



Review of Australian Higher Education

Response to Discussion Questions

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Review of Australian Higher Education – Discussion Paper, June 2008 *Responses to questions for discussion – Gordon Institute of TAFE*

Preamble:

The Gordon Institute of TAFE welcomes the release of the *Review of Australian Higher Education Discussion Paper*. As a leading provider of training and education, the Gordon Institute of TAFE is committed to reform in the Higher Education sector which will meet student needs and address skills shortages. The Gordon Institute of TAFE is pleased to make a submission with respect to the proposed reform in order to build a competitive, smarter, more responsive training system.

The mission of the Gordon Institute of TAFE is to provide responsive quality education and lifelong learning opportunities that meet the changing and diverse needs of individuals, business and the community. The Gordon Institute delivers a Bachelor of Visual Arts in its own right and also has a strategic alliance with Deakin University.

As part of our commitment to continued reform, the Gordon Institute of TAFE has a bold vision to be the number one TAFE institute in Australia by 2010 (Gordon 1-10). Our key objectives are:

- To be recognised as a leader in education and training, embracing new technologies and learning strategies
- To be the Training Provider of Choice for industry and community clients
- To be the key player in proactively assisting the region's economy in transition and community needs, particularly those in disadvantaged areas
- To be the Employer of Choice in the region for both existing staff and for potential new staff

In order to ensure this vision is realised, the Gordon Institute of TAFE has implemented the following key strategies:

- Overall review of the Organisation
- Application of Institute core values and behaviours across all areas of operation
- Increased focus and commitment through investment in innovative solutions
- Development of a Strategic Master Plan for Facilities & Information Technology
- Strategic review of all courses
- Streamlining Institute operating systems and procedures
- Implementation of Performance Measures

Once the vision of 'Gordon 1-10' is achieved, the Institute will be united in its direction with staff empowered and equipped to be innovative and proactive. The Institute will be a leader in education and training, particularly in the local community. Further, it will be a workplace of shared vision, values, looking to provide opportunities to staff in an enjoyable workplace. The Gordon Institute of TAFE will be the best we can be for our students, staff and community.

As the Discussion Paper does not define the term 'Higher Education', the Gordon Institute of TAFE has adopted the following definition of Higher Education in our submission as per the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website.



The Australian higher education system comprises (in 2007):¹

- 39 universities of which 37 are public institutions and 2 are private;
- 1 Australian branch of an overseas university;
- 4 other self-accrediting higher education institutions; and
- Non-self-accrediting higher education providers accredited by State and Territory authorities, numbering more than 150 as listed on State and Territory registers. These include several that are registered in more than one State and Territory.

The non-self-accrediting higher education providers form a very diverse group of specialised, mainly private, providers that range in size and include theological colleges and other providers that offer courses in areas such as business, information technology, natural therapies, hospitality, health, law and accounting.

In this submission, the Gordon Institute of TAFE acknowledges the commitment made by the Federal government in meeting the key challenges facing Higher Education. The Gordon Institute of TAFE welcomes a competitive operating environment in which investment in skills will deliver benefits to individuals and business. This submission offers comment on views and questions relevant to the Gordon Institute of TAFE as a participant in the Higher Education sector. This submission also highlights some of the unanticipated outcomes associated with reform and makes suggestions for improvement.

Chapter 1: Higher Education in Modern Australia

1 How adequate is the statement of functions and characteristics of higher education in modern Australia?

The statement of functions of Higher Education in modern Australia accurately highlights the role of education providers in developing sustainable communities, contributing to cultural and social structures and building the national and regional economy.

As one of Australia's largest regional TAFEs, The Gordon Institute of TAFE is recognised as a leader in education and training, embracing new technologies and learning strategies.

The Gordon Institute of TAFE is pivotal in assisting the region, which is in a state of transition, by adding value to emerging industries, traditional industries and socially disadvantaged areas through the provision of higher levels skill sets, accessible methods of delivery and stimulating, innovative courses with positive outcomes.

The statement of functions claims "the central place of higher education in modern Australia derives from the two core functions of contemporary universities." While acknowledging the contribution of universities to both the higher education sector and society, TAFE does not undertake research as a core function yet TAFE is as equally valid a higher education institution in modern Australia. Indeed, an illustration of this is that Deakin University grew out of the Gordon Institute of TAFE.

The statement of characteristics of higher education in modern Australia is well aligned with the objectives of the Gordon Institute of TAFE. As a training provider of choice, the Gordon Institute of TAFE seeks to provide clients with higher level skill sets to meet the demands of an ever diverse workforce and economy. With rapid changes in technology, governance, regulation and resources, the Gordon Institute of TAFE is engaging with students and the community in new and exciting ways that exceed traditional expectations of the higher education system.

¹ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education



Section 3.1: Meeting Labour Market and Industry Needs

2 Are there impediments to the higher education sector being able to innovate in the development of courses and programs? What are these impediments and how could they be removed?

The development of innovative and timely courses and programs is a particular issue in the TAFE and vocational educational and training sector. As seen in the recent discussion paper released by Skills Victoria, there is an increasing paradigm shift for TAFEs to be less reliant on government funding and to increase fee for service activity by making the most of innovative learning practices and responding to changing client demands.²

This represents a significant change for the TAFE sector as it has traditionally relied on government funding for the majority of its delivery. The change to becoming more client focused is not an unwelcome one. It is evident that to address the skills shortage and to assist the economy in prospering, courses at this level of higher education need to be more innovative. They need to have flexible delivery methods to suit both the student and their employer, they need to be responsive to industry demands and importantly, there needs to be more recognition of prior learning.

A significant difference for TAFE as distinct from universities is that it is governed by (in the case of the Gordon Institute of TAFE) Skills Victoria which specifies key performance indicators (KPIs) linked to funding. These KPIs may not always match with customer or industry demands. There is an inevitable time lag from the time that various research data is collected, analysed, published, interpreted and formulated into regional analysis. This results in a mismatch between the needs of the economy and training choices made by individuals and business. The implications are critical as training funding and allocations are often based on recommendations from such research.

Another impediment to the innovation and development of courses is the need for TAFE to meet Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) guidelines. Whilst this system ensures quality and consistency, TAFEs, unlike universities, have to offer uniform courses i.e. certificate III in hospitality offered at one TAFE must deliver the same modules as that offered at another. This is quite different to the university model whereby a university can establish a course and not be regulated by the AQF. While regulatory requirements are important, they can be an impediment in terms of responsiveness and innovation.

3 What are the appropriate mechanisms at the national and local level for ensuring higher education meets national and local needs for high level skills? What is the role of state and territory governments in this area?

See above

4 How adequate are the mechanisms for aligning supply and demand of graduates? How do pricing and labour market signals impact on student choices?

Mechanisms for aligning supply and demand of graduates in the TAFE sector is largely reliant on survey data of graduates and industry sectors. The data is not always timely which has the resultant affect of a lag between training students and having them fill the demand in the workforce.

² Securing Our Future Economic Prosperity: Discussion Paper on Skills Reform, *Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development Victoria*, April 2008.



It is anticipated with the increased profile of Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) that the gap will close. There will continue to be an inevitable gap between student data and the demands of industry. This can be assisted by greater collaboration between TAFEs and ISCs.

Pricing and general labour market conditions impact significantly on student choices. Choice of course is not the only impact made by costs. Clients also give strong consideration to which TAFE institute or registered training organisation (RTO) they will attend if course costs are variable in the market. This is not surprising given that in TAFE, for example, a certificate III offered by one TAFE institute should be the same as that offered by another.

5 Are there particular examples of good practice where you can demonstrate either rapid response to skill shortages or successful initiatives to improve generic skills?

There needs to be more development and direction on innovative delivery strategies to meet the needs of providers. A good model is exemplified in the TAFE Development Centre in the programs that have been rolling out.

The use of recognition of prior learning (RPL) has been a successful initiative in responding to skills shortages. In 2006, the Gordon Institute of TAFE implemented a skills recognition centre branded as GEARS™ (Gordon Education Assessment Recognition Services). GEARS™ is an innovative skills recognition service designed to equip skilled and experienced workers with a Nationally Accredited Qualification that recognises their experience and competency.

Similarly, the Gordon Institute of TAFE oversees the operation of Geelong Skills Store which uses the online Competency Navigator™ tool to provide a broad skills assessment for individuals and also to establish and track the required evidence portfolio to achieve actual RPL/RCC of the identified competencies.

The result has been that skills gaps have been filled quicker than would normally be the case as clients are fast-tracked to courses that match their skill set and meet the skills shortage in the region. This is of mutual benefit to the client and training provider as client costs are minimised by only participating in necessary course modules while the RTO gains students and helps fill gaps in the skills store region.

6 How effectively are Australian higher education institutions responding to demographic change, especially in providing lifelong learning to meet the challenge of the ageing population and the need for upgrading of skills and re-training?

At the TAFE level, we are responding to demographic change and providing lifelong learning opportunities by offering recognition of prior learning. Further, we are scanning the environment and consulting with industry to ensure the courses we run are demand driven and that there will be real job opportunities for graduates upon completion. Moreover, throughout this process we are ensuring that we are delivering courses that have not just short-term job opportunities but long range competencies that will enable graduates to reskill into different areas if their chosen field of work is not viable in the future.

Feedback from industry suggests there is a need to promote a suite of competencies rather than just certificate qualifications. Both individuals and business indicate a move away from whole qualifications to a skill set of competencies is required.

The Gordon Institute of TAFE is active in engaging the ageing population in training and education by offering courses that have flexible learning methods in an attempt to engage the whole of the community in life-long learning.



7 What is the relevance and applicability of the findings and approaches proposed in the United Kingdom paper, *Higher Education at Work*, for increasing skills levels in the workforce to Australia?

The approaches proposed in the paper *Higher Education at Work*, are similar to that proposed in the Victorian Government's *Securing our Future Economic Prosperity: Discussion Paper on Skills Reform*.

Currently in Victoria, there are 1.4 million adults who do not hold any post-school qualification and if training continues at this rate, there will be a shortfall of 123,000 people at the advanced diploma and diploma level by 2015.³

Like the United Kingdom paper, it is imperative to Higher Education and the future of the economy that:

- Numbers of businesses and individuals accessing training are boosted to increase the skills of Australia's workforce
- Develops a VET system that engages effectively with all stakeholders
- Fosters a culture of lifelong learning
- Is responsive to flexible delivery models and caters for student and industry demands

The Gordon Institute of TAFE would welcome such an approach in increasing the skill levels of the Australian workforce.

Section 3.2: Opportunities to Participate in Higher Education

8 Should there be a national approach to improving Indigenous and low SES participation and success in higher education?

There is merit in a National approach if that means a coordinated and integrated response from the three levels of government, relevant organisations with a mandate to support Indigenous participation and the Indigenous communities themselves. We are a long way from achieving this.

This initiative also needs to take a whole of life continuum approach that both supports and tracks Indigenous access, participation and good outcomes in education and training starting at pre-school level and moving through formal stages of education to post school engagement in tertiary education including skills development to economic/employment independence.

Succinct policies with achievable outcomes are required to improve participation. Some barriers include the focus on module completion rates, the lack of a whole-of-TAFE approach and the dearth of partnership approaches between higher education stakeholders and the Aboriginal communities at large.

Low SES

There should be a national approach to improving Indigenous and low SES participation and success in higher Education.

³ *Securing Our Future Economic Prosperity: Discussion Paper on Skills Reform, Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development Victoria, April 2008, p.5.*



Equity in higher education is worth worrying about. Higher education confers significant individual benefits in terms of personal development, social status, career possibilities and, of course, lifetime earnings. But while individual social justice has been the major imperative behind many equity initiatives, there has been an argument, especially in the USA & the UK. Improving the higher education participation of people from disadvantaged groups is essential for long-term social and economic integration of these groups and the widening participation and intergenerational social mobility might lead to more cohesive and more economically successful communities.

The approach needs to be flexible enough to respond to local concerns and opportunities.

A National approach to improving indigenous and low SES participation and success in higher education is of great importance. If the trend of majority middle and upper SES population moving on to higher education and filtering out into the workplace, this could only mean that certain postcodes will have better servicing than others.

It is a cyclic way of thinking; it is only natural that if you are exposed to a level of service you would not accept anything under this.

The structuring, resource, monitoring and evaluation are one that will take time. The success of increased numbers based on support and resources set at primary school level and even Pre School for some students. Students from lower SES and indigenous background, particularly those in remote areas do not have the support and resources to deal with learning difficulties that can become so debilitating as time goes on, but if identified and managed early will not have a significant effect on a student's learning. The monitoring and evaluation may not be in the span of one government's office term so the commitment needs to be beyond a political promise.

9 If you support a national approach to improving Indigenous and low SES participation and success how do you see it being structured, resourced, monitored and evaluated?

Accepting that a National approach is desirable does not mean that a one size fits all response is appropriate. The nature of Indigenous communities across Australia is widely different and the response at the State, Regional and Local levels needs to reflect this diversity. Strategic planning needs to involve all key players and resources need to be pooled for maximum impact and outcome. At the moment different levels of government and individual organisations are working within a competitive paradigm and fighting each other for inadequate resources.

The voices of Indigenous leaders and communities need to be central to any coordinated response. In Victoria the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) in conjunction with Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LAECGs) and other key bodies such as the Institute for Koorie Education at Deakin University, the Indigenous Units of TAFE Colleges, and relevant education and training bodies including schools and Industry need to be mobilised through Forums and Regional alliances to lobby, advocate, plan and monitor coordinated and integrated responses.

Regions could be resourced to set up such an alliance - this would also need to acknowledge the particularities of local Indigenous communities and not assume that a single group e.g. Wathaurong in the case of Geelong, is fully representative of the Indigenous community in the region.

Currently many programs are only funded on an annual basis which limits planning for the future and is disconcerting to students as they are not guaranteed that funding for the program will continue. In terms of resourcing, monitoring and evaluation, a similar model to that used by Skills Victoria could be used whereby priority skills training areas are identified by Government and education providers. The providers are then asked to provide feedback and advice on priorities as identified by the government. A study area reference group is then convened by the provider and liaises with key stakeholders in the region. Thoughts are gathered from key stakeholders as to



whether the government priority areas for directing funding concord with the priority areas identified by the key stakeholders in the study area reference group. The recommendations of the study area reference group are feed back to government and moderation between the two reports takes place. This approach works well with funding and resourcing issues and could be adopted to assist in structuring, monitoring, resourcing and evaluating a national approach to improving Indigenous participation in higher Education.

Low SES

Initiatives Funded by Federal & State Government, giving Higher Education providers increased funds for appropriate supports for learning outcomes for Indigenous and low SES participation and success in higher Education are welcome. Also, additional out of class support in tuition and literacy assistance if disadvantaged in this area is a key requirement. Other examples include:

- ACCESS INITIATIVE - works on the basis that reserves 20 per cent of undergraduate places for students who demonstrate educational disadvantage (formerly the targeted access Program)
- Students from access initiative would have access to the Learning Support unit (under priority) which would be better resourced through Federal & State Government funding as an initiative for better outcomes.

For many, the problems can start in early childhood where poverty is pervasive and parents are struggling to feed and clothe children. Education may not be seen as a priority. Centrelink benefits need to keep pace with inflation and there needs to be affordable housing. Parents who have had good experiences with education are more likely to set the goals higher for their children. Hence national initiatives need to be encompassing. TAFE education costs need to be kept low and people given incentives to study.

10 What institutional initiatives have proved successful in increasing low SES or Indigenous participation and success? (Please provide information about outcomes as well as activities.)

There has been considerable research into pedagogy and curriculum that works with Indigenous youth. Much of this has been discovered through Pilot Projects that have failed to gain ongoing funding beyond the Pilot phases.

What is needed is for TAFE's and Universities and other appropriate bodies to disseminate this data/research to local communities and to help communities understand the nature of the findings and the implications for changed organisational practice. An example is the success of using IT with Indigenous youth to support their engagement with the learning process - these pilots have not been widely disseminated and there have not been forums for practitioners (teachers) to be supported in trialing these approaches in their own workplaces. We don't need more research but to make what we do know widely available and additional resources made available to pre-schools, schools, TAFE and Universities to undertake their own organisational piloting of this learning and to bring about change in organisational culture and pedagogic practice.

The needs of Indigenous communities require a planned, negotiated and long term resourced intervention. We also need more consolidated effort in identifying Indigenous youth, taking a case managed approach to their access, participation and completion outcomes and tracking their transitions through the continuum of lifelong learning – pre-school, schools and post school options. At the moment it is very difficult to even obtain actual data on the whereabouts of Indigenous youth in the education system or on their ongoing participation in their education. There are a range of things that need to be put in place at the local institutional level of preschools, schools and tertiary Institutions.



These include cultural awareness training for Institutions, training in multiple pedagogic approaches that are appropriate to individual young people and to groups of indigenous young people, customised approaches to working with Indigenous families and communities when discussing pathways for Indigenous young people. An example here is customising pathways meetings for Indigenous families. Another major issue is Indigenous youth participation in education that overlooks the importance of young people feeling a sense of achievement as able learners. The failure of current academic education approaches to appropriately value the diversity of strengths and abilities that young people demonstrate in schools leads to a devaluing of people's capabilities with young people starting to feel like failures from an early stage in their formal learning process. With Indigenous young people they frequently terminate their studies early for this reason.

Another major issue to take into account is Indigenous leadership - we need more Indigenous role models and to provide potential leaders with leadership training (leadership defined in its broadest terms and across a diversity of settings). If the Indigenous community cannot see what is possible then there is no motivation to aspire to potential. We also need real job creation schemes that provide holistic support like that available through Workplace Participation Partnerships that enable Indigenous people to improve their employment situation and to enable Indigenous youth to see the value of education and training in terms of economic outcomes.

A difficulty for all young people in regional and rural communities is the likelihood that they will have to separate from their communities to access higher education so we need to design education responses that take this into. This may incorporate better use of IT for learning.

Universities and TAFE's need to work in partnership with the school system over the long term (from prep to year 12) to encourage a positive view of higher education and develop a responsive education offering for Indigenous youth. Further, the delivery methods need to be flexible and fluid. Our experience indicates that the surrounding Aboriginal community has differing expectations to our typical student profile i.e. some expectations include pick-up from their community to the TAFE or assistance of cost with leaving the community to get to TAFE. A model has been suggested whereby TAFE should provide boarding houses for such students with some elders to assist in maintaining a connection both with their aboriginal community and engagement in education away from the distractions of everyday aboriginal life.

There are many Indigenous youth who could be encouraged to take up leadership opportunities in their communities and this encouragement can happen early in a young person's education.

Low SES

In the area of support systems for low SES students, there are many government and community based support structures that need to be considered. These include, but are not limited to:

Government Based

- ABSTUDY
- Pensioner Education Supplement
- Mobility Allowance

Institution Based

- Learning Support Services
- Disability Support Services
- DAAWS Funding – perhaps this funding could be extended to non apprentice students who enrol in Certificate II and above programs instead of just apprentice students



- Scholarships
- Counselling & Careers Student Support Fund

The provision of clear and well defined pathways into Higher Education e.g. TAFE courses needs further thought. At the Gordon Institute of TAFE, our experience of students in the low SES bracket is that they are able to commit to shorter courses that are delivered in smaller setting prior to making the decision about embarking on higher education

These institutional initiatives have proved successful in increasing low SES participation:

- Credit transfer arrangements for TAFE studies
- Strong TAFE/university links
- Student fees based on health care card availability, have encouraged people to 'test the waters', find they can study at TAFE level and then feel encouraged to continue into work or further study in the higher education sector.

Availability of bridging courses, plus access to career and personal counsellors, learning support and disability support, have all assisted low SES students to do well at TAFE level. This in turn can act as an incentive to consider university. The counsellors provide assistance to students who are applying through VTAC for university.

The best institutional initiatives in increasing participation with low SES participation have been in the areas outside of academia. Sports and the arts have a way of crossing SES boundaries.

Again, it will not be enough to offer incentives only at a higher education level when there would already be a large percentage of the students already not engaged at school prior to this. There must be emphasis placed on the difficulties of school attendance when there is a generational attitude, when facilities are not equal from one government school to another depending on post code. Eliminating or lowering costs for units where there is a shortage within the workforce will not make the situation better. It is unrealistic to think that because the enrolments at one higher education provider did not increase that the general population of students were not put off by the debt. The debt is the one reason students opt for pathway options within TAFE, across a broad SES.

11 What evidence is available from institutions about the impact on individuals or groups of either failure to gain income support or the inadequacy of income support?

Young people and others in rural and regional communities are seriously disadvantaged re-engaging in higher education if they need to move away from local communities. This is not solely an issue for Indigenous communities. But poverty is a real issue for the Indigenous community and a concerted and holistic set of supports needs to be put in place to enable young people to take up opportunities and be supported through these opportunities - over the long term - before we will see any real changes.

LOW SES

Many students are struggling on Centrelink benefits which have not kept pace with inflation rates. After two years (or more) of struggling at TAFE level to get a recognised qualification, students usually are keen to earn an income and see university as a distant prospect if that is their aim. Many are very disinclined to incur a costly HECS debt. The student counsellors are seeing far more students regarding poverty issues e.g. in 2006, the Gordon Institute of TAFE distributed \$10,000 via the Student Support Fund. This year to date we have distributed \$12,000. In July 120 students had book loans outstanding and the Finance department report that more than 12,000 students have taken out fee installments. It is not uncommon to find students withdrawing due to



financial pressures. Some students report going without food to pay essential bills and transport costs - this can be a real issue when students are in physically demanding courses such as bricklaying or carpentry. Rent in the Geelong region is very high and some students are semi-homeless (i.e. moving between friends' places and/or sleeping in cars). Some report sleeping in the open, horse stables etc. Mature age students can have very high mortgages - some report losing their houses as a result. Many students are doing it very hard. Hence university is seen by many as the place where only the wealthy can go - it is often not attainable.

Many low SES students are barely managing on a week to week basis. Should a crisis occur, they are at greater risk of withdrawing than other students as they have limited financial resources. These students need to have easily accessible support - both counselling and material aide. The need for material aide has risen exponentially over the past few years.

Income support for students need to be reviewed as it is insufficient to meet living costs with the additional expense of studying.

Section 3.3: The student experience of higher education

12 How can the quality of the student experience within Australia's higher education institutions be monitored nationally? Is there evidence that declining student:staff ratios have impacted on the quality of the student experience?

If the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) performance indicators are reasonable then they will be an ideal way of comparing students performance, however they must be realistic and deal with module or unit completions rather than just course completions.

With respect to student/staff ratios, the Gordon Institute of TAFE has not experienced a decline in this area.

13 How can the quality of learning outcomes in Australian higher education be measured more effectively?

In addition to the response above, other measures could include graduate destination studies and employer feedback on the quality of the training. There must be a nexus between the training and employment. This is not always the case so caution needs to be exercised – employers must only comment on student activity relevant to the courses they are studying and the position in which they are working. Students are sometime studying to change their field of employment or to make the transition to another employer.

14 How do institutions measure the quality of their learning outcomes and how do they know they are nationally and internationally competitive?

At the Gordon Institute of TAFE, quality and learning outcomes are measured through module evaluations, student evaluations, employer and staff surveys and NCVET graduate surveys/benchmarks. Previously we had benchmarked against national institutions but are not currently doing this because of the lack of uniformity in the survey instrument. Well structured AQTF measures may bring back the ability to do that.

Section 3.4: Connecting with Other Education and Training Sectors

15 To what extent should vocational education and training and higher education continue to have distinctive missions and how should these missions be defined?

The terms Higher Education and Vocational Education need to be clarified. Vocational Education and Training has closer linkages with industry. Universities are generally not aligned with industry and the vast majority of universities are involved in research.



This clearly illustrates that university and VET have some distinctive missions however this does not mean there are no overlaps.

With respect to how these missions should be defined, the focus should remain on the welfare and outcomes for students. The strength of university is their research focus and ability to drive innovative learning. The strengths of TAFE are the engagement of the students with the community and industry. The learning is put into practice i.e. it is vocational. Further, the TAFE sector is well connected with Skills Councils to ensure students are likely to have a job outcome upon completion. It would be beneficial if Universities were also directed by the relevant government authority to direct training efforts into courses that have job outcomes and address skill shortages.

Opportunities to pursue life long learning or higher order qualifications are at times hindered by internal protocols imposed by Universities. For instance, protocols at least three major Victorian universities work against older Australians who want to take their skills and knowledge to a doctoral level since many may have gained their Master degree some time ago. The procedures at such Universities require the applicant to find two academic referees. This is particularly difficult for applicants who completed their Master degree some time ago, hence limiting or making it difficult for them to pursue a PhD.

Higher Education providers need to work in unison to accommodate the skills and knowledge requirements of the 21st century. For instance students who withdraw from higher education prior to the completion of their studies leave without a formal qualification although they may have attained a number of skills and knowledge. Reworking of the higher education qualifications structure so that each year level with a degree course aligns to the Australian Qualifications Framework would be of benefit. Such year level structure could ensure that practical applications and employability skills form part of the training.

Alternately and again working in unison, VET programs can be developed to form the common core basis of any qualification. In other words, all students who undertake post year 12 study must be competent in core vocational units in their discipline field before entering higher education. Outcomes for students would include entry into higher education (at what we perceive today as second or third year), completion of VET lower level qualification and entry into employment, or continuation of VET into a higher level qualification.

16 Does the movement between the sectors of students with credit need to be improved? If so, in what ways?

There are impediments in the higher education sector regarding innovation in the development of courses and programs. For instance, VET and higher education programs are often developed independently and articulation/credit transfer is an after thought. This may occur because VET Training Packages are nationally developed and higher education, although moving towards a competency or capability outcomes, still favours the traditional 'curriculum divided into subjects hence graded' approach. The Australian Qualification Framework⁴ (AQF) in some respect works against articulation/credit transfer between the sectors through the guidelines offered for articulation. These read as follows:

"arrangements and dual award qualifications in the same fields between Diploma and Bachelor qualifications. Depending on the particular nature of the awards being linked actual credit levels may be greater or less than the recommended level:

- 50% credit for an Advanced Diploma when linked to a three-year Bachelor Degree
- 37.5% credit for an Advanced Diploma when linked to a four-year Bachelor Degree:

⁴ AQF Handbook 2007



- 33% credit for a Diploma when linked to a three-year Bachelor Degree
- 25% credit for a Diploma when linked to a four-year Bachelor Degree
- In most instances students may be granted up to 40% credit towards the requirements for the award of the Senior Secondary Certificate Education in jurisdictions where these are specified.
- Depending on the particular circumstance, the credit levels may be greater or less than the recommended level”.⁵

Structured qualification linkages across sectors are required so that awards are properly integrated across sectors. This would also allow for easier movement between sectors and for levels of training within either higher education or VET to be acknowledged.

17 To what extent should relative provision between the sectors be planned or demand driven. What are the effects of current differences on funding, governance and regulation in limiting planning or influencing choice between the sectors?

TAFE institutions can also be encouraged to establish workforce analysis centres so that training needs and demands can be systematically determined.

An overhaul of the training system is required. There is far too much duplication in delivery across sectors (including the secondary sector) which impacts on our limited resources, both financial and human. Reward systems need to be developed for institutions that can demonstrate good practice in terms of integrated or concurrent delivery between sectors. Such a system will allow the retention of independence of delivery (e.g. what is driven by demand regionally/internationally) and will offer the opportunity for sectors to work together.

18 Can institutions provide examples of good practices which have led to movement between the sectors with high levels of credit and good learning outcomes?

Section 3.4 of the paper examines the interface between higher education and vocational education and training. This investigation is long overdue and is of the utmost importance. The paper clearly focuses on the movement of students from VET to University training – “the proportion of domestic undergraduate students admitted to higher education on the basis of prior vocational education and training study (articulation) was only 10.1 per cent in 2006.”⁶ As a provider of higher education, the Gordon Institute of TAFE would like to see an equal focus the inverse pathway of university graduates making the transition to VET.

What needs to be researched is the number of graduates coming from university to VET for meaningful post graduate qualifications to make them work ready. In the early 1990's, research showed that for every TAFE student going on to university, four were coming the other way i.e. from university to TAFE. The case for this often overlooked phenomenon is logical. Gordon Institute of TAFE researched one cohort of 32 Civil Engineering diploma students of whom 9 had been to university or completed Civil Engineering Degrees. In interviewing them the theme was consistent. University gave them the theory, TAFE the practical skills. The common theme from the interviews was that university graduates were told by potential employers they were unlikely to get a job without TAFE learning experience. The cohort also knew that there was no HECs on TAFE courses and this was a sound, cost efficient way to get a post graduate qualification.

⁵ Ibid pg 87

⁶ Review of Australian Higher Education: Discussion Paper, *Department of Education, Education and Workplace Relations*, June 2008, p.42.



Section 3.6: Australia's Higher Education Sector in the International Arena

22 Are there any unintended consequences of the current approach to internationalisation of higher education in Australia?

Tensions and missed opportunities have resulted due to the failure to integrate international and local students. It seems that while international students are provided with induction information about the environment they are joining to study, local students usually do not receive any formal introduction from their host institution to international students. There does not seem to be awareness programs to educate local students about the challenges faced by international students and formal buddy systems are rare.

International operations usually operate out of a standalone centre within the Institution and there is not an integrated approach to global learning across all faculties or departments.

23 What is an appropriate role for government in assisting the Australian higher education system to internationalise? On what principles should this role rest and what purposes should it serve?

Minimum requirements for higher education and vocational institutions should consist of:

- global curriculum components in all programs
- a higher percentage of supported overseas study/work opportunities for local students
- incentive based 'buddy' systems to integrate local and international students

There needs to be greater recognition at policy level that tertiary education now has global parameters and global responsibilities.

24 Can you provide any examples of good practice in encouraging local students to undertake study in other countries?

Case Study 1 Australia: RMIT International Industry Experience and Research Programme (RIIERP)⁷

A comprehensive programme established in 1992 by Sylvester Abanteriba to send graduates overseas on vocational training and research programmes –

It enables students of engineering at RMIT to access vocational training and research programmes in international companies and research institutions around the world.

- Links to 140 companies in 12 developed countries
- Annually 300 apply / 160 selected from across a range of disciplines (80% engineering)
- US\$1.9M sponsorship from various companies provides living allowances
- Aim – equip graduates with professional competence to enable them to perform in different cultural environments

⁷ Abanteriba, S (2006) "Development of strategic international industry links to promote undergraduate vocational training and postgraduate research programmes", European Journal of Engineering Education, 31:3, 283-301.



- Comprehensive programme covers vocational training, middle and advanced level research
- Global Industry Advisory Board established in 2002 to provide advice on the management of the program
- Participants must produce discipline and culture based reports

Case Study 2 US:

Community College - Fox Valley Technical College: International Professional Field Study Course⁸

“Since Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC) added to its mission a commitment for preparing students to work in a globally influenced workplace, international professional field study has been expanded in various programs, such as marketing, accounting, automotive technician, culinary arts, childcare, nursing, occupational therapy assistant, truck driving, and electromechanical programs.

The motivation for sending students abroad came out of business and industry surveys that recommended the college provide training that would both help students learn about their professional field in an international environment, as well as gain experience in working with people from different cultures. To create the most value for its students, FVTC started offering the International Professional Field Study (IPFS) as a three-credit hour course.

This course consists of a reciprocal exchange where students and faculty from the U.S. and abroad host each other in their homes and workplaces. As part of this course, students also learn the fundamentals of a foreign language spoken in the country they are visiting and gain cultural knowledge and understanding of values and behaviors in a different society and workplace. Country briefings and cross-cultural orientations offered on the home campus are another important part of this course. Upon completion of an IPFS course, students are able to incorporate global perspective into a comparison of professional and social practices in the U.S. and the country visited.

The course focuses on three training areas: academic, professional, and cultural, offered in equal portions. While abroad, students attend classes in their technical field, participating in instructor-guided discussions and activities. They visit businesses related to their profession, where they spend several days shadowing their hosting student. For example, automotive program students in Germany visit auto dealerships and Volkswagen training facilities. Nursing and occupational therapy students in the Netherlands visit hospitals and various community clinics, and culinary arts students work in bakeries, restaurants and hotel catering businesses.

Students acquire cultural education from host families, observe day-to-day living, attend language classes and participate in cultural sightseeing trips. Upon their return home, students make presentations on their international learning experience to the entire program class, thus educating other students about the academic and work environment in another country. This activity helps career students understand and relate their fields from non-U.S. perspectives, and recruit new students for a program the following year.

Students report that as a result of an IPFS course abroad, their professional and academic knowledge increased, while their cultural learning was described as invaluable; their overall

⁸ Tillman, Martin “Impact of Education Abroad on Career Development: four Community College Case Studies Volume II” American Institute for Foreign Study Stamford, CT. P10-11.



Experience was “life changing and unforgettable.” Students also reported that such study abroad affected their employment in a positive way. Employers reported greater interest in learning about the student’s/employees international experiences, which helped to establish a better informal rapport with supervisors and co-workers.

Since this is a very young program, it is too early to report how such training eventually impacts job growth or promotion. The IPFS courses are led by instructors who design questions for investigation during the field studies, a final assignment, and grading parameters. Just as it is for students, for many instructors such a field study may be their first trip abroad.

The FVTC International Studies department provides training for instructors leading a course abroad, addressing such issues as safety, cultural differences, culture shock, geography, history, demographics and political environment in a given country. To make a course abroad more attractive for instructors, in addition to compensation for teaching, FVTC offers instructors credit for professional development required for all faculty and their supervisors as part of their employment in the Wisconsin Technical College System.

FVTC also shows its commitment to international education by allocating funding to the International Studies department, whose staff is dedicated to providing services to students, faculty and staff, and to organizing such international programs.

Like the other college cases cited in this paper, faculty development goes hand-in-hand with student career development in study abroad. For vocational students at FVTC, the major obstacle to study abroad is funding. Financial aid is available to them, but it is also challenging to get time off work and away from family responsibilities. FVTC looks for ways to help students fund international field studies by allocating scholarships and seeking grant opportunities.

One specific field study in an automotive technician program has been awarded funding by FIPSE (Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education) for six colleges, three in the United States and three in Europe (Germany, the United Kingdom, Portugal), to participate in international exchanges and develop new internationalized curriculum in the automotive program.

The faculty members have designed a project with the lifestyles and limitations of the technical college student in mind to maximize the international influence for all students. The Transatlantic Automotive Technology (Trans Auto TEC) project recognized the fact that international experiences for vocational students are effective when incorporating a variety of instructional resource to introduce new concepts.

Appreciation for another culture or industry in a different country can be learned and experienced through methods other than those available in a traditional study abroad program.

FVTC faculty found that creative international experiences, which may appear minimal by comparison to semester or yearlong foreign travel, may be life changing for students who frequently have not ventured far from their Midwestern hometown. Moreover, the experience has even more relevancy as it is linked to their occupational learning with the faculty modeling the language and culture learning along with the students.

The FVTC college climate also has been enriched by the international opportunities offered by the TransAutoTEC Project and related activities. In 2004 this project received the IIE Andrew Heiskell Award due to its innovative approach to building an international dimension of study into the traditional vocational curriculum of automotive technology. Using Web-based technologies, students and faculty in three U.S. community/technical colleges linked with the GM Automotive Service Educational Program (ASEP) teach and collaborate with European apprentice students and faculty linked with the Volkswagen Corporation. Faculty in partner colleges synchronized the instruction of selected units using common Web-based multimedia learning resources.



This created a virtual transatlantic classroom with internationally integrated peer-based learning opportunities. Advanced digital technologies, including remote video/audio connections, 3D, and animation, as well as chat rooms and email, are used to enhance learning and build relationships in an international context. Subsequently, transatlantic student and faculty exchanges reinforced the technology enabled relationships, promoted cultural experiences, and continued the collaborative learning in automotive technology.

This project united the practice of transatlantic exchanges and distance learning to establish an international dimension often not available in this field of vocational education. The overall learning outcomes of this project were for students to understand some of the similarities and differences of the American and European automobile industry while essentially learning the same technical content.

These experiences enhanced international work skills of all students with more intensive learning opportunities for the mobile students participating in the actual exchange. The non mobile students, who were not able to take time away from family and work responsibilities, benefited from the international peer-based learning made possible via technology, as well as through working with visiting exchange students and with their college classmates upon their return from the international experience.

This purposeful integration of international concepts into the learning experience of both mobile and non-mobile students removed barriers to international education often encountered by adult students with limitations to participation in extended exchange activities due to financial and family responsibilities.

For the Trans Auto TEC mobile students, the exchange experience was an intense month of activities, including staying with a host family and linking with another automotive student in the classroom and the workplace. Another unique aspect of the Trans Auto TEC Project was the Global Automotive Symposium that occurred as the European students visited the U.S. campuses. The Symposium in Detroit brought together the visiting students and faculty from Germany, Portugal and England with associate degree automotive students from colleges in Wisconsin, Illinois and Michigan. Sponsored by General Motors, the group visited automotive related sites to learn together about the U.S. automotive industry. The U.S. student participants in the symposium were those planning an exchange to Europe later that spring as well as their classroom peers who were not participating in the exchange. Additionally, the students had the opportunity to prepare for the cross-cultural and language challenges of the IPFS course.

Partnerships with private corporations like Volkswagen and General Motors enhanced the resources available to the faculty to create a new course entitled "Global Automotive Market." The new course established a permanent credit vehicle for integrating international learning about the automotive industry into the associate degree program.

As a result, the TransAutoTEC project strengthened the internationalization of vocational activities and perspectives on campus while providing foundation and rationale for the more academic components of international study focused on language and culture. This project also has served as a model for internationalisation of other technical programs to prepare students for working in a global economy."



Section 3.7: Higher Education's Contribution to Australia's Economic, Social and Cultural Capital

26 Do you believe that knowledge transfer and community engagement are legitimate and appropriate roles for contemporary higher education institutions? If so, how do you see this additional role for the higher education sector blending with its traditional roles and are there limits to these additional roles?

This is an essential role however the difficulty would be in defining 'community'. A sophisticated entity which brings to together bodies such as Industry Skills Councils, Local Learner Employer Networks, Economic/Innovative Educationalists, Higher Education, VET and others would need to be established. Such an entity would be responsible for strategic implementation.

Section 3.9: Governance and Regulation

32 Is the level of regulation in the sector appropriate? If not, why not, and what should be done to reduce the level of regulation?

The level of regulation in the sector is high but is not necessarily effective. The AQTF is not assisted in removing unsatisfactory performers from the sector and there are numerous other areas where individual regulations and audit activity overlap and could be streamlined e.g. audits by the Nursing Board, Worksafe, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, NEACS, DEEWR, DEST, that relate to our training and delivery, when the strength of these programs can really be tested by AQTF or ISO audit activity.

SUMMARY

This submission demonstrates the commitment of the Gordon Institute of TAFE to assist in building a more competitive, smarter, more responsive higher education system. As a leading provider of higher education, the Gordon Institute of TAFE recognises the positive relationship between education achievement and workforce productivity. In adapting to the ever changing demands of our clients, the Gordon Institute of TAFE produces highly skilled graduates and contributes positively to generating new knowledge and facilitates the transfer of applications of knowledge.

This submission has addressed the need for high level skills; access and participation issues; the need for a stimulating learning environment; connectivity of the institution with other higher education stakeholders; international markets; resources, governance and regulatory matters.

An unanticipated outcome of attempts to increase participation in the higher education sector may be a decline in vocational education and training. This is of concern given that some research states labour market trends indicate a need over the next ten years for more people to obtain vocational education and training qualifications than higher education qualifications.⁹ It is estimated that four million people will need to acquire higher education or vocational education and training qualifications to meet the expected skill needs during 2006-2016.¹⁰

⁹ Review of Australian Higher Education: Discussion Paper, *Department of Education, Education and Workplace Relations*, June 2008, p.22.

¹⁰ Review of Australian Higher Education: Discussion Paper, *Department of Education, Education and Workplace Relations*, June 2008, p.41.



Further compounding the problem of higher education participation is that vocational education and training attracts more low SES students than the higher education system. People from low SES backgrounds are one third as likely to participate in higher education than people from high SES backgrounds.¹¹

It is an central tenet of this paper, as noted in the discussion paper, that vocational education and training qualifications are positive outcomes in their own right; this sector should not be viewed as a 'feeder' to higher education.¹²

The Gordon Institute of TAFE looks forward to reading submissions from others that seek to promote a more effective, competitive and responsive higher education and vocational education training system.



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¹¹ Review of Australian Higher Education: Discussion Paper, *Department of Education, Education and Workplace Relations*, June 2008, p.29.

¹² Review of Australian Higher Education: Discussion Paper, *Department of Education, Education and Workplace Relations*, June 2008, p.40.

