

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT



TAFE ranks as Australia's largest educator, with 1.6 million enrolments annually in our colleges and institutes.

Several hundred thousand teachers – permanent, casuals, guest lecturers and specialist staff – cater to this uniquely Australian tradition of life-long and vocational education. Constant student enrolments screen the rates of change impacting TAFE education – demographics and the mix of students changing rapidly,

courses demanded by students and industry under review, and productivity under scrutiny.

TAFE education is growing amid these huge demographic, environment and demand shifts.

A sea change in the market extends across several boundaries –

- Adult education growing as our aging population shows a boundless zest for

learning and exploring new horizons and movement in jobs,

- A staggering number of Australian teenagers at school enrolling in vocational education courses in their completion at school (Years 11 & 12) – estimated now at 50%,
- Huge changes to how traditional trades and accredited skilling courses are delivered by TAFE,
- Double-digit increases in international students seeking Australia's quality VTE sector, and
- Extension of TAFE operations to offshore delivery, and joint ventures or commercialization of operations internationally.

The Australian Government joined in with its own vision of how this sea change should evolve, by enforcing a role itself as the sector regulator, and its Skilling Australia 2005 legislation enacted.

This change in regulation was rapid. ANTA was scrapped with the 2005 Budget, and centralized strategic direction – with some funding responsibility – established directly under the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), effective 30 June, as part of the Urig Whole-of-Government initiative. DEST developed a new network of sector 'consultations' between the Australian Government and industry, peak stakeholders, VTE providers, state and territory registration bodies, and TAFE institutes already individually incorporated, as change continues.

For TAFE a key issue was the establishment of 10 Industry Skills Councils to oversee course development. ISCs were provided significant budgets, with a sunset clause after three years. These specialist "ISCs" promise a new era of collaboration between industry seeking training and recruitment, and VTE providers of vocational education.

Direction for TDA within this changed environment was clear.

TAFE Directors Australia worked for optimal business outcomes for our TAFE membership.

An important strategy throughout was enforcing recognition that TAFE providers should be provided a special voice and advocacy to sector policy, and prior to further change.

Research supported this position. Domestic and international survey reports showed a high correlation between direct input between agencies and VTE providers – public and private – to effect successful changed teaching and learning outcomes – without compromising quality.

TDA cherishes this national policy 'voice' - and already our Review of Operations for 2005 recognises the progress achieved across several business areas to bring improved outcomes to TAFE colleges and institutes.

This changing period presents extraordi-

nary challenges, yet the opportunities now available for this sector will see areas for exceptional growth and development.

Our vision is realistically achievable: TAFE to be recognized as Australia's provider of choice in vocational education and training.

Domestically, TDA effected significantly improved outcomes for the system of international visas regulated for international students to enroll in Australian TAFE colleges and institutes. The National Training Framework noted TDA as the peak body for consultations for the TAFE sector.

2006 will see TDA advocate far greater numbers of scholarships for Australian TAFE students to experience courses overseas.

Internationally TDA launched wide-ranging strategic and operational initiatives to support strong growth for TAFE – from a relatively low base – for international student enrolments, and commercial collaboration. China was a significant focus, with an MOU signed in May between TDA and the China CEAIE group, and programmes successfully established collaborating with AEI, AusAID and international donors.

Again, scholarships for international students seeking study in the Australian TAFE system will be an important advocacy. We should also recognise the motivation

of students to study and work or even migrate to Australia. This brings urgency to our case for Australian agencies to achieve timely and fair management of study entry and visas.

TAFE Members signaled their willingness to re-position TDA during strategic reviews, which were held toward the end of the reporting period (November/December 2005).

The result was a robust TDA three-year strategic plan to provide advocacy, policy clarity and the 'Shift in Focus' so demanded by Members. The organization takes on this challenge with a new management team, and TAFE Member CEOs and affiliates to TDA have responded incredibly well to offer help, and resource many of these new challenges. I thank my predecessor, Margaret Fanning, for her foresight in how TDA was positioned nationally to take up this challenge.

In my early career as a political journalist and media executive, my 'sea change' years back was to use my advocacy skills in the vocational education sector in Australia and the region, and learned much while principal speechwriter in DEST, and lecturing in the (NSI, Sydney) TAFE system before this appointment.

This learning on change management was perhaps most eye-opening during an earlier posting in Singapore. I saw in that tiny island economy how opportunities were frequently seized, and numerous long-

standing public sector agencies develop even stronger as economic change took hold.

In the Australian domestic market, TDA has identified new Higher Education accreditation and approval processes as key opportunities resulting from changed regulations.

TDA has a strong interest in this subject. A number of TAFE Institutes are higher education providers and TDA has a strong interest in this subject.

More fundamentally, blurring of the boundaries between VET and higher education in recent years has meant that changes to one element of the education and training system has the potential to impact strongly on other elements of the system.

Further opportunities will be in more effective use of TAFE data, and stronger relationship and customer management to create better service for our Members – spread widely across Australia.

Opportunities into 2006 have also been offered with the reference on skilling by COAG, the Council on Australian Government.

Internally, TDA will support stronger professional development for TAFE CEOs and executives, and better embrace the achievements of teachers and students across our rich education system.

Improved systems and savvy use of ICT will support a lift in Member Services.

I look forward to meeting the teachers and students of TAFE, our extended 'TAFE families' of professional associations, administrators and regulators.

We have much to achieve. The Review of Operations for 2005 indicates that the forces of change will continue into New Year, and TDA will be eager to embrace the opportunities.



*Martin Riordan*