arrangements, no matter how worthy the cause.

This raises particular challenges for the institutions but these are matters that are best addressed at the local level as partnerships develop.

### **Recommendation 8**

The Government undertake as a priority initiatives that overcome the structural and financial barriers to the provision of, and access to quality learning communities.

## IN CONCLUSION

The broad educational policy framework in Australia is lacking alignment to develop seamless and coordinated learning environments that meet the increasing 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 the community.

Such is the magnitude of the potential change resulting from the current review into 'Higher Education' 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.

The question which many commentators believe lies at the heart of the issues being pursued by the Federal government in the Issues Paper is 'Which sector should offer what qualifications?' We owe it to our future as a nation not to allow this debate to degenerate into populist rhetoric about qualifications, who delivers them, who should pay and how much.

We began this submission drawing the reader's attention to the principles that underpinned the creation and continual transition of vocational learning institutions in Australia. To the extent that there is a need to justify the debate at all, it is about access to quality learning environments.

It is time to understand, accept and commit to what is in the best interests of students, building on mutual strengths, and not what might be seen as being in the best interests of educational institutions who are largely being driven by declining government investment and relentlessly increasing costs. If this means the establishment of a strategic and integrated educational framework that fosters a culture of learning, then it should not be beyond the capability of any innovative society to achieve it.

If we embrace the concept of community-based learning precincts, with individuals valuing learning, organisations building a learning culture and governments supporting it, the interests of future generations will be preserved and we will become a competent nation that values knowledge and learning.

All it will take in Australia is vision and commitment.

## TABLES

The following data reflects the relative standing of the TAFE and university sector in terms of Government investment and public participation and has been variously relied upon to support much of the argument advanced in this paper.

**Table A.1**

Government recurrent expenditure on VET per publicly funded annual hour of curriculum: 1997 - 2000

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	AUST
1997	15.31	10.65	15.14	15.87	15.39	19.32	29.29	18.35	14.24
1998	15.57	10.60	12.51	13.83	13.64	16.90	28.23	18.15	13.54
1999	14.81	9.48	13.61	11.98	13.27	16.44	19.99	16.04	12.84
2000	13.82	9.51	15.15	12.20	12.84	14.99	20.67	13.64	12.68

Source: ANTA (2001 Vol 3)

**Table A.2**

Total recurrent revenues VET: 2000 (\$'000,000)

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT
State Gov't	889.8	509.1	383.1	204.1	148.6	45.9	55.1	43.0
% of Total	66.3	48.4	62.2	56.4	52.5	52.1	72.5	56.9
Comm Gov't	262.2	180.9	134.7	73.8	65.1	252.9	16.5	16.7
% of Total	19.5	17.2	21.9	30.4	23.0	26.0	21.7	22.1
Fee for Service	75.4	222.6	39.4	37.6	31.1	10.9	1.9	8.0
% of Total	5.6	21.2	6.4	10.4	11.0	12.3	2.5	10.6
Student fees and Charges	38.6	43.7	33.9	25.9	20.7	3.2	0.8	4.1
% of Total	2.9	4.2	5.5	7.2	7.3	3.7	1.1	5.4
Ancil trading	75.9	96.0	25.1	20.4	17.4	5.2	1.7	3.7
% of Total	5.7	9.1	4.1	5.6	6.2	5.9	2.2	5.0

Source: NCVER (2000 Financial data)

**Table A.3**

Comparison VET-University: Receipts: 2000 (\$'000)

	VET PROVIDERS	UNIVERSITIES
All Gov't revenue / Net Base operating grant	1,341.9	4,020.8
Student Fess and Charges	171.0	910.8

Source: NCVER (2000 Financial data)

**Table A.4**

Comparison of student cohort enrolment: 1997 - 2001 ('000)

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Students in VET programs with degree or postgraduate diploma	61.4	67.5	79.8	79.8	83.9
Students admitted to Bach Degree with TAFE qualifications	14.3	14.3	15.7	14.6	15.3

Source: Varieties of Learning (Tables 2, 4)

**Table A.5**

Student in Diploma Level Courses: 1997 - 2001

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
VET pathway ('000)	188.5	198.4	200.1	200.1	202.4
University pathway ('000)	10.8	9.6	8.9	9.5	9.5

Source: Varieties of Learning (Tables 7)

Note: Data in this table is qualified. Refer to p13 of source.

**Table A.6**

Total Students in publicly funded VET programs: 1997 - 2001 ('000)

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Publicly funded VET programs	1,458.6	1,535.2	1,647.2	1,749.4	1,756.8

Source: NCVER (2001)

Actual enrolments all Commonwealth funded places 444.01 451.8 457.2 430.3 N/a  
Source: University Funding and Expenditure: Table A.7 (AVCC publication)

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