



Victorian TAFE  
*Association* Inc  
Reg. No. A37584B

---

A paper on Contribution made by  
Regional TAFE Institutes to the economic growth  
and well being of Regional Communities



## Introduction

Regional Institutes have both a vocational education and training role and a Community Development role. Recent Federal and State reviews and inquiries have confirmed the significant contribution TAFE Institutes make to the economic prosperity and social well being of Australia. In regional areas, an examination of the range and scope of the services regional TAFE Institutes provide through their unique relationship with their community, readily show that the benefits of a vibrant and relevant vocational education and training facility cannot be overstated.

In many regional areas, the Institute is the only TAFE provider or indeed, the only post-school education facility available to the local community, necessitating the provision of a wide range of courses covering the needs of both regional employers and the wider community. So it is for social and economic as well as educational reasons, that the structure of the regional Institute and the vital role that it plays in the overall health of its community must be preserved.

## Innovative Alliances

The Regional Institute is often called upon to provide services beyond its capacity to maintain resident expertise, and in these cases, the Institutes have developed an aptitude as education brokers - calling on the services of other providers or specialists to meet those specific requirements. In response to these community pressures, Regional Institutes have developed innovative strategic educational links to support and extend the range of programs offered. Partnerships with regional secondary schools, particularly with respect to the VET in Schools program, and with other Regional or Metropolitan TAFE Institutes or Universities, all combine to provide joint courses and closely coupled pathway arrangements through the cooperative use of facilities, sharing of services and coordinated delivery of courses.

A consequence of the commitment to provide a broad based course profile to a restricted population base is that class sizes are often less than optimum, a situation made more difficult by the universality of the Government's program purchasing model. The significance of maintaining a broad based course profile lies in the underpinning capacity of the Institute to fulfill the broader community role outlined later in this paper.



To meet these challenges, Regional TAFE Institutes have lead the way in the development and adoption of innovative and flexible delivery methods such as:

- ◆ Active use of video-conferencing for geographically isolated classes;
- ◆ Fleximode delivery with reduced class frequency supported by a high level of support materials to make delivery to small groups more efficient;
- ◆ Remote Centre classes based in small community halls or in association with ACFE providers;
- ◆ Traditional off-campus delivery through multimedia based programs rather than via correspondence;
- ◆ On-line delivery and regional learning networks.

A strong regional Institute that has the capacity to offer a range of flexible and innovative training opportunities to its community has a significant effect on reducing the emigration of those seeking tertiary education and training. In this way, Institutes contribute to demographic stability of rural and remote regions and substantially reduce the financial and social burden on regional families who would otherwise be required to bear the cost of a metropolitan education.

## Regional Institutes as Businesses and Employers

A Regional TAFE Institute is of major economic importance to its region, both as a substantial business and employer in its own right and as a significant element of regional infrastructure integral to the economic development of the region. In its business and employer role, a Regional TAFE Institute attracts income from outside its immediate catchment area, both nationally and internationally, providing real net income to the region. Institutes spend locally and institute staff live, spend and invest locally. In 1997, Victoria's ten regional TAFE Institutes had in total, an operating budget of \$195 million, employed 4,211 people and had a student population of 10,228 full time students, and 110,693 apprentice, trainee and part time students.

Central to the business of Regional TAFE Institutes, is the strong alignment between economic and educational outcomes. Their strategic planning models seek to link their operations with regional economic development goals and directions, ensuring that the Institutes remain focused on both a sustainable education sector and the continued economic health of the region.

---

## Regional Institutes as Community Leaders

The community development role of Regional TAFE Institutes is exemplified by the expectations of its community that it remains accessible to all and manages the diversity of its community by offering a broad program profile together with appropriate infrastructure support to meet customer needs. The collective skills and energy of Institute staff are often a major source of support for the community in areas not commonly associated, or expected of a tertiary education provider. Regional TAFE Institutes are represented on a range of regional bodies and organisations. This can extend to the provision of library services, Taxation Office consultants, business advice child care services to the wider community as well as active participation in the economic and social growth of the region through local government and business forums.

Regional TAFE Institutes are endowed with a unique capacity to contribute to regional and statewide information gathering and strategic planning. The sense of “ownership” created through the structure of autonomous governance by the Institute Council and in turn, its local business membership, is of great importance to regional areas, giving that community the self-confidence to move forward into other fields of economic development.

The findings of recent studies that addressed the issue of educational institutions operating in regional areas found that universities, while keen to develop stronger relationships with regional communities, generally had little success in doing so<sup>1</sup>. The report states that, *“Few universities have sought to tailor the nature of their teaching program delivery and design to the particular economic strengths and needs of the regional locations in a demand responsive way. As a result, the contribution of the university to the regional economy and national objectives may be lower than it might otherwise be”*. In contrast, the operations of Regional TAFE Institutes are very much embedded in the strengths and demands of the regions.

A different study carried out by DEETYA found that the University of Ballarat is one that does not fit into the mould suggested by the study outlined above. The DEETYA research, using the University of Ballarat

---

<sup>1</sup> Garlick, S, Creative Associations in Special Places: Enhancing the Partnership Role of Universities in Building Competitive Regional Economies



as a case study, commends the University for the manner in which it has coped with dramatic change, including conversion from a CAE to a university in 1994, severe budget reductions, and the mergers with TAFE colleges in 1997<sup>2</sup>. Interestingly, the study cites as a critical success factor, the fact that the university is regionally based and therefore has a stable point of reference and clear sense of its own purpose. The University also consulted extensively with its regional communities and industries, making them aware of the threats facing the university and by doing so, strengthened the commitment of the University and its region to each other.

The centrality of Regional TAFE Institutes to the economic and business life of their region, positions them to provide credible data and analysis, supported by consistent and rigorous research, to governments, industry and the community on key areas of Regional development. It is this single quality, more so than any other, that typifies the ethos of a regional TAFE Institute and demonstrates their value to the health and well being of regional Australia.

Kemmis, D Maconachie, Strategic  
Repositioning: Identifying Areas for Future  
Investment: A Case Study of Rapid Change at  
the University of Ballarat, DEETYA, May 1998.

---

<sup>2</sup> S Kemmis, D Maconachie, Strategic Repositioning: Identifying Areas for Future Investment: A Case Study of Rapid Change at the University of Ballarat, DEETYA, May 1998.