WA TAFEs to specialise: Barnett

- by: John Ross
- From: The Australian
- September 08, 2012 12:00AM

WA Premier Colin Barnett wants TAFEs to specialise. Picture: Marie Nirme Source: The Australian

WESTERN Australia could develop specialised TAFEs to help drive its specialised economy, according to Premier Colin Barnett, who has emphatically refuted speculation that his state's spectacular growth has hit the wall.

Speaking four years to the day after his government’s election, Mr Barnett said he wanted WA TAFEs to become “centres of excellence” within broad educational providers.

“The government’s keen to see that individual institutes develop specialties for which they are recognised nationally and hopefully internationally,” he told the TAFE Directors Australia conference in Perth.

“There will be a range of training programs that will be in pretty well every TAFE. But some need to … have their own specialty (alongside) a broad range of courses.”

Mr Barnett said the move would complement WA’s revamping of its TAFEs, which have been renamed as institutes and polytechnics with their own separate identities.
He said the goal of the rebadging had been “to identify them as not simply part of a large and amorphous TAFE – to give them autonomy and self-management and bring them closer to the region or industry they serve.”

But centres of excellence would have a northern rather than eastern focus, he suggested.

“We’re a long way away from the other states and the focus of this state is very much toward Asia.”

Mr Barnett said his state’s integration with Asia and particularly China was not fully appreciated elsewhere in Australia. He also rejected speculation that WA’s boom was running out of steam, saying economic growth would continue strongly for up to 30 years.

TAFE Directors Australia supported WA’s plans to develop centres of excellence, saying it would complement similar initiatives in South Australia, Victoria and federally.

“We see it as an opportunity to give people an aspirational goal to get involved – for people from the community, industry and other providers to partner up with these centres,” said chairman Stephen Conway.

Mr Barnett said training reforms under the Coalition government had been successful. Total enrolments had grown by about 40 per cent over the four years, while enrolments by Aboriginal students has grown by about 25 per cent.

However he and new Training Minister Murray Cowper offered no clues on further market reforms that have been flagged for WA, or details of how the state will apply the training ‘entitlement’ it agreed to at the April meeting of the Council of Australian Governments.

Sources said such details were unlikely to emerge ahead of the state election, due within six months.