Title | Vision 2020: The State of Origin
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**Issues:**
- How will TAFE survive, how will TAFE institutes look in the future and how can they recalibrate employment, infrastructure and partnerships with industry?

Since the push towards a more competitive, demand driven VET market commenced (circa 1996) political, business and industry commentators have been predicting the demise of TAFE. Such prophesizing has reached a new crescendo with the contestability of public funding viewed by many as the death knell for the institutions once solely responsible for delivering vocational education and training (VET).

As we all know, VET in Australia has clearly started the journey of transforming to a demand-driven system through an agenda pre-occupied with the concept of establishing and designing markets that arguably have not previously existed.

In Queensland, this challenge is driving the State’s public provider that is amidst one of its greatest reform agendas as TAFE Queensland recalibrates to define its future role in a yet to be established ‘further education’ sector.

Throughout its long history, TAFE Queensland has played a fundamental role in training individuals, preparing people for work and providing second chance education. While the school and university sectors of education have clearly defined roles, the schools by age and the universities by awards, Technical and Further Education providers have traditionally filled all the other educational needs of the community and industry – from the entry-level VET requirements of 15–19 year olds, to the special needs of disadvantaged groups within society and the retraining needs of those who wish to re-enter the workforce after an absence or as a result of redundancy.

Fundamental to TAFE Queensland’s future success is recognising that a provider of residual training in Queensland doesn’t exist in the markets of the future.

Arguably, the real opportunities for our State owned providers of VET are outside the Pandora’s box known as ‘VET’. Our collective challenge then is to identify where TAFE’s strengths and attributes can best meet the needs of new and emerging clients.

While (at this point) public providers struggle to compete on price in a competitive VET market, our enviable employer (89%) and student (87%) satisfaction rates and reputation for delivering high quality education and training outcomes must be of value to someone?

With the increasing recognition from employers that the skills they need to increase their productivity and profit do not lie in a three year plus, off the job degree qualification and greater numbers of VET graduates are articulating to higher education via pathways programs - there is a growing opportunity for TAFE providers to advance their

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1 Goozee, G. 2001. "The development of TAFE in Australia" NCVER Australia
educational and financial outcomes by becoming the provider of choice in the delivery of higher education qualifications with an applied (or employment) focus and the partner of choice for universities.

This position is obviously buoyed by Commonwealth reforms to de-regulate higher education funding currently being considered.

There is also a clear and demonstrable economic need for large, quality VET providers to be continuing their expansion into higher education qualifications, as improving access to and participation in education and training at higher skill levels is an important objective for a contemporary, developed economy.

TAFE has the advantage of market share and experience, acknowledging that if we achieve our new world goals market share of publically funded VET will become irrelevant as our markets and revenues are diversified beyond our current bubble.

Rather than engaging in our historic practice of cannibalizing each other to gain market share, TAFE needs to adopt a collaborative approach. TAFE Queensland is meeting the new contestable environment as a unified entity. Collaborative activities across the TAFE Queensland network are ensuring the delivery of consistently high quality and innovative products. TAFE Queensland, in its many guises, has been delivering VET services for over 130 years. By tapping into this experience and the greater flexibility and independence provided under new governance arrangements, new and innovative partnerships with industry and service delivery are being explored and developed which are revolutionising how TAFE conducts business in Queensland.

Could there be a TAFE Australia in our collective future?

TAFE’s ‘survival’ (or perhaps better said as future dominance) is intrinsically linked to changing the perception that TAFE is a second rate option; the choice if you are unable to gain a university place and/or the stepping stone to obtaining admission to a tertiary institution. Of note are recent comments from Business Council of Australia President, Ms Catherine Livingston, suggesting that more students should be going through the VET system and gaining practical work experience skills rather than going to university.

In May this year, TAFE Queensland released its ‘Make Great Happen’ campaign, re-launching the TAFE Queensland brand aimed at celebrating the array of skills and professions accessible through TAFE. Just as the dream of previous generations was to gain a university qualification, the campaign seeks to reposition TAFE within the market and to become the aspiration of current and future generations.

Perhaps one of the more pressing challenges for TAFE as a result of the current reforms is balancing the community expectations of TAFE as the provider of a broad range of services, particularly for disadvantaged students and regional Australia. As the publicly owned provider of skills and training, TAFE will always align training which meets the prevailing policy direction of government. However, where does that leave TAFE and its more altruistic role with State and Commonwealth Governments directing public funding towards those skills which industry and business have identified as essential. As a result, those courses previously provided to disadvantaged students by TAFE which were heavily subsidised are now full fee for service, pricing this cohort of students out of the market.

In a recent article for the Campus Review, the Chief Executive of the Australian Industry Group, Mr Innes Willox, stated that TAFE doesn’t ‘just aim for the lucrative parts of the market, they fulfil a much broader training role, and they’re very much organisations that operate for the public good’.

Whether you concur with this view or not, TAFE has and continues to be an essential player in the VET market. The onus on the public provider now is to become innovative, responsive and flexible to ensure its continued place in the market and to provide services to support industry, business, local communities and students. TAFE does have the opportunity to define what it means to be the public provider and most importantly, TAFE will continue to change in response to the needs and demands of students, business and employers who choose TAFE as their preferred training partner.