

## **YARRA VALLEY EDUCATIONAL PRECINCT COMMITTEE**

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### **Inquiry into Technical and Further Education in Australia by the Senate Education and Employment References Committee**

Dear Committee Members

This submission replaces and expands our submission to the 2013 House of Representative Inquiry by the Standing committee on Education and Employment on the role of the technical and further education system and its operation.

The Yarra Valley Educational Precinct Committee represents the concerns of residents, businesses, schools and community groups of Melbourne's Outer East with regard to the level of provision of higher education and training within our region. The LGA's closer to metropolitan Melbourne, Knox and Maroondah, have a greater proportion of residents with higher education qualifications compared to the Yarra Ranges. The 2011 ABS Census data shows the following statistics for Highest attainment (15-64 years)

<u>Highest level attained</u>	<u>Yarra Ranges</u>	<u>Metro Australia</u>
Postgraduate Degree	2.1%	5.0%
Graduate Diploma	2.1%	2.1%
Bachelor Degree	11.4%	17.3%

With regard to Vocational qualifications at the Certificate III and IV levels, the most attained qualification level for all three LGAs reveal that Yarra Ranges has a larger proportion of these certificates at 36% of their population compared to Knox and Maroondah at 31% and 29% respectively. Following the closure of the Lilydale Campus of Swinburne University of Technology there is no higher education provision in this region and the provision of Technical and Further Education has been reduced. There is no longer any TAFE provision for automotive or hospitality. Swinburne TAFE played a vital role in the promotion of such courses both to individuals and local industry.

Organisations such as the LLEN have been working to improve outcomes for young people in the Outer East and data over the past five years reflects improvement in engagement, aspiration and achievement. During this time, VET enrolment numbers of young people from Yarra Ranges has risen from 1379 to 1689. Local education provision and opportunities for students to gain entry level local employment supported by further training is critical to the future of the region. In the On-Track Reports over the past 5 years many young people in the Outer East have identified travel distance as a barrier to further education. The presence of the facility at Lilydale was a key factor in improved engagement in the past five years. However, with the closure of the Lilydale Campus and the transfer of Vocational Educational and Training facilities to Wantirna, Croydon or Hawthorne distance for some is now once again an issue and for many travelling to these areas is just not an option. These students are being deprived of the opportunity for further education and training.

The provision of a campus for Technical and Further Education at Lilydale did, and will, provide an excellent link between secondary and higher education. The size and location of the campus encouraged students who felt uncomfortable with the notion of attending a large and impersonal institution or who were deterred by having to travel outside their community

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to commence a post-secondary course of study. This campus provided students with pathways to further education and employment. They were able to participate in TAFE and following success there proceed to Higher Education, sometimes with credit being given for their TAFE. For many of these students, success in a supportive higher education environment encouraged them to proceed to further study enabling them to improve themselves and increase their life, education, skill levels and employment prospects.

The Outer Eastern Metropolitan region contains low socio economic pockets, significant population of young Indigenous people, high levels of student disengagement and low levels of tertiary and vocational education. The low participation rates in higher education and training in the outer east can be linked to several factors which affect the affordability and accessibility of TAFE to students and business. These include:

- low aspirations,
- levels of social disadvantage,
- institutional poverty and high levels of welfare dependency

All of these factors are in part are influenced by issues of

- distance and geographic isolation
- rural isolation issues and
- the lack of re-training opportunities for employees.

The Yarra Valley experience has been that unless there is a traditionally defined education and training market which will ensure a flow of fee paying enrolments, usually at the higher end of the AQF, then existing TAFE and University institutions are unwilling to establish a geographic presence and offer a range of courses appropriate to the individual needs within our catchment area. The “market” model does not encourage traditional institutions to make extensive provision of pathway and equity type courses which might lie outside conventionally defined qualification and funding frameworks. Within the prevailing funding climate there is also no encouragement, as happened in the recent past, for TAFE institutes to cross subsidize from high enrolment/fee/qualification courses to customized equity based courses for disadvantaged groups.

Many of the larger metropolitan based TAFE institutes have now moved into that space once occupied by Colleges of Advanced Education before they were granted university status under the Dawkins reforms. This shift has re-opened up the space for equity and disadvantaged basic education and training provision that the Kangan Report of 1974 identified and used as a partial basis for the establishment of a national approach to technical and further education. Our experience through the work of YVEPC is a growing need for that provision in the Yarra Valley, particularly when the established institutions are unwilling to enter this “market”.

The present arrangements of funding to TAFE Institutes and Universities reinforce a traditional high end approach to course provision from which a paradox emerges with regard to the interpretation of education and training markets. Meeting demand is measured by enrolments for defined course offerings; however, what is needed within segmented population and geographic groups is often not part of the formally defined market and success measures.

The 2012 on track data for 2013 indicated that 26.1% of students in Yarra Ranges (of the surveyed students) indicated that they never intended to study whereas for Victoria it is 22.0. This imbalance needs to be addressed.

The Committee is concerned that indigenous programs, and other programs such as those for disabled students and those for women wishing to return to the work force that were provided by Swinburne University of Technology in Lilydale, will no longer be easily

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accessible for this community. The ongoing availability of tertiary and vocational education at Lilydale will act as a positive incentive for many disadvantaged people to continue their education and will also assist in meeting the demand for skilled labour across the region. The current situation discriminates against those who seek basic skills training in literacy, numeracy and work preparedness.

With the structural changes taking place in the Australian economy there is now an even greater need for re-training facilities. It is interesting to note in the 2011 ABS Census that 12.5% of the population was engaged in Manufacturing compared to 9.2% in Metro Australia; 13.1% in Construction compared with 8.1%; and only 5.9% in Professional, Scientific and Technical Services compared with 8.6%. This Census also shows discrepancies in the Occupation of employment of persons aged 15 and over with Professionals being 17.2% compared with 23.6% for Metro Australia; Technicians and Trades Workers being 18.9% compared with 13.5%; and Labourers 9.6% compared with 8.2%.

The closure of the Swinburne facilities has had a very significant impact upon the availability and cost of the VET in Schools programs in the region limiting the access of students in Government, Catholic and Independent schools to these programs.

Once part of the existing site is secured for educational purposes we propose that a different, community model of higher and vocational education be provided where schools and post-secondary educational providers work together rather than in competition. The cooperative model we propose is an educational hub that incorporates child care, primary and secondary vocational education, post-secondary vocational and higher education, re-training programs as well as parent education and special provision for educational programs for people with disabilities and social inclusion with programs for indigenous people, refugee and others with special needs. Positive links link with Trade Training Centres in the region should be encouraged.

We recognise that innovative forms of higher education and training will need to be considered including a variety of forms of cooperation between various educational institutions, industry groups and the community. We believe that such a model would have long term benefits including capacity building; reduction in welfare payments; and a reduction in generational poverty.

Swinburne University of Technology intends to call for Expressions of Interest in purchasing this site through the provision of VET Programs, Secondary School programs, Adult Further Education programs and Higher Education university programs. Any provider will require some support to establish operations on site and for a period of time that will be required to increase enrolments once again to viable numbers.

We urgently seek your support and commitment to the retention of the provision of higher education and training at the Swinburne site in Lilydale to enable a smooth transition to ongoing delivery for all levels of higher education and training by 2015.

Yours sincerely

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