Adopt single brand, UK colleges told

AS Australian states jettison the TAFE brand, the peak group for public colleges in the UK has urged its members to do the opposite.

In a paper outlining an international development strategy for UK vocational training, the Association of Colleges has encouraged local providers to unite under a common identity.

The paper highlights a single marketing moniker as one of the “easily identified” drivers of other countries’ success.

These drivers include the “use of a single ‘brand’ by every contributor to the system – for example Australian TAFE or the German Dual-System – to contextualise the marketing effort of individual providers”.

The paper says UK vocational education and training – also referred to as “further education” – is falling behind international competitors in attracting overseas students.

It contrasts the 40,000 international further education students who come to the UK each year, often for short periods, with ten times as many foreigners studying at the country’s onshore university campuses.

“It must also be compared with anecdotal evidence about the successes of German, Australian, Canadian and other VET systems, competing successfully against the UK in key world markets for learning.

“UK further education underperforms internationally in comparison with UK higher education and the VET systems of competitor countries.”

Australian commentators have also stressed the value of a common identity for public training providers, saying the TAFE brand is well recognised overseas.

However it’s not a view shared by every Australian jurisdiction. In Western Australia, seven of the ten public institutes recently discarded the TAFE brand in favour of names such as “polytechnic” and “institute of technology”, in an effort to highlight the breadth of their tertiary provision.

Four Victorian institutes have also ditched the TAFE brand.

However Tasmania has taken the opposite tack. Early this month it announced plans to reintegrate two bodies, Tasmanian Polytechnic and Tasmanian Skills Institute, into a single entity known as TasTAFE.
“The TAFE brand is well understood locally, nationally and internationally and TasTAFE will capitalise on that,” said Education and Skills Minister Nick McKim.

The UK paper also urges local colleges to resist jargon in favour of a “black box” approach to marketing.
Training promotion should be stripped of “complexities which are of no interest to the customer”, the paper suggests.

It also highlights funding as a driver of success, advocating “sustained representation and investment, led by government, over many years”.

But Australia doesn’t have the wood over the UK when it comes to regulatory compliance, the paper suggests.
“Flexibility and adaptability, within strict quality controls, are important hallmarks of UK VET which other national systems do not necessarily share,” it says.

“A detailed examination of quality assurance arrangements and national consistency in Australian TAFE … [is] less likely to arouse feelings of inferiority.”

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