

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The terms of reference

1.1 The Committee's inquiry into the appropriate roles of TAFE and the extent to which they should overlap with universities was prompted by the Committee's concern that conflict was occurring at the boundaries between TAFE and higher education. While some overlap between the vocational education and training (VET) and university sectors is inevitable and, perhaps desirable, the Committee wants to ensure that any conflict arising does not diminish the core functions of either TAFE or universities. Consequently the Committee believes that the issue stands to benefit from examination and debate.

1.2 It is some 24 years since the Kangan¹ report led the way to Commonwealth Government recognition of TAFE as an educational sector in its own right. More recent policy changes have recognised and encouraged the development of a wider VET sector within which TAFE is still the major player. However, TAFE no longer enjoys the protection of being a government monopoly and the only officially recognised VET provider.² In the light of these recent developments it is timely to re-examine the roles of TAFE.

1.3 TAFE is a creature of the State and Territory Governments. However, Commonwealth financial contributions to TAFE and to VET generally are significant and successive Commonwealth Governments have vigorously pursued national objectives in VET policy. It is this Commonwealth activity and expenditure and TAFE's articulation with universities which entitles the Committee to look generally at what would otherwise be the sole domain of State and Territory governments. An account of the conduct of the inquiry is at Appendix I.

1.4 The Committee is favourably disposed towards TAFE and this inquiry has been entirely constructive, apolitical in its intentions and initiated without predetermined outcomes. As such the Committee is disappointed that some State governments saw fit to discourage their TAFE sectors' participation. On the other hand, the Committee was delighted to receive many constructive and detailed submissions from TAFE institutes, TAFE associations, TAFE teachers, dual sector institutions, universities and many other interested parties. The list of submissions to the inquiry is at Appendix II.

1 *TAFE in Australia: Report on needs in technical and further education*, Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education (ACOTAFE), Australian Government Publishing Service, April 1974.

2 Mr Terry Moran, Chief Executive Officer, ANTA, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 646.

What is TAFE?

1.5 'TAFE' is an acronym for Technical and Further Education. Over the last 20 years the term 'TAFE' has been adopted in general usage to denote an individual college or institute of TAFE, or the entire TAFE sector, run by State and Territory governments. In this report the term 'TAFE' will be used to denote the entire government sector and individual colleges or institutes will be referred to as such. The term 'VET' will be used to refer to the entire vocational education and training sector of which TAFE is one, albeit large, part along with a vast array of private and community providers.

1.6 The basic facts about TAFE are impressive. TAFE is large, diverse and widely dispersed. In a typical year about 80 TAFE institutes operate on over 300 campuses³ around Australia, delivering vocational and personal enrichment programs to more than 1.2 million people.⁴ Existing TAFE infrastructure is estimated to be worth between \$6 billion and \$7 billion.⁵

1.7 The flow of university graduates to TAFE at over 52,000 in 1996 was about four and one half times greater than the number of TAFE students admitted to university on the basis of their TAFE studies.⁶ Unmet demand for VET places is greater than unmet demand for higher education places.⁷ Clearly TAFE is vital to the social and economic health and development of Australia. Its particular place in the VET market is explored in Chapter 2.

1.8 Perceptions of TAFE are usually based on widely varying individual experiences: an apprenticeship undertaken long ago, a spouse's diploma, a niece, nephew, son or daughter's traineeship or apprenticeship, a neighbour's art class or an evening computer course. The list is almost endless. As a consequence, TAFE is many different things to different people and, whilst generally well regarded, it may suffer from the lack of a clear and coherent public image. The need to build TAFE's status is a recurring theme in this report.

TAFE and Higher Education

1.9 To enable a meaningful examination of the area of overlap between TAFE and universities it is necessary to have a working definition of the role of higher education and an understanding of the distinctions between TAFE and universities. The issue is complicated by the fact that higher education is not an homogenous sector. Australian universities have diverse histories and

3 Mr Christopher Robinson, Managing Director, NCVER, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 119; The number of institutes and campuses is not static. See NCVER, *Exhibit No.24*, Appendix D, p. 144.

4 NCVER, *Exhibit No.24*, Tables 1a & 1b, pp. 6 & 7.

5 Mr Terry Moran, Chief Executive Officer, ANTA, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 657; and see *Report of the Review of the ANTA Agreement*, AGPS, 1996, p.115.

6 Australian National Training Authority, *Exhibit No.30*, p. 7. For further discussion of this statistic see Chapter 5.

7 NCVER, *Submission No. 49*, p. 3

each actively promotes its strengths and unique characteristics to prospective students.

*Australia has a unified national system of universities, of which diversity and autonomy are central features. Each institution has the freedom to specify its own mission and purpose, modes of teaching and research, constitution of the student body and the range of educational programs.*⁸
[AVCC]

1.10 While TAFE's focus is primarily on vocational education with a substantial supporting interest in general education, it cannot be seriously argued that universities are focussed exclusively on the advancement and dissemination of knowledge for its own sake. Universities also teach vocational courses such as accountancy, architecture, engineering, law, dentistry, medicine, nursing and veterinary science which require students to successfully master a significant body of both theory and practical skills. They quite properly belong in universities.

*The role of Australia's universities is the creation, preservation and transmission of knowledge. Besides undergraduate teaching, the universities' roles include research, postgraduate education, consultancy and the provision of expert advice and comment on issues of national and international importance.*⁹ [AVCC]

1.11 However, it is also true that the standing of individual universities and of particular faculties is highly dependent on the value that employers of the professions place on the employability of graduates. Some university courses clearly have a vocational focus and some universities are more vocational in their orientation and philosophy than others but fundamental differences remain between TAFE and higher education.

*The fundamental difference between the TAFE institutes and the universities is the strong link between the TAFE institutes and the workplace. A large proportion of VET students are mature age and are already in work — their motivation in undertaking courses is to upgrade their skills. Another set of VET students are apprentices or trainees, directly linked to the workplace through a contract-of-training.*¹⁰ [NCVER]

The significant difference I see between TAFE operations and university operations...is that clearly the TAFE programs are relatively shorter-term, very focussed in terms of what they are on about, and very much applied. I

8 *University Facts 1997*, www.avcc.edu.au/avcc/pubs/facts97/f97unis.htm (as at 29 April 98)

9 *ibid.*

10 *Submission No. 49*, p. 11.

think one of the fundamental differences between TAFE training and education and university training and education is that the vast bulk of our programs are not intending, really, to set people up with a total educational framework for life. We are very much concerned with what people want to do now, for the next year or two, and the expectation and the reality in most cases is that people then come and take another sample a couple of years down the track to upgrade and update their skills.¹¹ [Mr Barrie Baker, Director, South West Institute of TAFE, Vic]

1.12 The TAFE and higher education sectors overlap where they meet at the diploma and advanced diploma level in the Australian Qualifications Framework (*see* Table 1.1). The cooperation and competition between the sectors at this level is discussed along with some resultant anomalies in Chapter 5.

Table 1: Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) Qualifications¹²

Schools sector	VET sector	Higher education sector
		Doctoral degree
		Masters degree
		Graduate Diploma
		Graduate Certificate
		Bachelor Degree
	Advanced Diploma	Advanced Diploma
	Diploma	Diploma
	Certificate IV	
	Certificate III	
Senior Secondary	Certificate II	
Certificate of Education	Certificate I	

11 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 340.

12 Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (1996) *see* ANTA, *Submission No. 49*, p. 10.

1.13 There are demographic factors spurring competition at the interface between TAFE and universities. There has been a decline of almost 10 per cent in the population of young people aged 15-19 years between 1990 and 1995.¹³ Combined with declining high school retention rates, this had reduced the pool of school leavers eligible for university entrance by about 18,000 between 1992 and 1995.¹⁴

*The decline in the population in these younger age groups has had serious ramifications for the higher education sector in terms of declining student numbers and associated government funding. In part, the move by universities to diversify and 'drift downwards' by introducing associate degrees is a direct response to the funding imperative brought about by the decline in the 15-19 year old population.*¹⁵ [ANTA]

1.14 Demand for higher education by school leavers has been further reduced in the short term by recent increases in HECS charges.¹⁶ One apparent consequence of this pressure on universities is a more generous approach to credit transfer for TAFE studies and an increase in the admission of TAFE graduates to university courses¹⁷ on the part of universities.

The status of TAFE

1.15 It is clear to the Committee that TAFE, and the programs it offers deserves to enjoy higher status in the community. As stated earlier, the need to build the status of TAFE is a recurring theme throughout this report. TAFE programs are quality programs with some institutes and programs earning national and international recognition. It is an untold story with the serious and unfortunate consequence that prospective students, particularly school leavers, may overlook the educational and career opportunities accessible through TAFE.

*TAFE needs a more clearly defined role: it has been viewed as not schools and not higher education by many people, rather than being viewed in a positive light as the right choice to meet particular needs.*¹⁸ [Tasmanian Government]

1.16 It is the Committee's intention that this report should lead to State, Territory and Commonwealth Government agreement on a publicly

13 Ibid, p. 4.

14 ANTA, *Submission to the Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy, Annex C*, p. 49.

15 *Submission No. 49*, p. 5.

16 Associate Professor Bruce King, University of South Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 135.

17 Lewis, D, *Procedures and Outcomes for NSW and ACT Universities*, DEETYA, 1997, p. 77.

18 *Submission No. 74*, p. 3.

enunciated vision and mission for TAFE. Government action at State/Territory and Commonwealth level should be to enhance the status and capacity of TAFE, raising awareness of its programs.

1.17 While the Committee found that TAFE institutes have a clear sense of their role and mission, Governments at both Commonwealth and State/Territory levels have not clearly articulated their vision for and expectations of TAFE. The Committee has identified the following as the key roles of TAFE:

- Vocational education;
- Adult and community education;
- Second chance education; and
- Special needs education.

The structure of the report

1.18 TAFE's focus and its major area of activity is the provision of high quality vocational education and training. However, it is obvious that this is not the limit to TAFE's wide spread of activities, many of which are ancillary to its core VET role. The Committee has attempted to identify activities of TAFE and relate them to its core roles. Of most social and economic significance to Australia and individual Australians is TAFE's role as the pre-eminent provider of VET for industry and individuals and of open 'second chance' education.

1.19 The structure of this report is as follows. Most TAFE programs can be related to its VET and community service roles which are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively. The report identifies the significant emerging roles for TAFE separately in Chapter 4, discusses TAFE's interface with higher education in Chapter 5 and funding and administrative issues in Chapter 6.