

TAFE Directors Australia
Submission to Erebus International
Review of DEEWR International Education Group
and Offshore Network Activities



Background

TAFE Directors Australia is the national peak association for Australia's 58 TAFE and technology institutes. International engagement is a key platform of Australian TAFE institutes in their development of skilled workers for a global economy. International engagement, through students and projects, also generates significant revenue for TAFE institutes that is vital to their commercial success.

Our members provide qualifications and skills that are high quality, hands on, and industry relevant for over 1.67 million students per annum, including over 27,000 international students.¹ The Australian TAFE system leads the way in the development of transnational and offshore industry programs around the world and has been active in over 50 countries since the 1980s.

TAFE Directors Australia welcomes the review of key activities undertaken by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' International Education Group and Offshore Network. Given the significance of international education and training to our members TDA is keen to engage at a more collaborative level with DEEWR to discuss the future activities and priorities for government and industry in growing and sustaining our international engagement.

TAFE Directors Australia member institutes engage with international clients and therefore the DEEWR International Group and Offshore Network on range of levels:

1. Inbound students – just over 30% of international students in the VET sector are studying in a TAFE institute. Students chose TAFE for a variety of reasons, they tell us they value our industry links, quality of education, employment and graduate outcomes and committed teachers. Our international students have goals and aspirations including using TAFE skills and qualifications as a pathway to new opportunities either in further studies, employment or residency.
2. Transnational programs - in country delivery has been growing in significance over the past three years with a number of agreements and programs in place for transnational delivery. China, India, Middle East and the Pacific are the main areas for TNE activity within the sector. TAFE leads the way with NCVER reporting that in 2006, 56% of Australia's public providers delivered courses offshore to 32 countries, an increase from 22 countries in 2005. This offshore delivery networked in 2007 catered to over 31,000 students in range of industry areas.²
3. Offshore industry development – Australian TAFE institutes are actively working within domestic and international clients operating global functions to support their skills and training needs. Our TAFE institutes are taking the successful partnerships with industry and translating them to a global market place. TAFE is known as a global training partner for clients such as Leighton's, Thiess, Cisco and Sheraton Hotels to name just a few.

¹ National Center for Vocational Education Research (2007) Australian vocational education and training statistics: Students and courses

² National Centre for Vocational Education and Training (2006) Offshore VET Delivery

4. Systems development opportunities – The Australian VET sector has reach with over 50 countries who use aspects of the Australian system, most often in partnership with a TAFE institute. Australian TAFE institutes provide key skills, knowhow and development assistance across the Asia Pacific for a range of aid and development agencies and donors.
5. International Relations – skills and productivity are key agenda items for most governments and industry sectors in our globalised world. Increasingly TAFE institutes and TDA as a peak body are being involved to engage in international relations with governments, industry and other likeminded organisations.

TAFE Directors Australia and its members work with DEEWR (both the VET group and Australian Education International) across a range of activities that are related to international including:

1. Member of key industry boards, committees and reference groups (National Quality Council, Government Industry Stakeholder Committee (GISC), Council on Australian Latin America Relations (COALAR), Transnational Quality Strategy (TQS)
2. Contractor for industry projects through Strategic National Initiative funds and other funded projects
3. Sharing of international best practice, with the most recent support for the OECD Thematic Review of Vocational Education and Innovation
4. Participant and supporter on DEEWR AEI VET Missions (Latin America, India, South East Asia, Saudi Arabia)
5. Liaison and support to AEI offshore network with market intelligence, TAFE member updates and general collaboration

Given the diverse nature of the Australia's TAFE sector's international engagement many members also work closely with Austrade in key markets, particularly to leverage Austrade's industry intelligence. Systems development projects will also typically lie with AusAID where TAFE is actively engaged in a range of projects.

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Question 1. How do you think DEEWR's International Education Group and Network can best contribute to strengthening Australia's education and training systems so that they become acknowledged as world class?

TDA believes that for DEEWR's International Education Group and network to best contribute to the strengthening of Australia's education and training systems there needs to be:

1. An understanding that this requires a whole of department and whole of government approach
2. A true partnership between government and industry

In consideration of what extent the International Education Group and Network should be involved in the following areas, please see comments below :

identifying and communicating information relating to international best practice;

Given the investment in a significant offshore network it should be paramount that the IEG are able to identify and communicate information relating to best practice. It should also be noted that must be a two way process, with the IEG aware of the best practice occurring within the Australian education and training system. A traditional focus on international students has meant that some markets and staff are not fully briefed on the broader opportunities within the sector and the best practice occurring within the Australia system. This level of knowledge and detail is required in order to perform this task well.

Given the involvement of our members in over 60 countries worldwide, it is also important to note that international best practice may also be gained from this "front line" engagement. In addition to DEEWR's role in the identification and communication of information relating to best practice, TDA recommends that funding and support should be allocated to programs of teacher exchange and professional development between Australia TAFE teachers and administrators and key partners from around the world. Many other competitor markets, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Canada and the USA are already funding such programs.

TDA believes that identification of international best practice within DEEWR network requires better integration and sharing of knowledge and priorities between AEI and the VET Group within DEEWR

RECOMMENDATION –

- *Recognise the role of providers in identifying and communicating best practice*
- *Fund and support a program of teacher exchange and professional development between TAFE teachers and administrators and key partners*
- *Ensure that offshore network understands the best practice "at home" through improved engagement*
- *Better integration of AEI VET strategies and the VET Group activities*

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promoting outward mobility by Australian students;

Mobility of Australian students must be a priority for ALL sectors of the Australian education and training system. The view of mobility purely from within an educational context can also be limiting. Mobility is of value (and brings productivity returns) regardless of whether it is undertaken by student, a recent graduate or a mid career professional. The VET sector has been largely ignored in the mobility debate over the past decade but in recent years, through new research into the mobility barriers and opportunities in the sector, and with support from DEEWR on pilot projects in the sector is growing in awareness and demand.

As industry becomes increasingly globalised, our graduates require technical and soft skills that are global. There is recognition from our members that current processes and models for student mobility (as modelled from the higher education sector) are not entirely relevant for the sector. TDA welcomes the opportunity to work with DEEWR International Group to determine a program and policy mix that supports and grows VET sector mobility with the ultimate goal to increase Australia's labour force productivity and global engagement. TDA requests that the support must involve a program of tangible services and funding that takes into account the unique needs and characteristics of the VET sector.

TDA also believes that the Government has a role to play in continuing to support and grow the investment in the study of languages from the early years of schooling.

RECOMMENDATION –

- *Open up opportunities to VET students, practitioners and institutions for access to scholarships and funds for mobility that take into account the needs and characteristics of the VET sector*

Develop a program to promote mobility across all Australian sectors

Support and grow government investment in the study of languages

activities (including the wider dissemination of relevant information) designed to enhance the education and social experiences of international students while studying in Australia; and

The social and learning experiences of international students are paramount. Quality institutions remain committed to the provision of high quality education and learning experiences and of course in turn, social integration and support. There is a role for the broader community and government in recognising the needs of international students. Many agencies are involved in the social support network for students including departments of (state and commonwealth) transport, housing, multicultural affairs and immigration.

The question of wider dissemination has been taken in this context to mean the wider community. The International Education Group has a role to play in working closely with industry and the broader Australian community to move past sensational media reporting, in order to gather evidence and a research base, and then take appropriate action.

A move to the traditional and new communities where international students are studying must also be taken into consideration. TAFE institutes service Australia's major capital cities but also operate across rural and regional delivery sites. Opportunities

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for international engagement need to also be considered outside of the traditional delivery sites

RECOMMENDATION:

- *Provide funding for community based or institutional based programs that support student integration and broader social inclusion*
- *Commit to a program of research with a focus on issues of social inclusion and student integration into communities*
- *Work with providers to support student services programs, institutional based buddy and support systems*

promoting diversity in the delivery of education and training to international students.

Diversity is one of Australia's key characteristics, not just in international education but in many of our industry sectors and in our communities.

This question could be considered from a number of angles such as diversification of origin of students, level and type of course, student's post graduation intentions, providers, delivery models. Whilst government has a role in the promotion of diversity, individual providers make these decisions based on a range of factors including their location, scale and scope of international activities, community expectations, industry focus areas etc.

Diversity of student origin and course of study is part of many of our member's international strategic plans. The sheer size and high demand for skills training in some of our key markets including China and India can make this difficult to manage. Institutes are piloting new and innovative delivery models that support student and course diversity, however issues with gaining CRICOS registration for some of these new and innovative programs has been reported as an ongoing issue.

The MODL still unduly impacts the demand in courses and in countries of origin. With Australia's skills and labour shortage, skilled migration will continue to play an important role in the solution. TDA members have responded to demand from international clients seeking skills in areas where Australia's skills shortages are at their highest. This in and of itself is not a bad thing. The system is compromised where we have reported cases of providers taking advantage of the MODL and not necessarily producing graduates who are industry ready. TDA would welcome the opportunity to work with DEEWR and other commonwealth departments in considering other methods and tools to support the needs of Australian industry.

RECOMMENDATION:

- *DEEWR, Commonwealth agencies and industry work together on the issues related to the Migration Occupations in Demand List and consider other methods and tools that reward and recognise international students or other skilled migrants in entering the Australian workforce*
- *Support providers in piloting new and innovative programs to encourage diversity*

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Question 2. How do you think DEEWR's International Education Group and Network can best contribute to creating the environment for a sustainable, globally connected and internationally influential education and training system?

From the context above it can be surmised that new priorities for the DEEWR's International Education Group and Network are to create a sustainable, globally connected and internationally influential education and training system. These goals are not dissimilar from many of our members in their international engagement.

Sustainability of international activities is paramount to TAFE as government owned and operated institutions. Many institutes have now been engaged in international activities now for over 20 years - through a sustainable business approach that is dependent on global connectedness.

The Australian VET sector (vis a vis TAFE) has successfully built global reach and influence with the Australian approach to vocational education and training and skills development now considered world's best practice. Whilst departments and governments can contribute in marketing and selling this message, it is providers who are at the forefront of development and international engagement.

In consideration of what extent the International Education Group and Network should be involved in the following areas, please see comments below:

aligning education and training systems with other governments;

There is certainly a long way to go in aligning the Australian education and training system with other training systems globally. We note that this is highly complex area and should be undertaken in partnership with industry practitioners who have been working in the field. Perhaps the role is not so much in aligning systems but in engaging at an international level and taking leadership on issues of global concern. TAFE Directors Australia as an association has taken on this role in its leadership within global VET networks, including the taking on the role of Deputy Chair within the World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics and in stepping up its engagement with traditional competitor markets on issues or opportunities of common interest.

The Australian VET market is operating with clearly defined market segments; yet there are limited opportunities for segmentation in the VET market. The DEEWR International Education Group has traditionally failed to accommodate the discreet market requirements, and underplays for TAFE our public sector gravitas in market. For example, India and China, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, and more recently Chile have all in recent times demonstrated a strong desire to partner or utilise Australia's public sector-owned TAFE Institutes across both capacity building and educational collaboration. Many TDA members have now aligned their business and commercial activities with Austrade who have taken a much more client focused approach. Austrade have demonstrated a strong market focus in assisting our Institutes identify, conduct due diligence and implement global skills development arrangements..

RECOMMENDATION:

- *More research into international clients' needs and competitor marketing in relation to VET systems*
- *A more sophisticated marketing analysis of VET stakeholder engagement, and market promotion, to accommodate this risk issue.*

participating in multilateral, regional and bilateral fora;

Participation in multilateral, regional, and bilateral fora is important, but we believe that it is just as valuable to provide timely and informed communication back to the industry. TDA members take part in a range of global industry forums such as UNESCO UNEVOC, World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics, Association of Colleges and the International Vocational Education and Training Association. It should be noted therefore that the role for providers and government to work collaboratively on this level of engagement should not be overlooked, while also noting the above comments RE competitiveness.

The advent of Free Trade Agreements, and possible further aid focus or investment by the World Bank, ADB and/or AusAID on VET and skills, brings added strategic importance of regional associations, and how Australian VET relates within these areas. Key regional grouping such as APEC and ASEAN may provide us with vehicles to review Australia's role in the region given the increasing importance of VET as a key component to international education, and the fruitful opportunities that would flow if major corporations and exporters were encouraged to bring synergies to Australian Government activities.

RECOMMENDATION:

- *TAFE Directors Australia believes that it is timely to consider the formation of regional public sector skills provider forum that supports the aspirations of the sector and provides a vehicle for heightened engagement in the region on common issues of skills, training and workforce development.*
- *Such a model would support the move from Australia being viewed as purely a commercial player in the international education and training market to one that with its public sector TAFE Institutes, and agencies such as the Australian Pacific Technical College, is able to use skills and training as a means for further economic and social development of the region.*

promoting international recognition of Australian qualifications and courses;

This is a crucial area to support the sustained growth and global connectedness of the Australian training system. The recent work completed with Strategic National Initiatives (International) funds demonstrates that the mutual recognition of qualifications is a key opportunity (and therefore a barrier if not overcome) for the Australian VET sector. This should be a priority given the highly mobile global workforce and demands from clients (students, industry, governments). Whilst government should take a leading role, it should be in partnership with providers and industry (employers). It should also come from the position of mutual recognition rather than the pure promotion of Australia's qualifications and courses.

RECOMMENDATION:

- *Training Packages continue to be cited as a barrier to further recognition and delivery of Australian qualifications in the international market place, any future training package reviews need to consider the international context.*
- *DEEWR to work with TVET, UNESCO and related agencies, to create a leadership platform on skills mutual recognition through Asia-Pacific*
- *Support the proposal with shared investment between higher education and vocational education, for inbound and outbound student strategies*

promoting international recognition of Australia's approvals, quality assurance and consumer protection arrangements; and

Promoting international recognition of Australia's approvals, quality assurance and consumer protection arrangements are just one part of the mix in promoting and supporting the sector. This is still a distinguishing factor between Australia and many other competitor markets (ie Canada, USA, NZ). However, TDA believes that a more proactive approach to ensuring compliance and in taking decisive action in cases of breach needs to be a focus for the department. The fact that states and territories are partners in the delivery and implementation of the QA systems cannot be overlooked.

RECOMMENDATION:

- *Rather than a focus on promotion take a proactive approach to ensure compliance with Australia's quality systems, the results will speak for themselves*

undertaking research and analysis activities including partnering with Australian education and training stakeholders to research and disseminate information on international issues.

As noted in earlier comments, providers are leading the international engagement working in a variety of settings with key decision makers and stakeholders. Their knowledge and input should be valued and captured. In order to do this, the department and industry need to develop new consultation and communication mechanisms to share this knowledge and research. TDA members view the Market Information Package (MIP) and the information that it contains relating to statistics and market intelligence as valuable. MIP fees are considered quite high for many niche RTOs and the fee structure relating to MIP should be reassessed.

There are many bodies involved in research and we believe that there is scope to better leverage and capitalise on investment in this area. It would be helpful to industry for DEEWR International Group to publish a research priorities listing each year or to invite, through transparent discussion with peak bodies and other members of the sector, input into annual research areas.

RECOMMENDATION:

- *DEEWR to publish an annual program of research priorities so that providers and other agencies can leverage this investment*
- *Reassess the fee structure of the Market Information Package for providers*

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Question 3. How do you think DEEWR's International Education Group and Network can best contribute to enhancing Australia's reputation for high quality education and training?

In consideration of what extent the International Education Group and Network should be involved in the following areas, please see comments below:

ensuring in-country awareness of Australia's quality assurance and consumer protection arrangements;

Though effective government to government relations, a skilled and knowledgeable Counsellor network ensuring in country awareness of Australia's QA and consumer protection arrangements are important. However the priority should be the implementation and effective working of the QA and consumer protection arrangements within Australia.

working with State and Territory Governments and key sectoral stakeholders to enhance the quality of education and training;

Given the structure and ownership of TAFE within the jurisdiction of states and territories a positive and cooperative relationship between jurisdictions is vital. Furthermore whilst the rules and regulations (the ESOS Act) is a Commonwealth Act focussing on Commonwealth powers to control visas, the audit and monitoring processes for international education are carried out at State level in a manner which is sometimes inconsistent between states and not in accordance with the intent of the Act.

This has been one of the weaknesses in the current system where a system that is widely promoted as "national" has large discrepancies in interpretation and implementation from state to state. This of course impacts our member's ability to operate effectively in the international market place and also confuses clients who in one jurisdiction are able to enrol in a program that has gained CRICOS registration but not in another. There is scope for professional development of auditors and a more consultative approach to quality assurance and process improvement.

RECCOMENDATION:

- *Focus on improving the discrepancies that exist across jurisdictions in the implementation and interpretation of the ESOS Act*

identifying and communicating problems regarding possible capacity constraints of Australia's education and training systems;

In order to identify and community problems regarding possible capacity constraints of the Australian education and training system the department needs to know the system well and understand fully the scope of delivery options now available. The Australian TAFE sector, operating through state and territory governments, has a range of systems in place to consider both capacity and capability of their respective systems. The reality is that this is an institutional matter. DEEWR may have a role in considering the support of new pilot delivery programs that open capacity and marketing programs that support regional delivery and programs in areas that are not in high demand.

Question 4. How do you think DEEWR's International Education Group and Network can best contribute to ensuring international graduates of Australia's education and training institutions are highly valued by international and Australian employers?

In considering this question there are three key elements to ensure that international graduates of Australia's education and training institutions to be highly valued by international and Australian employers:

1. Delivery of a quality training product
2. Ability to integrate into the work environment (including competence in English and general Australian workplace behaviours)
3. Recognition of Australia's qualifications in international markets

Therefore, the prompts below do not adequately take into consideration the elements that are required to ensure that Australian and international employers value our graduates.

In consideration of what extent the International Education Group and Network should be involved in the following areas, please see comments below:

providing Australian education and training organisations with information on employer needs both internationally and domestically; and

The Australian VET sector is built on a system that is industry led – this means that TAFE institutes have a deep understanding of employers needs certainly domestically and increasingly internationally. As our member institutes continue to engage in new and innovative models of offshore delivery and customised training they are working more closely with global employers. To date, the offshore network has not been able to provide a level of service in this area as they have been more focused on student promotion and government to government relations. Austrade has provided a level of support to member institutes in understanding international employer's needs and in identifying opportunities for TAFE to provide training and consultancy. Offshore network does not currently have the capacity to provide this information in any systemic way DEEWRs move into this area would require significant professional development for market representatives.

RECOMMENDATION:

- *Any move into this area in a more systemic way would require close engagement with Austrade and significant professional development for in market representatives*

promoting the benefits of international graduates to both in-country and domestic employer organisations

International graduates from Australian TAFE institutes are well regarded in industry. The focus on hands on, industry relevant training has seen many international graduates from the higher education sector (both here in Australia and in their home country) also articulate into vocational programs. The English language ability and social adaptability of students is a critical determinant to success in the workplace. All

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VET programs require a period of work placement that ensures students have this experience prior to graduation.

Question 5. What do you see as the main roles of DEEWR's International Education Group and Network?

In consideration of what extent the International Education Group and Network should be involved in, please see comments below:

the extent to which the changes in the international environment has resulted in shifts in priorities over the last 5 years;

With diverse levels of international engagement and prioritisation, TDA members report varying experiences and comments on their interactions with DEEWR's International Education Group and Network. Notwithstanding this, our participation in the global labour market means that international engagement has opened up to not only the "big" players servicing significant cohorts of international students, but to "niche" players who are engaging through direct industry linkages, sharing of best practice and institutional linkages.

Growth in the importance of skills and vocational training for both developed and developing economies has been increasing over the past decade. We are now witnessing significant demand not only domestically to meet skills and labour shortages, as well as responding to the changes in industry and technology needs, but equally from all corners of the globe. TAFE institutes are active in over 50 countries around the world and have contributed in some way to the development of over 20 countries national VET systems. VET is no longer just a pathway to a higher education qualification, but it is a pathway to global career, as well as to economic and social development. Notwithstanding this growth in both onshore and offshore opportunities and the high demand worldwide for VET, our members have reported a low level of knowledge and understanding of the VET sector from some offshore network posts.

We believe that the move from a purely inbound student focus and therefore a better understanding of true international engagement will require a stronger focus and coordinated effort form within DEEWR (VET group and AEI).

Finally, the competitive environment in which we operate has resulted in shifts in priorities and models of cooperation. Increasingly our members are participating in projects with a range of international partners (including Germany, New Zealand, UK, USA and Canada). Australia has yet to fully capitalise on a national approach to bidding for large scale offshore work as some of our competitors have demonstrated. The ability for the Australian sector to respond cooperatively has been identified as a significant barrier to further growth. DEEWR has a role to play in funding research into the feasibility of a national bidding agency that is able to draw on the resources of the system to appropriately respond.

RECOMMENDATION:

- *Investment in the development of national consortium approach to international tenders and projects*

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- *Stronger focus on professional development opportunities for post to understand the characteristics of the Australian VET system and to be in a position to promote and support members in market*

the degree to which the International Education Group's and Network's activities complement or supplement those of your agency in terms of international engagement; and

Under a genuine government industry partnership the activities of DEEWR and peak bodies such as TDA should both complement and supplement. However, TDA believes that there is currently not sufficient opportunity to engage at a strategic level on a whole of industry basis to consider the implications of these activities. Two examples in 2008 demonstrate that we are missing the opportunity to complement and supplement each other's international engagement activities due to lack of consultation and communication:

- Peak bodies were excluded from the annual Counsellors Conference in 2008. With significant investment in the return of the Counsellor network there was no formal opportunity to engage and share information, best practice, and market intelligence
- Peak bodies are afforded no role or involvement in the annual business planning and prioritisation of activities for posts. Given the industries involvement is usually critical to the success of offshore activities; it is a missed opportunity not to provide a more robust and open communication and information sharing process to prioritise activities in market and to leverage government and industry investment.

RECOMMENDATION

- *Offshore network business plans should be developed in collaboration with peak bodies and be made more transparent*
- *Peak bodies to be included in the annual Counsellors Conference*

your views on what the International Education Group's and Network's priority activities should be in the next 3 to 5 years.

TAFE Directors Australia is committed to continuing to work with the Australian government, states and territories and the broader industry to ensure that international engagement within the Australian education and training sector continues to grow and is sustainable. We feel strongly though that at the current time there is not significant mechanisms for genuine engagement between the critical stakeholders.

TDA's believes that the International Education Group's and Network's priority activities in the next 3 to 5 years should be based on:

- Taking a whole of government "Team Australia" approach
- Ensuring (not only promoting) Australia's quality assurance systems are working
- Collaborative and genuine government and industry partnership
- Providing market intelligence and information that assists providers to make decisions about future investment, promotion and delivery

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TAFE Directors Australia proposed the following specific actions for the next 3-5 years:

1. Support and investment in a proposed Asia Pacific Regional Skills Forum
2. Investment in the development of national consortium approach to international tenders and projects
3. Peak bodies involvement in offshore network business planning and activity prioritisation
4. Funding for mobility activities within the VET sector (at the student, practitioner and provider level) and programs to support the sector in increasing uptake
5. Further research into the student outcomes and graduate destinations of international vocational students
6. Open and collaborative debate and discussion regarding the future and impacts of MODL
7. Funding through a broader Stakeholder Engagement Contract to support international engagement
8. Closer working relationship with Austrade, AusAID and other Australian agencies supporting our members in international engagement

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Question 6. In what ways do you consider that the working relationship between DEEWR's International Education Group and Network and your organisation can be made more effective?

potential changes in your organisation's role and objectives in the area of international education;

Over two thirds of TDA members are actively engaged in international education and training. The move to the offshore industry development model means that regional institutions who in the first wave of international education were not seen as hubs for international students are now able to engage at new level. International engagement has grown to become a key strategic consideration for many of our members. In 2008 TDA celebrates 10 years as the peak body representing Australia's TAFE and technology institutes. Our role in supporting our member's international engagement is balanced between three key areas:

1. Policy and advocacy (government relations)
2. Marketing and Business Development (international relations)
3. Capacity and Capability (member relations)

the current administrative arrangements in place and current and future possible division of responsibility between the Network and your organisation; and

TAFE Directors Australia relies on the input and advice of its membership to support the administrative arrangements in working with the Department and the Network. In December 2007 TAFE Directors Australia filled a new role of Director International Engagement. This role was modelled on TDA's Director Stakeholder Engagement, a position focused on the domestic agenda and in working closely with DEEWR in this capacity. Through this arrangement TDA enters into a stakeholder engagement contract with DEEWR so that effective representation can be carried out. Given the changing priorities in international education and need for a genuine collaboration between government and industry, TDA would recommend that the 2008-09 stakeholder engagement contract be extended (and funded) to include international.

RECOMMENDATION:

- *That DEEWR extend the stakeholder engagement contract to international engagement*

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