



Victorian TAFE Association Response to the Report advising on the development of the Victorian Education Plan

The Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Report advising on the development of the Victorian Education Plan.

Membership of the VTA includes four multi-sector universities, fourteen stand-alone TAFE providers and Associate members the Centre for Adult Education (CAE) and AMES. VTA members will, in many instances, respond individually to the Report to highlight areas of particular interest to their organisations. This response is based on comments provided directly to VTA by members. That said, the diversity of the membership of the VTA needs to be acknowledged and some divergent views may exist that have not been provided to the VTA.

The VTA appreciates the opportunities provided by Kwong Lee Dow and members of the expert panel for input by VTA and Victorian TAFE providers. The commentary below reaffirms the views expressed in oral consultations that VTA members, with the exception of one recommendation, support the thrust of the recommendations contained in the Report.

The approach taken in this response is to consider each of the recommendations of the Report.

Recommendation 1: The Panel concludes that Victoria will need a rate of bachelor degree attainment in the order of 47 per cent of 25 to 34 year olds with a bachelor degree by 2025 and therefore recommends that the Victorian Government advocate to the Australian Government for the resourcing requirements to meet this need. (Chapter 3.3)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

However, 'resourcing requirements' should include the consideration of:

- Clearly identifying resources to specifically support the improved participation of under-represented groups and a mechanism to target resources to institutions best placed to engage with these groups, who offer quality and flexibility in the pathways and products they offer these groups.
- The important role that TAFE will play in achieving an increase in bachelor degree attainment. Key to the achievement of this goal will be the preparation of a greater number of first generation higher education students for bachelor level study. TAFE can play a significant role in supporting these students to prepare for and undertake higher education study.
- A comprehensive re-think of higher level VET qualifications structures, content, assessment practice and articulation arrangements.
- Better resourcing of foundation-level VET qualifications.
- AQF5 and 6 qualifications being included as part of this advocacy.
- The need to support this recommendation with other strategies to attract and retain the students and to ensure completion of the qualification.
- The fact that resourcing requirements extend beyond ensuring the physical capacity to promote greater levels of engagement and should include partnerships to enhance delivery capacity; support to assist individuals through the education pathway that best suits them; and the provision of blended learning and online learning for mature age and work based learners.

The Victorian Government should take a leadership position in national discussions about the role that VET will play in the achievement of the bachelor degree targets.



Recommendation 2: That the Victorian Government assesses the state-wide current and planned capacity of tertiary education institutions against anticipated student numbers and identify shortfalls in:

- > infrastructure and infrastructure sharing arrangements
- > professional staff
- > support staff

The Victorian Government should coordinate responses through coordinated funding submissions to the Australian Government. (Chapter 4.1)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

The VTA would highlight that individual institutions are well placed to understand the current and future needs of the students, communities and industries within the constituencies they serve. This is underpinned by the reality that institutions are autonomous, and this creates significant incentives for TAFE providers to identify the tertiary education needs of their constituents, deliver appropriate products and allocate resources to maximise effectiveness and efficiency.

TAFE providers regularly undertake forecasting and planning work to orientate their delivery of education and research programs as well as to support services to maximize their effectiveness.

The State Government has a role to play in delivering additional sources of information and intelligence that enhance individual institution's ability to understand and respond to future needs.

The State Government is well placed to play a coordinating role in regard to funding submissions where groups of individual institutions have identified common strategic interests. The VTA would support institutions collaborating with other institutions and the Victorian Government to bid for federal funds at specific times when these opportunities arise. Coordination of responses would enable the State Government to ensure equitable provision is available across the State with appropriate facilities for delivery of tertiary education and fits with the role of the State in tertiary education.

More effective and efficient utilization and sharing of existing and new infrastructure is an important element in determining the State's capacity to meet the needs of anticipated student numbers. The VTA supports assessing infrastructure sharing arrangements and the state wide capacity to maximise usage of TAFE and HE facilities. Existing examples such as the Gippsland Education Precinct at Churchill are evidence of the potential of shared arrangements. However issues related to depreciation and maintenance and the supply of up to date equipment for example need to be negotiated prior to an arrangement being agreed.

The age profile and skills of professional staff are significant factors in planning for the future in the tertiary sector. Recruiting staff in skills shortage industry sectors is especially difficult and poses challenges for maintaining delivery into the future. Opportunities for the two way professional development of TAFE and HE staff are important to ensure they are able to work across disciplines where appropriate.

Recruiting administrative and student support staff is more manageable and most vacancies can be filled given well planned timeframes. It should however be recognised that there is a substantial disparity between TAFE Support Staff and Higher Education Support Staff in respect to salary, superannuation and general employment conditions and, in some fields, recruiting and retaining quality staff is increasingly difficult for TAFE providers.

Current practice within TAFE Institutes further demonstrates the benefits of working with



universities to share teaching and learning spaces for students, particularly for programs that are pathways from TAFE to university.

Recommendation 3: That the Victorian Government works with institutions to assist them in planning for forthcoming major capital and IT requirements and developments. (Chapter 4.1)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

This is already occurring in some areas and is an example of effective partnerships between the State Government and Institutions. An holistic approach to regional infrastructure planning will ensure that all sectors (secondary and tertiary) are adequately resourced.

Providing planning information and intelligence around future state-wide projections is a potentially valuable source of information that individual institutions could use in developing their future capital and IT strategies. It would also be of distinct value to those Institutions with a number of campuses that may be spread across different regions and that encompass major growth corridors.

The increasing use of information technology to enhance the student learning experience is inevitable. Further investment in this technology would greatly improve access for regional and rural students both at home and in the workplace. The technology should be cutting-edge, including faster internet access and satellite computer facilities that support regional students to benefit fully from access to technology that their metropolitan counterparts may already have.

Recommendation 4: That the Victorian Government commences integrated planning exercises in priority areas based on the pilot done with Victoria University, identifying supply and demand requirements by region and supporting the principle of avoiding subscale campuses. Integrated planning should involve tertiary institutions, local industry/ employers, ICT representatives, transport and student housing issues. (Chapter 4.1)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

Integrated planning will provide a coherent plan for delivery to meet the education and training needs of areas and regions. However due consideration should be given to differences in the way planning occurs in metropolitan and regional areas.

The VTA supports a planning approach that includes all of the key stakeholders and would also recommend close liaison with relevant local government authorities. The importance of industry involvement at an enterprise level creates ownership and ensures success of Government-funded initiatives as well as achieving the skills supply required for economic sustainability.

The integrated planning exercise jointly conducted by Victoria University and DIIRD in 2009 which reviewed the University's strategic plans in relation to tertiary education provision in outer metropolitan Melbourne is a good example of an approach which reconciled the University's mission, operating context and objective direction using the principle of not sustaining subscale campuses in favour of strengthening provision and the student experience at large viable campuses. Similar activities are taking place regionally with the Gippsland region currently implementing actions brought about by the recent review undertaken by Innovation Xchange on behalf of the Gippsland Regional Skills Forum. Similarly Wodonga TAFE is working with Charles Sturt University to map pathways which will allow students to remain in the area in order to complete HE courses.

Other regions would benefit from an integrated planning approach. In the Hume region for example the linkages between La Trobe University and University of Melbourne campuses /



infrastructure and those of Goulburn Ovens and Wodonga TAFEs could be explored to improve pathways and reduce duplication.

Recommendation 5: That the Victorian Government discusses with institutions the most effective way, if any, that the Government can assist in ensuring that academic workforce requirements due to growth in the sector can be adequately met in the future. (Chapter 4.1)

The VTA supports this recommendation

There are strategic opportunities to promote flexible work arrangements among both academic and VET workforces to support individuals transitioning out of other careers and an increase in cross-sectoral teaching. Institutions have a significant role in promoting these opportunities and preparing potential career changers for teaching roles. Given the significant shifts occurring in Australian tertiary education sector, its workforce would benefit from Government support to promote TAFE, higher education and dual-sector providers as employers of choice. The VET sector faces significant challenges in the sustainable provision of qualified teaching/training staff immediately and certainly in 5 years time (by 2015). Attracting staff who can earn higher salaries in the private sector rather than in the VET sector is a critical issue.

The Victorian Government could play a leadership role in the national dialogue about the qualifications that best position VET practitioners to contribute to the emerging tertiary education sector. This would be timely given that the quality of the VET workforce is pivotal to achievement of Federal and State targets and goals. Victorian leadership could be exercised to ensure:

- That VET practitioners have an in depth understanding of how learning takes place and how to facilitate learning in a range of contexts and for diverse groups of learners and include units on literacy and numeracy.
- That mentoring / supervised teaching practice of VET practitioners with entry level qualifications be supported through Work Integrated Learning (WIL)
- That VET training and assessment qualifications at Certificate IV and Diploma include units which deliver the skills and knowledge to articulate to a higher qualification

Institutes are actively working in this area and there are examples of good practice to be drawn on such as Victoria University's Work-based Education Research Centre (WERC) which has a strong focus on building the professional development of the VET workforce; and Wodonga TAFE where a relatively high proportion of the teaching workforce is university trained and they encourage their teachers to pursue university study to develop additional teaching skills and provide a different perspectives to teaching and training. They also encourage industry specialists and those with key industry skills to deliver their teaching and learning programs, to ensure students have access to the latest theories and practices and are exposed to experts in their fields.

Recommendation 6: That some appropriately qualified staff may be identified in schools, TAFE institutes and universities, who could effectively teach students needing special attention and assistance at first or second year undergraduate level. Over time employment arrangements for limited numbers of such 'expert teachers' could allow them to build careers through work in more than one sector. As well, a pilot program could be initiated with an education faculty to prepare a stream of teaching staff with proficiencies to teach from say, year 11 and 12 through to first and second year undergraduate level. (Chapter 4.1)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

The tertiary sector requires a multi skilled staff profile and where appropriate the VTA supports the integration and development of the VET and HE workforce for a limited number of expert teachers. The VTA sees opportunities to better utilise the full capabilities of the HE academic and



VET teaching workforce by supporting teaching across AQF levels. This process has the capacity to develop proficiency to teach into undergraduate programs for TAFE teachers and also affords an opportunity for academics to teach into higher level vocational education awards.

Inadequate support for learning capability is one of the factors contributing to students' withdrawal. An integrated learning support model needs to be developed and funded appropriately for implementation. All teaching/training staff needs to acquire some skill level in identifying and assisting students with learning difficulties, literacy and numeracy deficits in their programs.

The teaching staff stream as described would assist in developing a more universal employment arrangement for all teaching staff, and potentially aid in the linking of industry specialists to training activities in the various teaching levels leading up to undergraduate level. In any process to develop new capacity for TAFE teachers the current competencies and experiences of TAFE teachers need to be recognized and unnecessary and repetitive qualifications should not be added to the list of prerequisites for working in the broadening tertiary environment. Discipline/field of study expertise needs to be recognised and developed across the sectors.

Some TAFE providers are currently negotiating programs that introduce university level courses into a Diploma or Advanced Diploma so students have experience with the range of teaching methods and styles. It is also important to consider the role of specialist transition teachers, those that understand the important role of transition from school, to TAFE and then university. Incorporating further education training styles into senior level high school could also assist students success rates once they move onto TAFE or university study.

Recommendation 7: That, in order to achieve more widespread blended education models, the Victorian Government should work with institutions to identify examples of innovative teaching methodologies that may increase the diversity of learning experiences. Relevant information, including successful e-learning delivery methods, should be disseminated to all tertiary institutions. (Chapter 4.1)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

All TAFE providers have examples of best practice which could be shared with other institutions within the sector. Commercial advantage is a reality however which may constrain some institutes from participating.

The approach to the development of teaching skills and knowledge across the education sectors can be inefficient and divisive. In reality there is much that is the same across them in regards to pedagogy and it would be sensible to bring them together. This is especially important for smaller institutions that do not have the economies of scale to invest in specialist support staff and the infrastructure to support the full range of blended learning activities.

Consideration should also be given to Recognition of Prior Learning and workplace delivery as part of any blended learning model.

Recommendation 8: That the Victorian Government reconceptualises and strengthens its role in higher education in Victoria to underpin the State's transition to a knowledge-based economy and as a key element of a broad human capital development strategy. (Chapter 4.2)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

The Victorian Government can play a pivotal role by analysing the alignment of education and



training provision with forecast industry developments and skills requirements over the next decade. Industry Skills Councils, Industry Training Advisory Boards and Economic Development Plans are important as data sources to inform Governments on these issues. However, it needs to be recognised that appropriate solutions may be found interstate as much as intrastate. This is particularly relevant for e-learning where borders become irrelevant.

Recommendation 9: That the Victorian Government strengthens its capabilities to analyse, facilitate, influence and support developments in the public interest that emerge from the tertiary education sector. (Chapter 4.2)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

TAFEs and dual sector universities would welcome greater support from the Victorian Government particularly with regard to building pathways between VET and Higher Education and breaking down cross-sectoral barriers.

TAFE providers and Skills Victoria have a wealth of knowledge about the VET sector and could respond positively to issues emerging from the Higher Education sector with a sound understanding of data and the trends exhibited. The Victorian Government is uniquely placed to use its multi-sector data bases to synthesise this knowledge.

Recommendation 10: That the Victorian Government establishes processes across all its relevant planning activities that embed higher education participation in community, economic, social and cultural policies. In particular, higher education involvement should support a comprehensive approach to human capital development and the development of a knowledge economy. (Chapter 4.2)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

The dual sector institutes work closely with all sectors and relevant government departments to ensure that planning for Tertiary provision is needs-based and supported by the necessary demographic information and social indicators.

VTA refers the Expert Panel to the joint departmental (DEECD and DIIRD) unit focussing on youth issues as a model that may be used in planning for tertiary education. However the silo approach in Government is limiting the breadth and scope of responses as Institutes and Departments work within the confines of their portfolios, policies and budgets. Even within DIIRD innovative solutions are restricted by lack of comprehensive knowledge and information sharing across possibilities offered by Skills Victoria and other sections of the Department.

Recommendation 11: That the Victorian Government coordinates through integrated planning those State responsibilities that intersect with the higher education sector including schools, VET, transport, and infrastructure planning. (Chapter 4.2)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

TAFE providers always seek to ensure their educational and campus planning fits the needs of their region. A more integrated approach on the part of the State would assist in ensuring alignment of these activities.

VTA does not underestimate the effort involved in achieving truly integrated planning but notwithstanding the potential costs, there are significant benefits to be gained from an integrated planning approach including the sectors nominated in the recommendation above. From a



regional perspective a lack of integrated planning is a major concern with various government department often acting independently from each other. In regional areas access to education is further complicated by a range of factors including;

- access to limited public transport;
- limited on-campus accommodation, and
- the cost of living independently.
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These are all major barriers for many students. Strategies such as the greater use of e-learning technologies where students blend on-campus sessions with teaching via a student portal; study centres in regional areas which students can access for study, including computer facilities that are linked to the TAFE network are all working well. But further access to funding grants to enable more facilities for satellite sites and other opportunities such as mobile computer labs that link to the TAFE network, and greater availability of computers in neighbourhood centres and libraries would be very valuable.

This function could be co-ordinated and managed by DIIRD or an interdepartmental taskforce.

Recommendation 12: That the Victorian Government develops a strong and integrated capability to analyse and contribute to policy debate across the various dimensions that affect the operation of the higher education sector and its contributions to Victoria. (Chapter 4.2)

The VTA supports this recommendation

This should be a function of DIIRD and in particular Skills Victoria or an interdepartmental taskforce. The VTA should play a pivotal role in providing advice to Government to contribute to policy development.

Recommendation 13: That, having developed a Plan for Tertiary Education, the Victorian Government should continuously monitor it through formal reporting mechanisms. Particular areas of focus should include: attainment, enrolments, low SES and regional participation rates and international student numbers. It is essential that the Plan is dynamic and able to accommodate the needs of a changing tertiary education landscape. (Chapter 4.2)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

The VTA supports efforts on the part of Government to track the progress of the Plan for Tertiary Education. At the broadest level, The Plan needs to have sufficient flexibility to allow Institutions to operate in a sustainable way in an evolving competitive tertiary sector. However, in seeking to measure and track the outcomes and key indicators of the Tertiary Education Plan, there should be no duplication of, or additions to the existing extensive reporting activity required by Government. Cross-sectoral reporting requirements are a particular burden for multi-sector Institutions given the different data requirements across Higher Education and VET and the problem of implementing 'joined up' cross-sectoral student systems.

Comprehensive assessment criteria linked to overall Government priorities need to be developed and employed on a sector wide basis.

With the strong focus on compliancy in data provision from student management systems, further analysis of system-wide management information can and should be undertaken, both within Institutions and Government. Funding of Institutions should include consideration of this additional activity, including what other regional, state and national information is available to cross reference.



Recommendation 14: That the Victorian and Australian Governments need to create a more consistent policy framework across the tertiary sector. Such a framework should address:

- > funding
- > quality assurance and regulatory arrangements
- > student financing
- > industrial issues

The framework should be evaluated against its capacity to encourage student progress through levels of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). (Chapter 5)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

A consistent policy framework across the tertiary sector would enhance cross-sectoral pathways between Institutions as well as helping relieve some of the burden faced by multi-sector Institutions and those operating across state borders. The lack of alignment of systems and reporting cycles means that Institutions are forced to resource significant duplication at the behest of both levels of government. This occurs across:

- quality systems;
- financial systems;
- student enrolment and outcomes data, and
- staffing data.

The fact that the VET and HE sectors have different measures and data collection requirements means that multi sector Institutions face significant extra effort and cost each time a system is upgraded or renewed. Further, the lack of alignment of quality and outcomes measures, and staff and student data, makes it impossible for dual sector Institutions to simply establish and monitor whole of institution data sets and benchmarks, let alone benchmark well against external data. A co-ordinated systems-based policy framework, to meet the needs of the Victoria's distinct regional communities rather than meeting state-based funding targets or teaching priorities, would be more effective. A more consistent policy framework would need to be developed through COAG. While the focus of a tertiary sector framework may be escalation through AQF qualifications by students, it also needs to be remembered that adequate arrangements need to be in place for industry skills sets where these are required, and that industry is a major stakeholder within the VET sector.

Industrial issues will also be important as Institutions move towards cross-sectoral teaching arrangements.

Recommendation 15: That the Victorian Government seeks to ensure that new quality arrangements (TEQSA) do not constrain the diversity of providers and the emergence of new collaborations. (Chapter 5.4)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

The establishment of TEQSA could jeopardize streamlined arrangements between Victorian providers and providers in other States and Territories. While the Victorian Government will mirror the Commonwealth legislation, the practicalities of implementation need to be thoroughly analysed and any potential unintended consequences averted. However, as evidenced by recent experience with a number of institutional failures, quality standards for providers should not be compromised. Quality should be the cornerstone for building business opportunities for Victorian providers, especially in International markets.



Recommendation 17: That the Victorian Government advocates that the Australian Government commits to funding levels that will at least sustain current quality levels and, as a minimum, accepts the proposal to supplement indexation recommended by Bradley. (Chapter 5.5)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

However funding models need to accommodate growth projections on a State by State basis.

Also in determining the unit cost for the various levels of the AQF an increase in funding should be considered as you move up levels (rather than down which is the case under Victorian Skills Reform) to allow for the additional costs associated with maintaining the knowledge base as well as the research capability required for higher level qualifications i.e. diploma and above.

Recommendation 18: That the Victorian Government advocates that the Australian Government undertakes modelling to assess more accurately funding requirements for the numbers of students the system will need to accommodate over the next fifteen years, based on the modelling on student numbers completed for the Panel. (Chapter 5.5)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

Modelling of this type is fundamental to achieving a sustainable tertiary sector as predicated by these reforms. Modelling needs to be aligned to population and business growth projections on a State to State basis.

Modelling as the basis for developing a funding framework should be sophisticated enough to identify the needs of particular geographic locations and allocate appropriate resources to the Institutions according to the specific characteristics and needs of the communities they serve.

Recommendation 19: To ensure the needs of the State are considered in compact discussions with the Australian Government and in the development of the profiles of higher education Institutions and to ensure that, where appropriate, coordinated and consolidated bids are made. (Chapter 5.6)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

It is important that compact negotiations to determine priorities for tertiary education investment are done jointly with the States. It is important that State priorities and local knowledge are seriously considered and critical that the meaning of “coordinated and consolidated bids” is clearly articulated and agreed at COAG.

Recommendation 20: That the Victorian Government works with Skills Australia and Industry Skills Councils to ensure that Victorian industry and tertiary education Institutions have effective input into the development of a national network of workforce development advice for the tertiary sector. (Chapter 5.7)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

The VTA supports any opportunity for input into workforce development advice for the tertiary sector. TAFE providers historically rely upon its relationships with industry to inform its teaching programs and qualifications systems. It is essential that the Victorian Government consults with Industry Skills Councils and industry, though not exclusively peak organisations, to gain appropriate and pertinent advice regarding industry’s forecasts of skills needs dissected to regional levels, and their preferred modes of training provision. Tertiary providers should be represented in these forums to develop propositions which ensure a sustainable tertiary sector remains relevant to skills provision.



It may also be timely for the role of ISC's and their industry network consultation mechanisms to be reviewed or explored further so that stakeholders clearly understand the diversity of their activity and the information they provide.

Recommendation 21: That the Victorian Government further develops its own workforce needs, integrated planning and policy capacities in order to:

- > inform its own planning decisions in relation to tertiary education and industry development
- > provide direct advice to the Australian Government when necessary on priority skills needs for the Victorian labour force
- > enhance the provision of industry and occupational level labour market information for students, prospective students and education providers. (Chapter 5.7)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

However, a much more effective use of current resources supporting government policy and its implementation is advised. Bring the responsible Government departments, TAFE and Higher Education providers together to develop jointly negotiated advice on policy and practice.

Successful delivery of tertiary education options requires the Victorian Government to integrate planning and processes and to provide Institutions with ongoing access to current labour market information

Recommendation 22: That the Victorian Government facilitates the development and operation of industry sector networks between employers and tertiary education providers. The networks should provide labour market intelligence and specific proposals for action on skills shortages. (Chapter 5.7)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

However it is important to consider that:

- Many Institutions already have established mechanisms to engage with industry and the community in the interests of delivering local education based needs and local research.
- The VET sector has existing national and state-based frameworks that engage industry with the training system and the design of training products. For example advisory arrangements such as the Victorian ITABs and National ISC's we should consider how they might be broadened to cover all education and training sectors.
- The creation of another set of devices to engage with industry may be unnecessary given these existing mechanisms. It may be preferable to focus instead on making better use of the existing mechanisms, including better resourcing.
- Care should be taken to ensure effective participation of the sectors of the Tertiary environment as well as industry - get the right mix of voices in there and guide them to work together.
- TAFE providers already work closely with industry to meet their needs and provide graduating students with career opportunities.

Recommendation 23: That the Victorian Government identifies key gaps and skills deficits in the next ten or fifteen years. (Chapter 5.7)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

The provision of further sources of authoritative intelligence about projected skill needs would be



welcome by the TAFE sector. However, identification of key gaps and skill deficits should be done with appropriate stakeholder consultation regarding the mechanisms to source, analyse and publish intelligence to enable students to make more informed study/career choices. In this context the open market Skills Reforms package may require market design intervention.

Recommendation 24: That the Victorian Government considers the introduction of a scheme of public sector internships. (Chapter 5.8)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

Traineeships in the Public Sector have been an excellent environment for work based learning for vocational students. Institutions such as VU have been leading proponents of embedding Learning in the Workplace and Community (LiWC) as a major component of its education products. Other TAFE providers offer integrated learning in the workplace. The potential of public sector internships presents an opportunity for students to gain work-based learning experience in a range of contexts. However care is required to ensure that the private sector does not see this initiative as an opportunity to reduce their commitment to staff training.

The concept of tax deductions for employers taking on students in training has merit. It is extremely difficult to place students in the current environment yet it is also a very successful method of ensuring employability skills development and work integrated learning across VET and Higher Education. Any support would be appreciated. VTA notes the intervention of the State government in regards to clinical placements for health training and suggest this could also be considered so that other industry sectors are supported.

Recommendation 25: That the Victorian Government raise with the Australian Government the merits of introducing a cadetship scheme for regional students. (Chapter 5.8)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

VTA acknowledges the disadvantages encountered by regional students in accessing work based learning, and suggest that those in outer-metropolitan areas should also be included in the focus of a dedicated cadet scheme for regional students. TAFE providers experience working with trainees in the DHS Public Tenants Employment Program has shown the potential of this type of initiative to assist in achievement of social inclusion goals.

Cadetships have merits in some industry sectors and have been a part of the landscape of tertiary provision in previous decades. An analysis of the profile of the tertiary sector student would need to inform this policy direction. Generational differences in attitude and expectations of employment opportunities will result in quite different responses to and uptake of cadetships. The cadetship program introduced by Wodonga TAFE could be a useful example in this area. This highly successful program provides greater opportunities for regional students to stay in the area and for regional employers to attract and retain highly skilled employees. Further funding from State and federal government to support these programs would be valuable.

Recommendation 26: That Victoria endorses the challenging Australian Government ambition of raising the proportion of people in the lowest SES quartile participating in undergraduate higher education to 20 per cent by 2020, based upon the demographics of the Victorian population. (Chapter 6.1)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

The TAFE sector has a strong record of raising the participation and achievement of cohorts



under-represented in tertiary education. A unified, well-coordinated, approach amongst Governments to funding the capacity of both higher education and vocational education sectors to design and deliver pathways and cross-sectoral approaches would be a constructive step toward achieving the low SES participation target. It may also be appropriate to consider calculating SES levels for each region and government support being tailored to ensure that each region can achieve its targets.

Recommendation 27: That, in order to widen participation in higher education from young people in under-represented groups, the Victorian Government establishes a significantly enhanced coordinated and integrated approach to raise their aspirations and attainment levels. Considerations in the approach should include information about: income support; employment; course selection; selection procedures; the availability of scholarship programs; and Indigenous education strategies. (Chapter 6.3)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

Exposure to potential options, support for aspirational choices and academic/vocational preparation to undertake tertiary study are all vital in widening participation. It is important that young people are encouraged to participate in tertiary education particularly if their family has not been engaged in higher education previously, and there are perceived barriers to entry for these students. Other important influencers are teachers and careers advisors that may need additional resourcing in assisting students to make decisions about their study options. In general secondary school career advisers are university trained and in general have very limited experience of VET and TAFE in particular. Thus advice to secondary school students tends to be university focused. In addition, school teachers in general need greater exposure to and knowledge of TAFE provider course offerings.

TAFE providers are dedicated to addressing low educational participation, social disadvantage, and cultural diversity and Institutes have a long track record in this area and multiple mechanisms to engage with under-represented cohorts. These examples of good practice should be drawn on to inform any new approach.

Recommendation 28: That the Victorian Government investigates extending early childhood outreach programs to enable a greater number of low SES children and parents to participate. (Chapter 6.7)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

Early childhood education is critical to the development of a strong foundation for education participation and long term educational attainment. The TAFE sector is acknowledged for its capacity to enable people from low SES backgrounds to participate in education and training. Many have close relationships with secondary high schools and it is feasible for these relationships to be extended to primary schools. They are well positioned to have an impact on lower SES children by opening up opportunities for those individuals to experience further education in the VET sector as well as broadening their capacity to participate in university studies.

Recommendation 29: That the Victorian Government works with the Australian Government to ensure that income support arrangements are adequate and effective. (Chapter 6.10)

The VTA supports this recommendation

Income support arrangements are particularly important in a regional context as recent changes in income support have demonstrated. Arbitrary assignment of geographical boundaries to



income support criteria add another layer of complexity and introduces further barriers for students trying to understand changes in legislation and how that affects their study options. Access to income support needs to be simplified so that students can easily access information about their desired course of study rather than concerning themselves with complicated jurisdictional income support arrangements.

Recommendation 30: That the Victorian Government should initiate a study to understand rates of attrition in priority fields of study and the reasons driving these rates. (Chapter 6.15)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

However, any new study should acknowledge existing work in this area. Such as a current pilot study of higher education and VET completion rates for students entering higher education and VET from preparatory programs such as Gateway to Nursing and Diploma of Liberal Arts. This study being undertaken by Victoria University could be extended to more fully understand issues affecting CALD, mature age and low SES learners returning to study.

Consideration should also be given to:

- The role of work placement in preventing attrition - many TAFE programs include work placement as a key component of courses, which assists students to understand the work they will be doing once they graduate and enables them to make informed decisions about completion of their qualifications.
- Wide distribution of the results of such a study to all stakeholders.

Recommendation 31: That by 2025 each non-metropolitan administrative region should achieve at least a 10 percentage point increase in the proportion of people in the 25 to 34 age group who attain a bachelor degree qualification; and that by 2020 each non-metropolitan region should achieve at least a five percentage point increase in the proportion of higher education undergraduate enrolments of people from a low SES background. (Chapter 7.2)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

These are admirable targets and ones which should drive the tertiary sector to engage these groups. An understanding of these groups, their aspirations and expectations of achieving higher level qualifications is critical to inform the tertiary sectors about the best strategies to be employed to attract, engage and retain people in study.

Regional TAFE members indicate that an effective way to achieve these targets is to provide opportunities for students to achieve bachelor level qualifications at TAFE which articulate smoothly into post graduate studies at a university. In this way the aspirations of regional students with a lower SES background towards tertiary education continue to grow and develop, and supportive solutions are provided for those that may find the direct transition from Year 12 to university more challenging.

Recommendation 32: That the Victorian Government puts in place initiatives to promote linkages between enterprises by extending its Regional Innovation Clusters Program on an industry sector basis in immediately relevant priority fields where these do not already exist. To this end the Victorian Government should establish an industry/ tertiary education network program to assist formation of joint industry/education networks. (Chapter 7.3)



The VTA supports this recommendation

However, consideration should also be given to:

- Existing arrangements and established mechanisms at TAFE Institutions for engaging with industry and enterprises for innovation and research.
- Long standing national and state-based frameworks that engage industry with the training system and the design of training products.
- The need (or not) to create other programs to engage with industry given existing mechanisms. It may be preferable to focus instead on making better use of the existing mechanisms, including better resourcing.
- Ensuring that a broad range of participants (industry and community) is included in these networks and encouraged to work together.
- The need to focus on establishing networks in regional areas. In regional areas where there are several education providers, each with their own niche offerings, it is important to align the region as a whole with industry and to work collaboratively to meet the identified needs.

Recommendation 33: That a pilot project is initiated in a regional location to build regional aspirations towards participation in higher education. The project should involve engagement with schools, students and their families and include:

- > information about university courses and career advice, including individually tailored advice and mentoring
- > information about Australian Government financial assistance to students and how families in the regions can best use payment mechanisms
- > university outreach. (Chapter 7.6)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

Barriers to participation in higher education in regional areas were examined in 2009. Findings from this report should inform the construction of a pilot of the kind alluded to in the recommendation. However, the provision of career advice to parents and students should NOT be limited to the university sector as suggested in the wording of the recommendation. The VET sector must be included in such a pilot as regional students often begin their post compulsory educational journey through the VET sector – especially those in lower SES cohorts and those who do not achieve university entrance requirements. VET sector providers should be equally resourced to support and inform these potential students.

TAFE providers can provide examples of Institutions working to build regional aspirations. VU provides such an example through its work to build tertiary participation in outer urban areas in Melbourne's north and west. This includes programs built on links with secondary schools (via VET-in-Schools and a range of aspiration raising projects undertaken through VU's School of Education); programs encouraging educational participation among disengaged youth; and up-skilling for existing workers. VU Community Gateways provide individually tailored advice about accessing VU's programs and pathways between VET and higher education. Through its programs and support services, VU seeks to raise the overall aspirations of students and significantly improve the attainment of the foundational knowledge and skills required for effective tertiary education participation.

Another suggestion would be to consider a pilot with a specialist centre, such as William Angliss, (Tourism and Hospitality) working with a region so pathways can be facilitated for regional students.



Even where regional areas have significant access to vocational and higher education there still are many perceived social and cultural barriers to entry. Participation is also affected by cost and limited access to transport. Students are often not encouraged to aspire towards higher education and the experience of some regional students where regional HE campuses have been closed around them does not inspire the confidence to participate. Parents also need to be targeted; engaging them to understand the overall benefits of education, the costs involved and assistance available and the different pathways available. The CSU/Wodonga TAFE Foundation Year would provide an ideal test bed for such a pilot project.

Recommendation 34: That the Victorian Government initiate an overarching policy and planning framework to: facilitate State-Commonwealth relations; provide an overview of, and coordinate and encourage active planning and collaboration within, each of the regions; and provide an overview of how education and training needs connect with industry and labour market needs. Goals for attainment and participation in higher education and in vocational education and training could be monitored and aligned. (Chapter 7.6)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

However such arrangements need to ensure representation by all interest groups to ensure ongoing “ownership” of outcomes. It is important to recognise where there are existing specialist/leading industry TAFE organisations already in place and ensure a Victoria wide coverage of the possibilities in a field of study/ industry group.

The goals for attainment and participation figures would be very useful for regional Institutions to gauge and monitor. It would encourage Institutions to work harder within the local community to engage students and industry and help demonstrate the pathway from school to tertiary education and onto employment. The importance of local connections is particularly relevant for students who wish to stay in regions rather than relocate to a metropolitan area.

Recommendation 35: That the Victorian Government supports and contributes to the current review of regional loading and funding by the Australian Government. The Victorian Government should advocate the use of rigorous and accurate costing methodologies and also advocate that the Australian Government implement its findings as quickly as possible and put in place transitional arrangements prior to the implementation of the long-term funding arrangements. (Chapter 7.7)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

Recommendation 36: That the Victorian Government endorses current directions of development for higher education provision in outer Melbourne as a result of projected population growth and progressively monitors the advance over time, with attention to:

- > achieving an appropriate balance between TAFE and higher education provision
- > ensuring education provision harmonises with industry needs and labour market priorities
- > developing and sustaining effective working relations with schools and school authorities in the regions (the Northern, Western and Southern Regional Offices respectively). (Chapter 7.10)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

Achieving an appropriate balance of tertiary provision should be achieved through a collaborative conversation with TAFE, HE and school sectors. HE provision should not be considered in isolation. Duplication of effort across the tertiary sector should be avoided and monitoring of the actual and



emerging demand for education and training services in growth corridors by the Victorian Government will assist in these areas. In providing this advice, the Victorian Government would necessarily undertake an industry impact study to identify the skills required and possibly recommend preferred delivery modes. For example the growth corridor to the east of Melbourne has the potential to impact on a number of universities and TAFE institutes. The impact will vary depending on the appetite for growth and expansion of these Institutions and their capability to respond to the established industries (or those proposed for development) in the region. The movement of labour in response to industry demands should also be considered. Relationships between the tertiary and secondary sectors are critical to ensure adequate and appropriate provision of education and training programs across all AQF levels. Planning for education and training provision across Victoria as the State's population rapidly increases is an immediate necessity.

Recommendation 37: That the Victorian Government identifies the need for, and the feasibility of, expanding the defined list of foundation programs to include university entrance programs for domestic students – as are currently offered to international students. (Chapter 8)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

There needs to be stronger a focus on assisting students remain in tertiary education throughout their enrolment, not just prior to commencement. This will be particularly important if the targets around increasing participation amongst under-represented groups are to be met.

The need to address access to foundation skills courses is particularly important given the impact that the Victorian Government's Skills Reforms is having on these types of programs. Under these new arrangements, a number of courses which prepare students for further vocational or higher education study are not deemed to be 'foundation skills' courses. Programs such as the Diploma Liberal Arts, Diploma Further Education and Certificate IV Liberal Arts are courses preparing students for further vocational or higher education study. Government guidelines do not deem these programs to be 'foundation skills courses'. As a consequence, students undertaking these preparatory courses risk being deemed ineligible for a government funded place to undertake subsequent vocationally focussed certificate and diploma programs.

There are a range of preparatory/ foundation studies programs and initiatives (including fully integrated support programs with mainstream education and training) across the education sectors which are successful but not well coordinated from a State tertiary planning perspective. These need to be appropriately acknowledged and then built on to provide the strong and well understood foundations for the full range of students to access, subsequently participate in and complete higher level qualifications, as per the targets set by both the Federal and Victorian governments.

Recommendation 38: That the Victorian Government facilitates more consistent arrangements for, and develops a draft protocol around, the use of shared infrastructure by tertiary Institutions. (Chapter 8)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

This is a high ideal. There are many benefits to be gained from the Victorian Government facilitating discussions between providers across the secondary and tertiary sectors to see if mutually beneficial arrangements can be negotiated. Funding arrangements to support partnerships would need to be considered as a fundamental component of any arrangement. The Trade Training Centre arrangements provide a model for consideration, noting the barriers to reaching resolution of ownership and financial sustainability issues. In Regional Victoria there is



possibly a greater chance of successfully negotiating these arrangements than in Metropolitan Melbourne. A key requirement for successful implementation of this recommendation is that all stakeholders recognise a benefit for themselves. If this is absent then the initiative is unlikely to be successful.

The VTA and its members support in principal the development of a shared services philosophy. This could also extend to online shared service support facilities.

Recommendation 39: That the Victorian Government establishes a competitive Partnerships Facilitation Fund to facilitate partnerships between TAFE and higher education Institutions where complete or partial degree level qualifications can be delivered using existing Victorian infrastructure and resources. (Chapter 8.3)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

The VTA supports initiatives to better utilise existing infrastructure and resources. However the VTA would encourage the Government to ensure PFF considerations also include multi-sector Institutions.

Careful consideration should be given to the transparent and equitable distribution of funds this will be critical to ensuring that the Region benefits and not just the institution.

Consideration should also be given to the facilitation of partnerships around an industry specialization. For example partnerships such as those of William Angliss and regional institutes offers regional students pathways from certificate 1 (and VCAL/ VCE) through to degree programs in a potential three way partnership that includes a University offering Masters/ PhD level qualifications connected to foods, tourism and hospitality. This model also offers opportunities to connect with industry needs both local and State.

Further the VTA encourages expanding partnerships beyond the focus of education pathways to include:

- re-engineering curriculum to enable students to develop additional skills and adjust programs to meet industry needs,
- sharing infrastructure to immerse TAFE students into a university environment to reduce barriers and provide students with greater access to facilities (library and IT),
- more flexibility within programs to access specialist teaching staff and engage with researchers/research projects to assist student learning, and
- the ability for TAFE staff to develop interests aligning with university research and support their professional development.

Recommendation 40: That the Victorian Government works with Institutions to devise entrance processes to tertiary education that will enhance and complement the ENTER. These should take the form of a common framework of mechanisms that assess student capacity, aptitude and motivation. Principles of transparency, equity and efficiency should guide their use. (Chapter 8.6)

The VTA supports this recommendation in principle

There is evidence to support the proposition that the ENTER score is not a reliable predictor of tertiary education success, and that its reliability as a selection tool is variable at both ends of the scored spectrum. This may become increasingly problematic in a broadened tertiary sector driven partly by Government policy towards greater social inclusion. It seems probable that some providers will choose to lower their ENTER requirements to attract more students. Similarly in an



expanded tertiary sector, learners may be tempted to apply for courses for which they are not well prepared.

Many tertiary Institutions (HE and TAFE) already have in place a range of different mechanisms to complement the traditional dependence on the ENTER score. However, a common framework of mechanisms would be very valuable to clearly inform the public of the sorting and sifting processes they will potentially be exposed to. Examination of the introduction of a similar approach in Queensland developed through their Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF) could inform a Victorian solution.

It is important to ensure that students and Institutions make course selection choices to ensure the best outcomes for students. In this context we acknowledge that the ENTER may work well as a selection tool for well prepared learners with high ENTER scores. However we urge the Victorian Government and VTAC to explore alternative selection tools and processes for all students which could be a more iterative process that includes more opportunities to counsel students. For example, in dual sector Institutions it could be possible to offer less well prepared students a place in the Institution, rather than in a particular course. This could lead into a counselling process that over time results in an offer for a course or suite of courses.

This may encourage tertiary Institutions to better develop mechanisms to assist students who need further preparation prior to entrance into tertiary education, for example, in the areas of self-directed learning, assessment preparation and group-work, which can be developed along with their academic skills.

Other comments:

The work being undertaken in the Charles Sturt University (CSU)/Wodonga TAFE Foundation Program provides an exemplar of an innovative program which addresses many of the concepts identified within the Plan. The development of this partnership with CSU demonstrates the importance of both partners having a similar regional focus. This partnership is based on eight principles of “engagement”. The development of “learner pathways” is only one (albeit the most important) of those principles.

VTA would be pleased to provide further information.

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