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The Secretary
House of Representatives standing Committee on Employment
Education and Workplace Relations
R1, 116 Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Sir

The committee may wish to explore some of the issues I have attempted to raise in the attached paper. The original paper and thinking were in relation to a youth issues submission, the present offering was put together in haste to show needs of the older group.

What needs to be borne in mind is that the Labour markets are interlinked and while our older group do have special needs, they cannot be resolved in isolation from the needs of employers and the demands of the wider labour market.

I would be pleased to speak to the submission or answer further questions if the Committee would so desire.

Yours faithfully

Patrick A O'Neill

A Policy Discussion Paper
"How to Generate Better Educational and Employment Opportunities
P. A. (Tony) O'Neill

This policy discussion arose in part from a series of seminars forming the subject Education Policy, Schools and Society offered at The University of Melbourne in second semester 1998, it was also originally a response to a call for submissions by the Australian Youth Bureau for research papers. This paper sets out some research proposals, which in turn envisage a full scale research project to investigate ways and means of bringing valued educational outcomes to people in rural communities and attempting to develop enterprising employment generating opportunities.

One of the more important papers in the seminar series was that by David Labaree (1997) entitled "Public Goods, Private Goods: The Struggle over Educational Goals, Labaree offers a wide ranging sociological review of contradictions and tensions and educational conflicts within the American educational system.

Labaree sets down his diverse educational objectives which he would see as 1) Democratic equality, 2) Social Efficiency 3) Social mobility, each of themselves highly commendable policy objectives. What Labaree shows so clearly are the implications that follow when these issues become muddled, when the objective setting and the goal attainment become obscure, and when the evaluation processes become confused. The paper deserves close examination in its own right as an American work, because it highlights some of the dilemmas of an educational system and shows the political issues in sharp detail. What will also be argued here is that the work translates almost directly to the Australian environment. Accordingly, and given the relative lack of local public discussion it would seem appropriate to use the headings at least, in the Australian context, in an attempt to derive a set of useful and workable policy recommendations against a background of continuing high level unemployment in general and excessively high rates of youth and mature aged unemployment in rural areas.

Labaree sets out his review as follows, he outlines his three goals with related definitions and examines factors in support of each, he then examines some of the interactions when the interests as defined come into conflict. The democratic Equality approach is seen as one that argues "...a democratic society cannot persist unless it prepares all its young with equal care to take on the full responsibilities of citizenship in a competent manner." The social efficiency approach is seen as arguing that "our economic well being depends on our ability to prepare the young to carry out useful economic roles with competence" (emphasis added) The social mobility approach argues that "education is a commodity, the only purpose of which is to provide individual students with a competitive advantage in the struggle for desirable social positions."

Concurrently there has been a growing recognition of the need(s) of older workers to retrain so that they can hold down positions in a constantly changing labour market.

In this situation the political system comes under stress when people with narrow interests become lobbyists and can exercise a disproportionate amount of influence in a fluid situation. Richard Bowman reporting on the current state of teaching notes that teachers perform a role that is intrinsic to the development of a successful, happy, caring society."

(Teaching in Crisis, Melbourne "Age" 9/6/98). Bowman also notes in a comment on the notion of inclusive curriculum that "Schools now have a responsibility for teaching everything from water safety to sex education. And parents are only too ready to devolve responsibility for things that go wrong with their children's development away from the home and on to the school." These problems continue. The system does not greatly concern itself with occupational outcomes per se but still focuses primarily on further educational outcomes for its students.

The point being made here is that the secondary school system is not user friendly to an adult population who may need to return to basic schooling before they can move on to some of the advanced studies obtainable in the post secondary sector and which are arguably the ones most required to obtain the desired vocational outcome i.e. a job.

The critical issue that requires further examination is one of re entry to the workplace. For Bowman, who is actually reviewing the Senate Committee report on the teaching profession "Career education, vocational education and establishing links with business and industry are new skills that many teachers have had to cultivate." As Labaree would have it "Then as now, the simple reality is that students eventually leave school and enter the workforce, whether or not their schooling prepared them to carry out this work effectively." (Page 47) Some of the remainder of this paper will be dedicated to the problem of school to work transition as it would seem that the issue is being barely dealt with in a morass of other additions to the curriculum, more or less constant change and an expansion of school based assessment. Some will deal with the needs of older workers to access the system at times appropriate to their needs.

Elsewhere in the seminar series there is a paper entitled Is there a crisis in Government schools? Of course Not! By Geoff Spring of the Victorian Department of Education. Spring points out with some pride that the "key goal or mission of the reform process has been to give young people in Victoria the best chance for the future through helping each child reach his or her full potential".

In several pages of self praise the term "research" is not in evidence. In a different forum Richard White summarises some of the issues in a review of research on learning, curriculum and assessment. In referring to the broader question of research White notes "Teachers work in complex social context, a tough world in which they must from moment to moment take a wide range of decisions." White R T (1992)

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In the same wide ranging article White notes:-"No doubt everyone wants education to provide quality learning. All that is in debate is how to secure it. The message from research is that the present system, in a wide range of countries, is not doing it well. Shallow learning is common. It is time to try prescribing less content, to trust teachers with more power to determine what and how they teach, and to provide them with diverse methods of assessing whether they have met this greater responsibility by enhancing the quality of their students' learning."

The sections which follow attempt to bridge some of the gaps in a secondary program which aims to maximise potentials or at least "give young peoplethe best chance for the future....". (Spring G) The essential argument is that as a community we can and should do better than leave the issue to chance. On pragmatic grounds alone if we expect our young people to be entrepreneurs we ought to provide them with genuinely valid entrepreneurial skills. Conversely the system should have or develop the capacity to reshape the values and attitudes of older workers and refit them for work in the changed environment.

The proposals here will attempt to take diverse people through the transition process and place them in the workforce. No attempt is made here to inculcate values of citizenship or even the moral values so cherished by earlier educators. The role attempted here is to prepare students for the thrust and parry of the internationally competitive environment and world best practice as defined by the Minister and his senior bureaucrats. At times there does seem to be an ancient ring about the wording that is more reminiscent of the educational philosophies of the Spartans rather than of the Athenians, but that's progress.

The proposal will briefly review attempts to derive equitable solutions to an ongoing problem which has severe impacts on the welfare of young people and the mature aged in rural communities including increasing usage of alcohol, drugs of dependence, increasing homelessness and the strong probability of links to increasing youth suicide.

The problem of rural youth was stated fairly succinctly by in the report "Youth Employment: A Working Solution" completed by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (P 24) in September 1997.

"Together with the factors influencing employment opportunities which they share with urban Australians, young people who live outside the capital cities face additional problems in finding employment. The full time unemployment rate for young people aged 15 to 24 living outside the capital cities was 21.1 in June 1997 In country areas there are fewer employment and educational opportunities than exist in most urban areas and there is consequently some pressure on young people to relocate to areas of higher opportunity."

A STRATEGIC REVIEW

The quotation set out above sets the problem in one context but as will be argued later there are multiple contexts which need to be examined to derive solutions aimed at overcoming the handicaps that are created in a wider strategic environment.

Part of the broader context was described by the Committee on Employment Opportunities as follows "In the short term our (Australian economic) growth prospects will be determined primarily by conditions in the farm sector and in world markets, consumer and investor confidence and existing Government policies." (P44) the report goes on to note that progress to the end of 1993 had been "disappointingly slow."

The report was also future looking in its comment that:- In the medium to longer term our growth rate will be determined by our ability to take advantage of innovations and achieve growth, the level of investment and saving, the extent to which the economy tends to generate inflation at higher levels, of capacity utilization, and (especially given our higher levels of foreign debt) developments in the world economy." (Restoring Full Employment, A Discussion Paper, AGPS 1993)

At a broader level Labaree (1997) has identified three roles of American education with the attendant conflicting demands in educational systems of trying to be all things to all students. From the three models Labaree has identified:- the model of democratic equality, the model of social mobility and the model of social efficiency, what will be argued here is that the last named model is of most value to younger and older people in rural settings in Australia. The broad parameters of their role of citizens has been almost set by the time they can leave school.

For a large proportion of our young people not only can they vote, they are required to do so. It can also be argued that the extent of their social mobility will be constrained by the limits of the social efficiency model if their twelve years of expensive education only fits them for roles as highly educated recipients of Social Security payments.

The problem for older workers is exacerbated in that they may be committed to mortgages and their own children's education and unable to move to areas where labour market opportunities are more favourable.

What is sought here is to derive a particularly Australian notion of a social efficiency model at a time when resources in schools are under pressure and there is no room for the confusions and contradictions which Labaree finds in the American system. Labaree D. F. (1997)

The essence of this paper is that while total employment remains stubbornly around 8% our and youth unemployment at 30%, our educational systems should be used to more positively assist in the transition from school to work and in re educating older displaced workers. In tracing a recent history of the social efficiency goal in American schools Labaree and others note that while different groups "disagreed about the desired effect of this effort on social mobility, they united in the conviction that schools were in danger of becoming socially irrelevant and economically counterproductive unless they succeeded in better articulating educational content with future job requirements"(Lazerson & Grubb 1974)

One other aim of this paper is to propose forms of educational needs assessment and delivery that would serve to translate such economic prescriptions as those set out above into educational objectives with enhanced meanings in rural contexts.

Another purpose of this paper will be to show that in parts of Victoria and adjoining states the local employment/unemployment situation has got worse and is deteriorating relative to the benchmark figure found by the House of Representatives Standing Committee. In the period that has elapsed since the report was brought down much of south eastern Australia has endured dry to drought conditions and parts of Gippsland and Central New South Wales have been ravaged by flood waters. More recently the local economy has been buffeted by the "Asian Crisis".

With the availability of the latest Census data it is possible to show that the population of some country centres has declined over the inter censal period 1991 to 1996 with the highly probable consequent loss of confidence and decrease in business opportunities that follow such losses in provincial centres.

A further aim of this project is to add supplementary and current information to that provided by the House of Representatives Standing Committee providing an update of selected unemployment rates in particular districts in three States so that any policy contribution to a program of remedial action could be more closely targeted to the emerging needs as these are shown in higher unemployment rates, and longer durations of unemployment.

The National Youth Affairs Scheme takes as a given:- "The underlying premise for this research is that access to education and training and employment generation for young people is a fundamental issue for young people living in rural areas." NYARS Research Brief(1998)

The view taken here is the intent only goes so far, and needs to be qualified by the notion that employment other than self employment is conditional on a contract of employment being struck with a willing employer. This point will be returned to a number of times to justify employer involvement in the selection/presentation of curriculum offerings and the attainment of longer term social goals relevant to the creation of employment generating opportunities". What will also be argued is that in

small centres the idea of self employment, can be most usefully linked to a period of prior employment and a continuity of related activity at the end of a period of formal employment.

The paper will then seek to develop a working strategy as to how an alternative method of education and training delivery might work to overcome some of the known disadvantages facing people in rural environments. The paper will attempt to discern social costs and benefits of a possible project and in a later section propose an action based methodology to test an alternative delivery mode(s) for viability before extensive commitments are made.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

The project intends to conceptually package the education and training offerings of centrally located urban educational facilities and place them before prospective employers and trainees in remote areas to provide previously unavailable choices to trainees and prospective employers. The project aims to identify areas of unmet educational needs before training resources are locked into courses that may or may not be fully supported in an urban setting, or courses developed and finalised that overlook the needs of rural workers.

As a matter of policy it would seem appropriate to A) ascertain if there are or are not cheaper and more effective ways of getting training and expertise out of capital cities to where it is needed, without the difficulties and expense of establishing remote campuses and B) ensuring that students and young workers in remote areas can access a broader level of educational choices than the population of a district might normally seem able to support.

What is sought here are cost effective means of bringing equity to a situation where people in the bush often miss out on current educational products because of the time and distances involved in getting to where the best industry training takes place.

While further work is required, questions as to how complex learning materials might be distributed have been addressed by in part by the "Education Broadband Reference Group and their paper "The Future is Already Here, A National Strategy For Australian Education and Training to Maximise Opportunities Offered by High Capacity Communication Services." The paper itself may be accessed on the Internet at: <http://www.oltc.edu.au/reports/broadband/report.htm> The general purpose of the paper is to argue for a high technology strategy aiming to make full use of the "communication services environment, which is increasingly becoming part of the Australian way of life." Carr J, Feb 1997 (Chairperson, Education Broadband Reference Group)

In summary the group would argue that "High capacity (broadband) communication services will influence, significantly, the redesign of learning because they have the potential to:-
 transform the pattern of delivery of education and training
 enhance access to educational programs and resources that would otherwise not be available; and
 increase the amount, type and speed of information to allow synchronous (real time) and asynchronous (delayed time) learning. (Page 2 of the report)

The roles of the Internet and other service providers need to be more fully resolved, but in general terms the position taken here is that unemployed workers need as a matter of high priority ways and means of accessing Web data and other distance overcoming educational services.

Apart from purpose designed regional tele tutorial centres, the next most useful centres maybe local or school based libraries with developed Internet access sites that can be made available to older learners. One exciting possibility which is beyond the scope of this paper would be to imagine a floating class room, conference centre, and workshop facility cruising the Australian coast from Adelaide to Cairns offering educational access to probably 90% of the country's coastal population.

SOME WORKPLACE REALITIES

The model chosen for this paper is based on modules of training that are currently found in boat building. The reason for this choice will be made clear later but in the short term it can be argued that the skills provided in such a course have a wide range of applications in rural areas and a high possibility of self employment outcomes. Firstly there is boating of and in itself which can be an attractive tourist activity and which encourages visitors to come to an area. Boating and fishing can support and strengthen existing tourism promotion efforts by seeking to extend visitation periods, for example by making canoes or small boats available on a hire basis in suitable localities and supplying value added discovery excursions or providing add on teaching programs to basic hire services.

It will be argued that boat building skills as one example could help to minimise the effects of seasonal variations and operate across different industry sectors. Fabrication can be undertaken in "off" non harvest periods or when visitors are not traveling, and any surplus craft produced can either be sold or rented locally before the major visiting season.

More importantly boat building skills are cross sectoral which is to say generic to a number of sectors in the rural environment including home building, as well as the construction or manufacture or development of farm buildings and farm equipment which tend to be one off projects. Some particular skills from the boat building curriculum apart from plan

reading, measuring, cutting, and so forth include fibreglass fabrication skills which enjoy some level of demand in the rural sector for units such as spray tanks, vehicle body parts, mudguard replacements, and a wider range of products which can be fabricated on site easily and quickly using fibreglass e.g. utility canopies, stock feed containers and the like. Similarly there are specialist skills in areas such as welding of stainless steel and aluminum which have specific boat building applications, but can also be applied in large measure in agricultural pursuits.

The point needs to be made here that the boat building modules are not the only ones that are capable of being repackaged and promoted in the bush, but are seen here only as a working example of a broader attempt to get training out to where it is needed rather than the burden being continually thrown on prospective trainees to always have to move to where the training is available.

The basic facilities required for effective training often exist in even relatively small centres and provided a concerted effort is made it will often be possible to tap local sources of good will and resources for the use of sheds or work spaces and even the use of capital equipment such as a fibreglass sprayer which can often be unused for much of the year in a smaller centre.

Other skills which have consistently been in high demand in a rural context include those related to diesel engines and skills pertaining to refrigeration, food storage and packaging, and air-conditioning. Most of these skills will remain in the province of skilled tradespersons, but there are requirements and opportunities within the labour market for workers with trade assistant and technician level skills and for farm based repairs where equipment cannot be easily moved off farm to a repair facility. Other emerging skill needs deal with the installation and maintenance of communication and security systems.

A further point to consider is that while some stand alone skills may provide useful benefits for an employer it may be that other skills can have value added to them if they could lead fairly directly to self employment after a period of supervised employment with an original employer. What needs to be understood is that small employers in small centres cannot necessarily always sustain employment over a twelve month period.

It may be that the most useful clusters of skills that could be put on offer are those which would develop self employment qualities within a period of supervised (subsidised) training which would help to develop a new style of relationship between a host company and a trainee that could then stimulate and sustain an ongoing set of links, as in a local supplier of parts, or as contractor and sub contractor on larger projects, or even as an autonomous small business. Nothing in the foregoing would exclude actual forms of partnerships provided all the parties could be convinced they were looking at a genuine business opportunity.

It is not uncommon in rural employment for an apprentice to leave the host employer as soon as the indenture expires by mutual agreement, and then for both to work together on a contract basis as say a carpenter as part of a building team. Similarly other employers might be persuaded to look beyond the immediate term of a traineeship and look to other benefits that could flow into their area from bringing new skills to local communities, especially those skills which add value and which keep local expenditure within the locality.

What is proposed in this instance is to determine if packages which incorporated a given set of technical skills, plus some basic training in small business and a set of computer skills could be successfully promoted to regional employers against a background of meeting community interests as well as the needs of trainers and trainees.

The model in short would attempt to use a variation of the traineeship structure as a shell and as a means of providing employment and training, but would in turn acknowledge the reality of rural employment patterns and provide a set of skills to sustain a trainee in a period(s) of self employment following a program of structured training.

It should be stressed here that self employment is not a viable option for every unemployed person in a rural environment and some form of self assessment and self selection process would seem necessary to limit the number of places taken up. A serious proposal would need the involvement of a prospective trainer or trainers and a highly developed set of objectives as to which outcomes could be attained and how the outcomes would be assessed.

The basic outcomes argued for here would include specific small business management competencies taught at a post secondary level, and adequate computer skills to access, manage or set up a web site for educational and promotional purposes.

One funding approach that may be relevant is that akin to Austudy payments where advanced borrowing within limits may be possible against the value of future living allowances to generate some investment capital for a small business.

One other factor which should not be overlooked is the possibility of concerted action in a rural environment where community support can be a tangible factor in the success of a new venture. Where community interests are at stake community support can be stimulated in smaller centres in ways not normally seen in larger urban centres. The concept of small business in a smaller centre should not be thought of exclusively in terms of sole trader operations. The concept of co-operative structures is better understood in rural situations and indeed some household names in the rural sector started life as low level community based organisations.

It matters little whether a training program is thought of as a traineeship in small business with technical skills forming core units or whether it is seen as an industry unit as in say tourism with working business skills and computer skills added, the critical point is that the program must have a business orientation to add value and to make it equally attractive to employers and trainees alike.

ON MATTERS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Given that the proposal is untried in an Australian context it would seem reasonable to develop a procedure whereby providers of educational and training services could stand in the market or at least offer their services directly to employers in remote areas. It will be argued later that a useful structure now exists with the continued funding of Area Consultative Committees (ACC's) and the continuing operation of group training agencies.

ACC's provide an interface between local employers and local communities and in turn provide a forum within which ideas can be tested. The missing link is a form of training broker who could assess skills shortages at local industry level and search out appropriate providers especially those utilising distance education strategies and to seek appropriate authority to include such training within the ambit of an approved list of courses.

The most radical element in what is being proposed here is the requirement for TAFE colleges, universities and other providers to look for links, or be shown the linkages, and to bring together combinations of courses and units and modules into attractive packages and assess these against employers' needs and link any course provision to the pick up of places.

A simple analogy is to think of a national skills supermarket where selections of training services are presented in packages designed to make them attractive to employers and trainees. In other words supply and demand be brought together so that the course provided is seen as "needed" by employers and is agreed on, so an employment outcome is effectively guaranteed by virtue of the employer assessing the course against their own or local needs AND sponsoring a trainee for an extended period of employment.

The ongoing existence of the group training agencies now provides the necessary and sufficient conditions to support a period of extended employment as well as off and on the job training experiences in areas affected by seasonal employment variables. The development of TAFE's Victorian Virtual Campus provides some insights as to what the future of educational delivery services might look like for rural students.

The Rural Context

The general situation of many smaller rural communities is well known at least in stereotype. The loss of a local business such as a local pharmacy or doctor or bank, a post office or even a newsagency can often be seen as the last straw for some communities as it often means the town population is not large enough to support that type of business and as a result increasing numbers of people must travel to a larger centre for their necessities, which in turn puts additional pressures on the remaining businesses in town such as the bakery the draper and even the general store. The businesses that remain face a difficult task of competing with businesses in larger centres that enjoy the patronage of more customers, cheaper wholesale prices, better deliveries, economies of scale, a critical mass of prior customers and some prospect of growth in the local economy. More detail of this consolidation process and some up to date Census data is provided in appendix 1

The Employment Context

Youth and mature aged unemployment levels as at June '98 are set down in the following table and broadly can be shown to have remained at levels well above national and state levels of unemployment. Figures for the previous year are in brackets. Current ABS Labour Force Estimates show variations in the non metropolitan, full time employment base in selected areas comparing June on June figures for 1997 and June 1998.

Further details are set down in Appendix 2 which examines selected regions against State totals of employment by full and part time status. The patterns of gains and losses are quite clear as is a lack of growth in employment in non metropolitan Victoria.

Because of high variability in the published figures, some consolidation of statistical regions may have taken place which renders some comparisons difficult and gross variations in excess of 25% should be regarded with caution in the interim pending the issue of revised figures by ABS or definitive confirmation of zoning changes. The unemployment rates cited for the group 15 - 64 might be generally a better indicator of employment trends in a district until such time as accurate time series data can be collated and the full extent of current youth unemployment laid out.

Unemployment Rates (%) JUNE 1998
Figures for June 1997 (in Brackets)
STATISTICAL
DISTRICT 15-19 YEARS 20-24 YEARS 15-64 YEARS
Southern & Eastern (S.A.) 26.2

(27.5) 10.4
 (14.6) 9.8
 (8.5)
 All Gippsland (Victoria) 37.1
 (18.5) 9.4
 (14.1) 14.2
 (12.2)
 Barwon Western (Victoria) 40.2
 (22.2) 7.9
 (26.6) 10.0
 (12.2)
 Lodden Campaspe, Mallee 20.9
 (48.2) 12.0,
 (48.2) 9.7
 (10.9)
 Newcastle
 NSW 27.6
 (31.9) 13.1
 (23.8) 10.0
 (12.7)
 Murray- Murrumbidgee 24.4
 (15.6) 9.0
 (20.1) 7.6
 (8.1)
 Illawarra & South Eastern, NSW 25.6
 (23.2) 19.7
 (13.1) 10.3
 (9.1)

Source ABS Microfiche Labour Force Estimates June 1997 & June 1998

However compared with a national unemployment rate which approximates 8% it can already be seen that young people in country areas carry a huge disproportionate burden of disadvantage as do their local communities. When young people move on to the elusive "greener pastures" of bigger cities not only do they reduce aggregate demand for goods and services in their local area, they often arrive in the urban environment under-resourced to cope with the additional costs of travel and accommodation and tend to need greater access to welfare and support services when they arrive in the larger centre. Simple arithmetic shows that if 50 or 100 young people leave a district in a year they can take with them a substantial spend in terms of a local economy.

e.g. 50 on youth allowance at say \$5000 PA = \$250 000
 100 on benefits at say \$8000 PA = \$800 000

These are substantial figures which small economies can ill afford to lose apart from the social costs involved when towns lose their most valued resource, their young people.

The crucial points which follow from this brief survey of rural youth unemployment and which flow from the discussions with ACC's on their recently published strategic plans, is the need to link sectors such as tourism and primary production with retail and manufacturing in seeking employment opportunities and to look for other cross sectoral ties that provide a basis of skills and skills mobility that effectively permit job seekers to bid for employment opportunities and to develop further skills in diverse sectors rather than one or the other.

THE WIDER ECONOMIC CONTEXT

In his Economic Briefing David Clark writing on the Asian Crisis notes that "There is much more to the world economy than Asia. Asia excluding Japan provides only 10% of the world's output. The developed countries including Japan, provide 80%. (Aust Fin Review 2 Feb 1998).

Clark goes on to suggest that "GDP growth is likely to hit our long term average of 3% per annum ... (and) Sectors with high export dependence will be hit hardest.... (and) ... ABARE expects the value of agricultural exports to still rise over 1998-99 and many minerals will not suffer unduly."

Elsewhere Clark has established the relative values of agriculture and tourism with tourism generating something to the order of 7% of GNP and agriculture 6% and both being excellent earners of export credits. The recent decline in the Australian dollar while making life potentially difficult for importers, has the potential to help mineral producers and Australian exporters of farm products. The devalued currency also makes Australia a more attractive destination for a wider range of budget conscious tourists and especially backpackers from the US, UK and other European countries such as France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and so forth. Comment by recent visitors, suggests South Eastern Australia still has

untapped potential to attract visitors to our relatively unpolluted and natural environment. (Anecdotal evidence, Friendship Force visitors and hosts)

Further Research

It would be necessary to re-evaluate the employment data set out above and begin to set up comparative tables by ACC district which are aligned with ABS statistical divisions and to carry out detailed ratio analyses on a district by district basis to articulate and prioritise needs.

It would be necessary to go through in fine detail the current Strategic Regional Plan(s) 1998 - 2001 and further examine needs assessments of each of the participating ACC's and also to make a detailed examination of current offerings from the university sector, particularly those available through open learning systems, and TAFE offerings especially those with agreed curricula and agreed National Competency Standards mainly available through ANTA (Australian National Training Authority). It would be useful to identify common needs across a range of areas. The Australian training Product Catalogue is available at Website:- www.atpl.net.au.

It would also be useful to check the offerings of various regional private providers who may have specialist skills on offer such as coaching for and knowledge of examination requirements for tickets such as coxswain and Master 5 for those who would seek to gain boat handling and sea faring skills especially as these relate to a growing interest in whale watching off the South Eastern coast and other specific skills relating to eco tourism.

In practical terms there is a need to extract base line data and formulate a data base of potential employers to survey for a definition of training needs and or to test with a specific proposal(s), which in turn pre supposes that some investigation of common needs across each of the ACC regions has been undertaken.

The ACC strategic reports as at mid September 1998 are still "in draft" but reviews of draft reports and sample discussions with Executive officers suggest a set of proposals as outlined above would be well received.

Preliminary discussions identified a number of maritime heritage projects and expansionary plans in tourism that would benefit from access to the skills such as those outlined above. The maritime heritage aspect is not confined to coastal areas, there are a number of serious restoration projects underway particularly along the Murray at centres such as Swan hill, Echuca, Mannum, and Murray Bridge which require specialised skills and which offer innovative training opportunities.

Early discussions with the boat building group at Victoria University of Technology suggest new training modules will be suitable for alternative styles of delivery. Other business related units are already available on a distance education basis from ANTA and RMIT and other providers particularly Customer Service Training, Motivation, Report writing and other units. These units and others currently on offer through Certificate level studies of Small Business or Business Management courses can be combined in unique ways to suit the requirements of a given group.

SERVICE DELIVERY

Service delivery of distance education units could be fairly easily co-ordinated via the group training agencies or in some cases by a local learning centre with or without tutorial assistance. The possibilities of electronic curriculum integration would appear to be limited only by imagination and the restrictions on equipment availability in remote centres. The use of the Internet to promote local towns and their initiatives and their tourism attractions to National and International audiences should not be overlooked. The skills of site management are not beyond the ability levels of country students and businesses, but before making visitors welcome a town must be able to deliver the goods. Which is to say the promised attractions must be available more or less to all comers and at times which suit visitors.

The more practical modules of training remain problematic but it should not be beyond our collective wit to organise the dispersion of resources such as chemicals, moulds, some equipment and an instructor in some ordered way through a round of country visits. It was possible to bring an instructor in ceramics from Melbourne to Swan Hill some twenty years ago, complete with kiln, and at least one enterprising TAFE college was able to put a Mechanical Equipment Handling course on the road so to speak by transporting their heavy equipment round the State on a semi trailer.

With sufficient thought and effective market research, courses that have the most appeal. could be made available to all corners including employers and may in some instances have the capacity to break even or at least recoup the largest proportion of costs. Certainly some of the basic courses on Internet access either are, or would be highly valued in isolated communities when the full potential of the Internet is realised.

The vision of the State Training Service is to make a wider range of TAFE offerings available through on line delivery methods. The vision includes the objectives:-

- establish new more effective relationships between industry, students, service providers and government
- give meaningful expression to "learning through life"
- provide leadership in learning through new technologies
- secure and develop flexible resources for the future" (TAFE Online 2000)

The state of youth unemployment and in particular rural youth unemployment appears to have bipartisan concern at federal level, if not yet bipartisan action. This apparent commitment to improving the future opportunities of rural youth should not evaporate with a period incumbency, to be simply reviewed at the end of the next parliamentary term.

The above proposals are meant to shown one path forward in a difficult area. The problems of small communities are well documented, as are the problems of rural youth. The investment decisions required here are small and incremental and should be supported at least to the level of a pilot program.

A COURSE OF ACTION

What would be required at a minimum is one experienced community training practitioner or educator attached to one or more ACC with a charter to identify common training needs across three or more ACC areas and two or more States. The process should take no more than 12 weeks for review and a definition of needs. During such time it should be possible to have added the term "traineeship in Small Business Operations" to DEETYA's list of approved training combinations for the purpose of provided employer subsidies as for other forms of traineeship.

Field work should be allotted on the basis of participating ACC's and should permit the matching of suitable courses with the identified needs and confirmed in the field work phase. Six to eight participating ACC's would be sufficient to gauge the strength of support for the concept. Other tasks requiring attention would include:-

- Advertising for Expressions of Interest from potential trainees and employers
- Passing of selection tasks to group training authorities
- Administration work connected with selections and appointments
- Induction of trainees and issue of teaching materials
- Training in web site management and development
- Evaluating the most relevant offerings of TAFE's Online 2001 program and interstate equivalents

Higher level administrative requirements might consume further resources, but there are ways and means of attaching consultants to departmental offices at minimum cost which could tend to save the overheads involved in setting up or maintaining their own offices.

Ongoing supervision could be left with ACC's and group trainers but a consultant should return to evaluate a project twelve months after the first trainees have completed their course and worked through the processes of identifying and evaluating small business and self employment opportunities.

Accordingly it is recommended that preliminary work be commissioned to assess the currently available and emerging suite of training programs and employer subsidies to ensure that there is sufficient flexibility to train in small business operations combined with diverse technical skills and computing skills.

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APPENDIX 1

This process of urban consolidation can be seen in the Victorian Mallee, brought about in part because of technological innovations in farm work that have dramatically reduced the need for farm labor. Hamlets that once supported a small school and/or a railway station and/or a general store have become simply names on maps and hotel facilities with names like the "Grand Hotel" that once provided meals and accommodation for hundreds of seasonal workers now stand with unused rooms and memories of how things were.

In sports loving country regions it may be that the ultimate indignity for a district, is to lose its football team. Recent years have seen the emergence of consolidated teams with long hyphenated names incorporating the names of now defunct teams that have been lost through the process of amalgamation.

Inter censal data establishes conclusively that a number of smaller Victorian centres are losing population and almost certainly causing some level of stress in the business communities that are left to cope with the impacts of a declining population. (See ABS Regional Statistics Victoria Cat no. 1314.2).

Some sample rates of population losses in the inter censal period are set down below:-

Statistical division Population Loss 1991 - 1996, (Av Rate of Change Per Annum) Colac Otway 672 (-0.6%) Corangamite 911 (-1.0%) Glenelg 1191 (-1.1 %) Southern Grampians 1061 (-1.2%) Swan Hill 616 (-0.6%) Gannawarra 470 (-0.7%) Wellington 1300 (-0.7%)

APPENDIX 2

Data on the employed work forces of selected areas is set down below. South Australia has demonstrably lost out in the employment stakes and in Victoria modest growth in full time employment would seem to be at the expense of part time employment. New South Wales appears to have been able to grow both full time and aggregate levels of non metropolitan employment if even at the expense of some part time employment.

STATE EMPLOYED JUNE '97 000's EMPLOYED JUNE '98 000's

South Australia F/T, 470.3, P/T 183.8

Total 654.0 F/T, 454.3, P/T 176.3

Total 630.6

South Australia

(Non Metro) F/T, 124.1, P/T 48.2

Total 172.3 F/T 116.5, P/T 40.3

Total 156.8

Victoria F/T, 1529.5, P/T 538.9

Total 2068.4 F/T, 1558.5, P/T 565.1

Total 2123.5

Victoria

(Non Metro) F/T 378.0, P/T 158.8

Total 536.8 F/T 386.13, P/T 149.9

Total 536.7

New South Wales F/T 2098.1, P/T 652.8

Total 2750.9 F/T 2142.3, P/T 672.7

Total 2815.0

New South Wales

(Non Metro)FIT 690.6, P/T 261.2

Total 951.8 F/T 705.7, P/T 256.6

Total 962.3

Non metropolitan South Australia lost almost 16 000 positions divided fairly evenly across full time and part time work, Non Metro Victoria was almost static enjoying some increase in full time employment, but seeing some corresponding losses in part time work. Non metropolitan New South Wales was able to show gains in full time employment and total employment with minor losses of part time jobs.

There were significant inter regional variations within NSW which require further examination, by way of example the Murray-Murrumbidgee statistical district recorded an increase of 3000 new jobs (107 000 c/f 110 000) while the larger Illawarra and South Eastern Regions lost almost 16 000 positions, (240 000 c/f 256 000) recording losses in both the full time and part time employment categories. The Newcastle Statistical region lost some 14 000 positions (195 600 c/f 181 200) the losses being 5000 full time positions and 9000 part time positions. There is a need to understand these variations and to identify causal factors where they are apparent.