

## Analysis of TAFE provision Support document

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# Analysis of TAFE provision

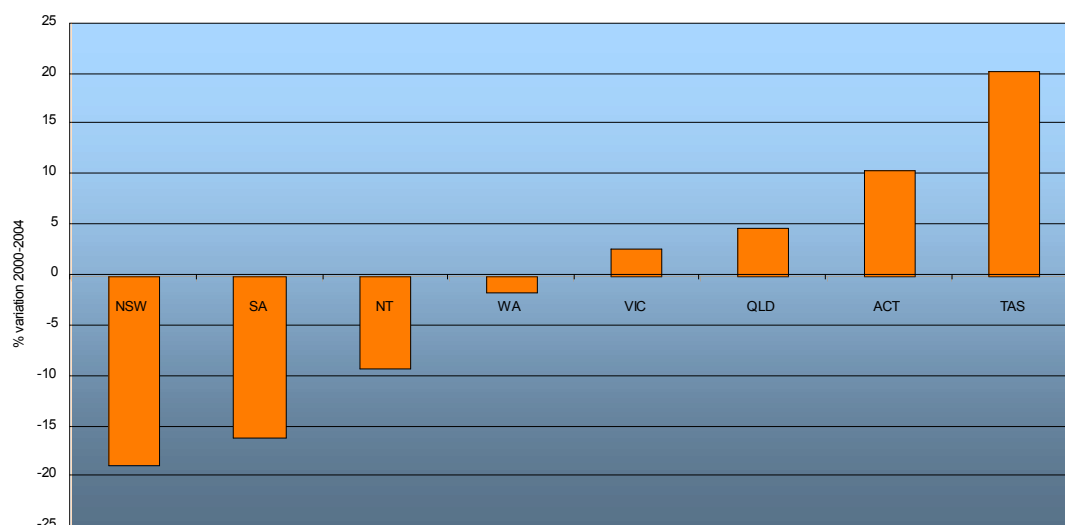
In striving to address the twin imperatives of industry and individual skill needs, TAFE Institutes operate within and respond to a diverse range of state/territory and regional community contexts. TAFE locations vary from capital and major cities, inner and outer regional areas, to remote and very remote locations and some TAFEs operate across large geographic catchments delivering to urban, regional and remote communities. The regional/local communities that TAFEs deliver to also differ in a variety of ways including their: population size and characteristics including age, Indigenous status, language background and socio-economic status; community social capital; local economic prosperity; industry types and their stability, growth or decline; employment opportunities; local infrastructure such as public transport; school effectiveness and the presence, role and effectiveness of other VET providers. This document provides a detailed analysis of the AVETMISS 2004 student participation data and identifies a range of differences between TAFEs.

The proportions of students belonging to the established disadvantaged groups vary considerably between and within states and territories. The densities of these disadvantaged groups in state/territory TAFEs reflect the demographics of the state/territory, and in particular, of the TAFE catchment areas, equity policies and targets and the capacities of the TAFEs to facilitate access through their inclusiveness strategies.

## State/territory, location and size

TAFE participation is not uniform across states/territories and has varied over time in different ways. As Figure 1 shows, between 2000 and 2004, there were increases in participation in four states/territories, while participation rates fell in the other four states/territories.

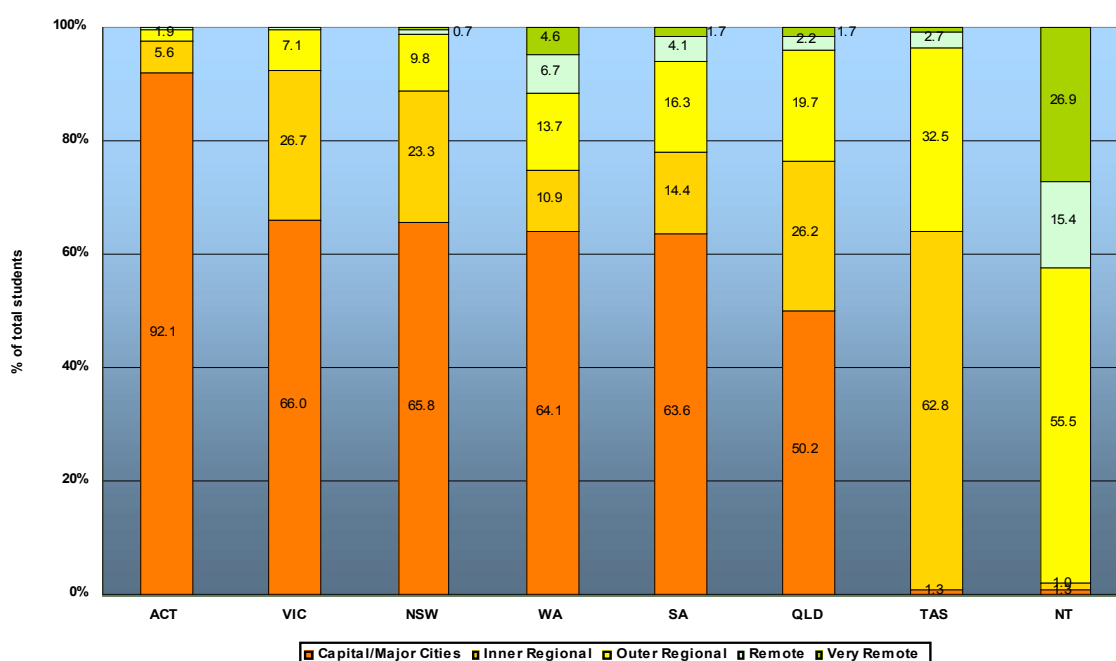
**Figure 1** Change in TAFE Participation 2000–2004, by state



Source: 2004 Students and Courses, NCVET 2005

While more than 60% of VET delivery in Australia in 2004 was to students in capital (48%) and major cities, the distribution varied by state/territory as Figure 2 below illustrates. There are a variety of ways in which a TAFE's location may affect its approach to inclusiveness and subsequent practice. Metropolitan TAFEs operate within a context of existing external service and support infrastructure for students' non-educational needs. There is also likely to be an existing transport infrastructure. However, they compete for students with other metropolitan TAFEs and RTOs. Regional TAFEs are often the sole TAFE provider, or even the sole VET provider in their area. With a more defined catchment, they are more easily able to develop an awareness of local industry skill needs and barriers to effective TAFE participation. However, they are more likely to experience increased demand for non-educational responses to student disadvantage and need to network with external agencies to build a support infrastructure. Regional areas are also likely to have much poorer public transport options.

**Figure 2 TAFE delivery by level of remoteness by state/territory, 2004**



Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVER.

Table 1 below shows the variation in mean TAFE Institute size across states and territories. NSW had the largest mean TAFE size and also the largest TAFE in Australia with more than 63,000 students. The smallest TAFE had just 1,600 students.

**Table 1 Mean TAFE size by state and territory**

	NSW	Tas	Vic	ACT	Qld	NT	WA	SA
Number of TAFEs	10	1	18	1	16	2	10	3
Mean TAFE size	37,059	31,665	17,988	17,528	15,662	13,152	9,894	9,527

Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVER.

Small TAFEs may find it easier to develop a more detailed understanding of local issues and needs and to implement case management approaches. However, lack of density of learners with particular needs may mean that there is not a critical mass for support programs and targeted delivery. Smaller staff numbers and other resources can also make it more difficult to provide specific or individualised support. While large TAFEs are likely to have greater scope for dedicated staff and resource allocation to address specific learner group needs, it is more difficult to implement individualised screening (e.g. of literacy and numeracy proficiency) or support when the student numbers are large.

There was a correlation between TAFE size and degree of remoteness, with non-metropolitan TAFEs being considerably smaller in size, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2 Mean TAFE size by level of remoteness by state and territory**

<b>State/ Territory</b>	<b>Sole TAFE</b>	<b>Capital City/ Major City</b>	<b>Inner Regional</b>	<b>Outer Regional</b>	<b>Remote</b>	<b>Very Remote</b>
ACT	17528					
NSW		41621	26077	13935		
NT				11157		1626
QLD		15276	15264	12324	1727	
SA		11011		5107		
TAS	38942					
VIC		23273	11606	6323		
WA		18616	5223	4718	3699	

Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVET.

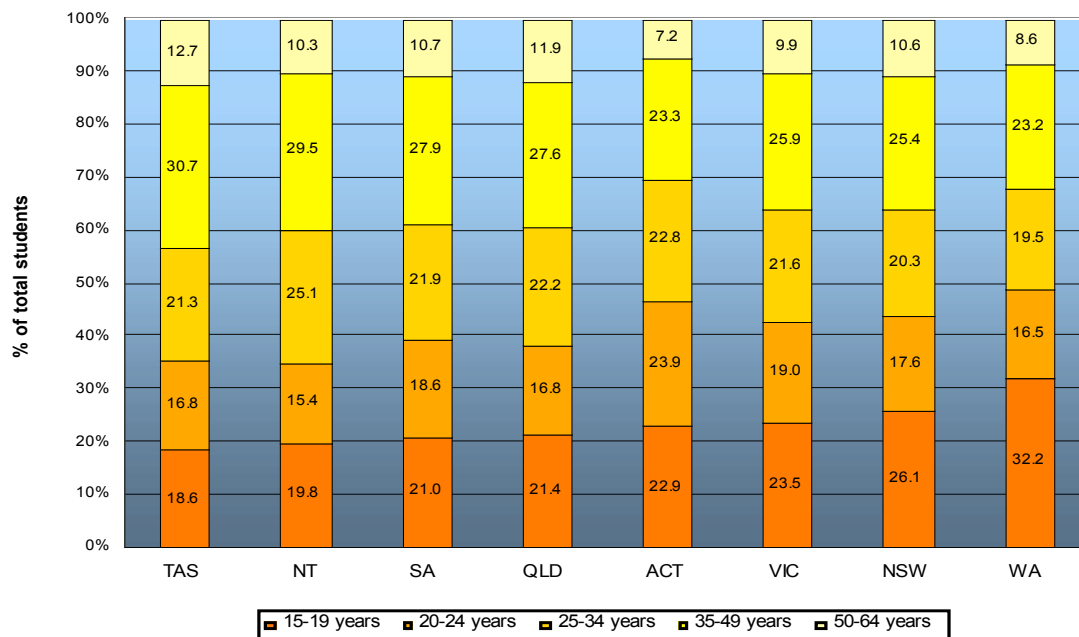
## Gender and age

Female participation rates differed by state/territory and by location. For example, in South Australia, there was a trend towards higher participation by women in regional TAFEs compared with capital city TAFEs, but the reverse was true in Victoria where 2004 rates of female participation were 8.7% lower in non-metropolitan TAFEs, compared with metropolitan TAFEs. In New South Wales, Western Australia and Queensland, rates of female participation were relatively consistent across capital city, major city, inner and outer regional areas.

Participation rates of different age groups in TAFE also differed by state/territory as shown in Figure 3 below. Participation of young people 15-19 years and 20-24 years, age groups regularly targeted as priority groups, varied markedly. These variations cannot be explained by varying proportions of young people in the population. For example, the rate of participation in TAFE of 15-19 year olds in Western Australia was 32.2%, almost twice the lowest rate of 18.6% in Tasmania. However, the proportion of 15-19 year olds in the population in Australian states/territories varied only from a minimum of 6.8% in the Northern Territory to a maximum of 7.9% in the Australian Capital Territory.

Rates of participation of young people in TAFE are influenced by a range of factors including local economic conditions such as local industry growth or decline and youth unemployment rates. Levels of study in TAFE of young people, in addition to the rates of overall participation, are also influenced by local school effectiveness. High rates of early school leaving are likely to contribute to higher rates of enrolment in non award and low AQF level study and a much greater demand for study support and assistance to improve literacy and numeracy proficiency.

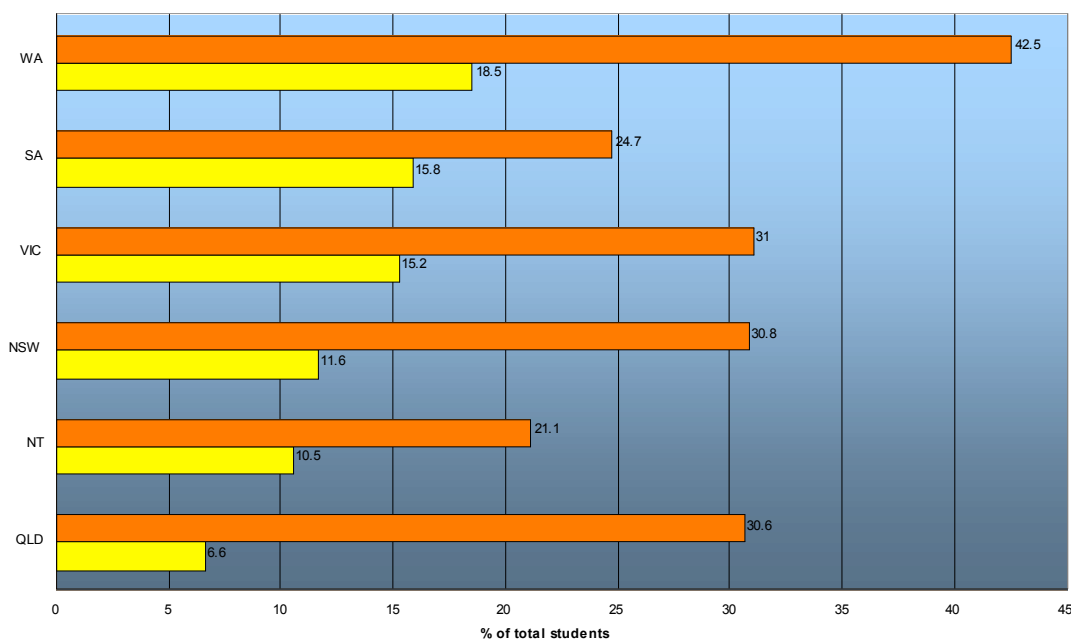
**Figure 3 Participation of different age groups in TAFE Institutes by state/territory, 2004.**



Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVER.

Rates of participation of young people were also not consistent within states and territories but differed by TAFE institute. Figure 4 below shows the variations between the TAFEs with lowest and highest proportions of 15-19 year olds by State/Territory (not including Tasmania and the ACT with only one TAFE each).

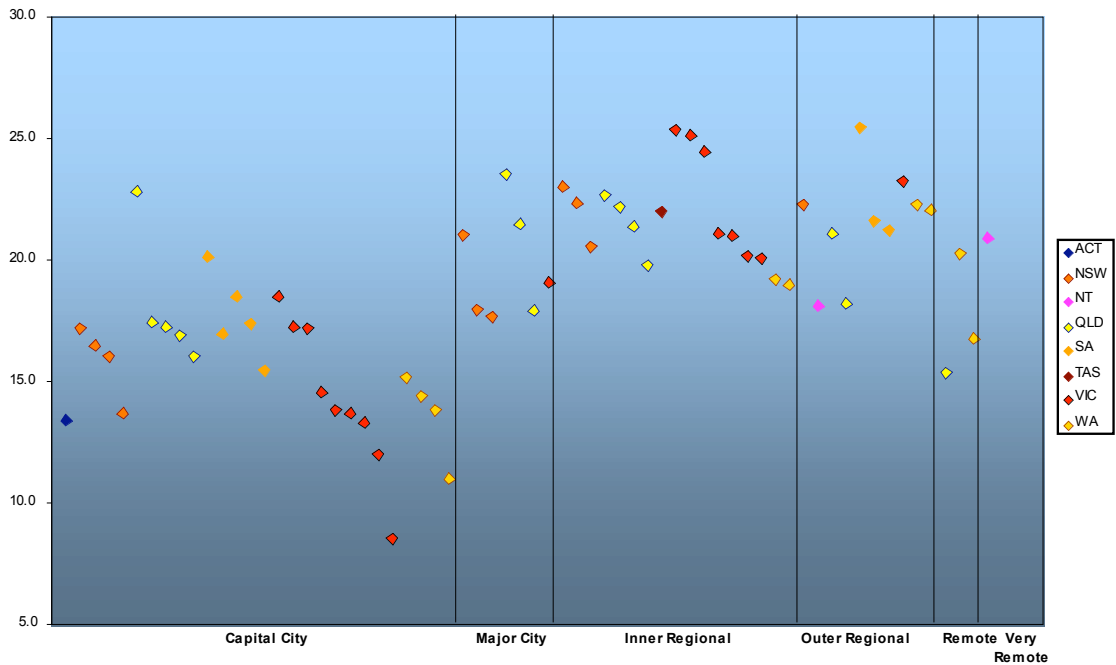
**Figure 4 Rates of participation of 15–19 year olds in TAFEs with highest and lowest proportions by state/territory**



Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVER.

Rates of participation by the 45+ age group, targeted and/or prioritised at both the Commonwealth and state/territory levels, were generally higher outside the capital and major cities. The trend was particularly pronounced in Victorian and Western Australian TAFEs, as Figure 5 below indicates.

**Figure 5 Participation rates for age group '45 years and over' for state/territory TAFEs by level of remoteness, 2004**



Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVET.

## Density of disadvantage

The proportions of students belonging to the established disadvantaged groups varied considerably between and within states and territories. The densities of these disadvantaged groups in state/territory TAFEs reflected the demographics of the state/territory, and in particular, of the TAFE catchment areas, equity policies and targets and the capacities of the TAFEs to facilitate access through their inclusiveness strategies.

Shifts in the participation rates of disadvantaged groups do not occur consistently across the nation. Nor are they consistent across states/territories, regions, or TAFE Institutes. At the state/territory level, the growth or decline in participation rates during the five years, 2000 to 2004, has varied, enormously in some cases, as Table 3 below indicates for selected groups.



**Table 3 Disadvantaged student groups as a proportion of all students by state and territory, 2004, with change 2000–2004.**

State	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
Indigenous	2.2	3.2	38.6	4.6	3.6	3.1	0.9	7.6
% Change 2000-2004	126.5	30.3	16.3	8.2	32.4	10.8	-7.1	35.7
With Disability	5.8	7.1	4.6	3.8	5.9	7.0	5.3	4.7
% Change 2000-2004	30.8	88.3	65.2	1.4	70.9	72.6	47.5	85.0
From LBOTE	11.2	15.9	6.1	8.9	10.1	4.9	13.7	11.5
% Change 2000-2004	-16.1	65.1	-17.4	11.3	-27.5	-1.3	7.5	11.8
Women	51.6	48.8	46.7	45.7	50.0	43.1	47.5	46.8
% Change 2000-2004	7.5	-4.3	-0.6	-6.0	5.3	-4.2	-0.2	-1.5
With no Year 12	27.0	30.8	34.2	33.2	38.7	22.4	45.7	39.2
% Change 2000-2004	-8.6	-14.6	15.0	7.0	-14.6	-3.6	-10.7	10.8

Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVET.

## Indigenous

The rate of participation of Indigenous students in VET, as a proportion of all VET students, was highest in the Northern Territory (more than 8 times the next highest rate). During the period 2000-2004, participation of Indigenous students in VET grew in all states and territories, except Victoria, which also had the lowest proportion of Indigenous students.

## Disability

Rises and declines in particular student group participation rates in individual states/territories are not necessarily associated with changes in overall participation rates in VET. For example, during the 2000-2004 period, overall participation in VET in NSW fell by almost 19% while rates of participation for people with a disability grew by more than 88%.

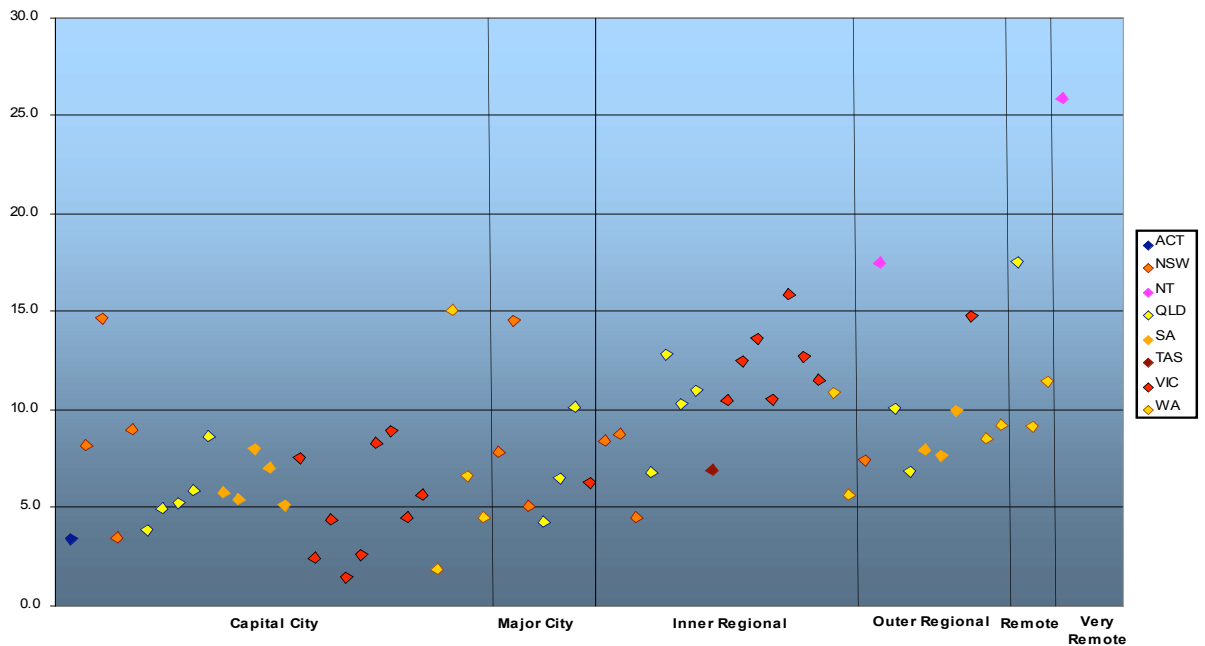
## Language background other than English (LBOTE)

Participation rates of people from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) in 2004 ranged from a low of 4.9% in Tasmanian TAFE, slightly lower than their 2000 rate, through to 15.9% in New South Wales TAFEs where the proportion grew by 65% over the five years 2000-2004. Differences in the densities of particular student groups are not only evident across but also within states and territories. Variations between TAFEs are especially evident in relation to the participation rates of people from language backgrounds other than English: in one state/territory 80.1% of one TAFE's students reported a language background other than English while for another TAFE the proportion was only 1.6%.

## Low previous educational attainment

Across the nation, there is a significant variation in the proportion of students with low previous educational attainment enrolled in TAFE. For students who have not completed Year 10, the participation rate ranged from 1.5% in one Victorian TAFE to 25.9% in a Northern Territory TAFE. There was a correlation between participation rates for this group and TAFE location, with proportions of this cohort being higher in regional and remote TAFEs for all states, except in New South Wales, where proportions tended to be higher in capital city and major city TAFEs, as Figure 6 below illustrates.

**Figure 6 Highest school level 'below Year 10' for state/territory TAFEs by level of remoteness, 2004**



Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVET.

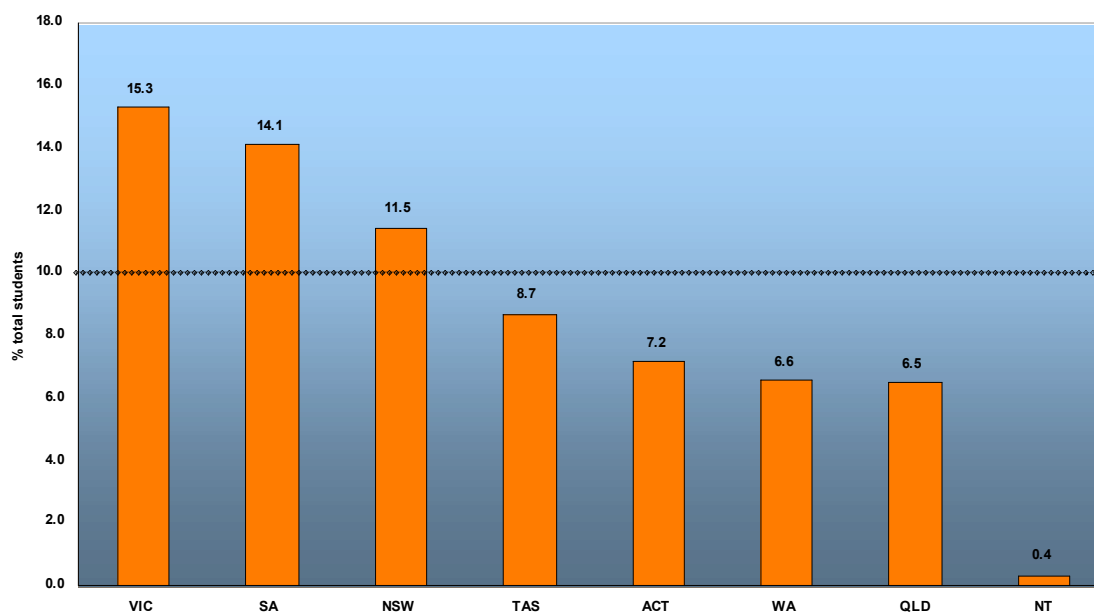
It is important to note that membership of these groups is self-reported by TAFE students and the context and processes associated with such data collection is likely to have an impact on how readily students self-report whether they are Indigenous, have a disability, speak a language other than English at home, or have low literacy and numeracy skills. In one state/territory, all students entering TAFE are routinely tested to determine their literacy and numeracy skills and this information (clearly more accurate than self-reported data about low literacy and numeracy) is used for reporting AVETMISS data.

## Socioeconomic disadvantage

Across states and territories, TAFEs cater to vastly different proportions of students from their most socio-economically disadvantaged communities. To facilitate an analysis of social and economic disadvantage, socio-economic status (SES) was assigned to students on the basis of the postcode of their home address. Postal districts were ranked across each state and territory using the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Index of Socio-Economic Disadvantage (2001) and grouped into ten equal bands where the lowest decile (or 10%) represents the poorest students and the highest band represents the wealthiest students. Assigning individuals an index of disadvantage based on their residential postcode assumes homogeneity across the district. However, individual addresses at census collection district level, which would provide a finer level of analysis, were not available. It is also important to recognise that SES bands are not consistent across states and territories.

Figure 7 below shows the proportions of 2004 TAFE students, by state and territory, whose socioeconomic status fell into the lowest decile for their jurisdiction. This allows us to see to what extent TAFEs were engaging the poorest members of their state/territory communities.

**Figure 7 Proportion of students from state/territory lowest decile SES, 2004**



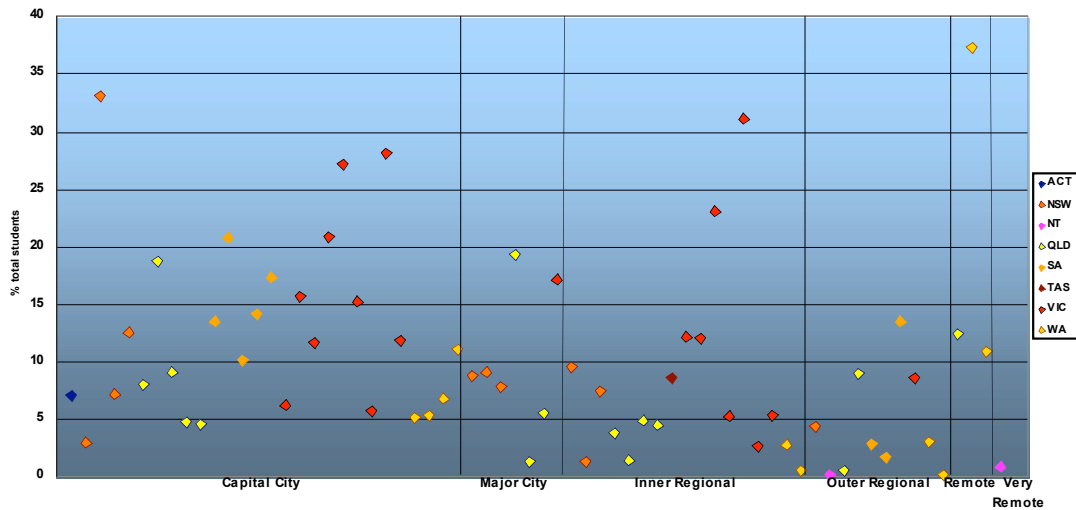
Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVET, ABS 2001

Victorian, South Australian and New South Wales TAFEs engaged greater proportions of the poorest 10% of people in their state than would be expected if SES status was equally distributed among the TAFE student population. In Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory, Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory, the poorest people in that state/territory were represented at lower levels (than the expected 10%) in TAFE programs.

The poorest people in a state or territory are clearly not distributed evenly across regions serviced by TAFEs. TAFEs in high SES areas are likely to have far fewer poor students than TAFEs in socio-economically disadvantaged regions. Hence mean proportions of students in the lowest SES decile for a state/territory do not indicate participation rates in that state or territory's individual TAFEs. For example, the two TAFEs with the lowest (0.3%) and highest (37.4%) proportions of the most socio-economically disadvantaged students in their jurisdiction were found to be located in the same state.

We can explore how the density of student socio-economic disadvantage in TAFEs varies by location, in particular, by level of remoteness. To facilitate this analysis, all TAFEs were designated a 'location': capital city; major city; inner regional; outer regional; remote and very remote; on the basis of the location of the majority of its students, as recorded in the AVETMISS dataset. As some TAFEs have campuses spread across geographical regions, it was helpful to use student locations (i.e. the major TAFE catchment) in designating an overall 'location' for each TAFE. Figure 8 below shows the percentage of students from the lowest decile SES for all Australian TAFEs, by their designated location.

**Figure 8 Percentage of students from lowest decile SES for TAFEs by location**



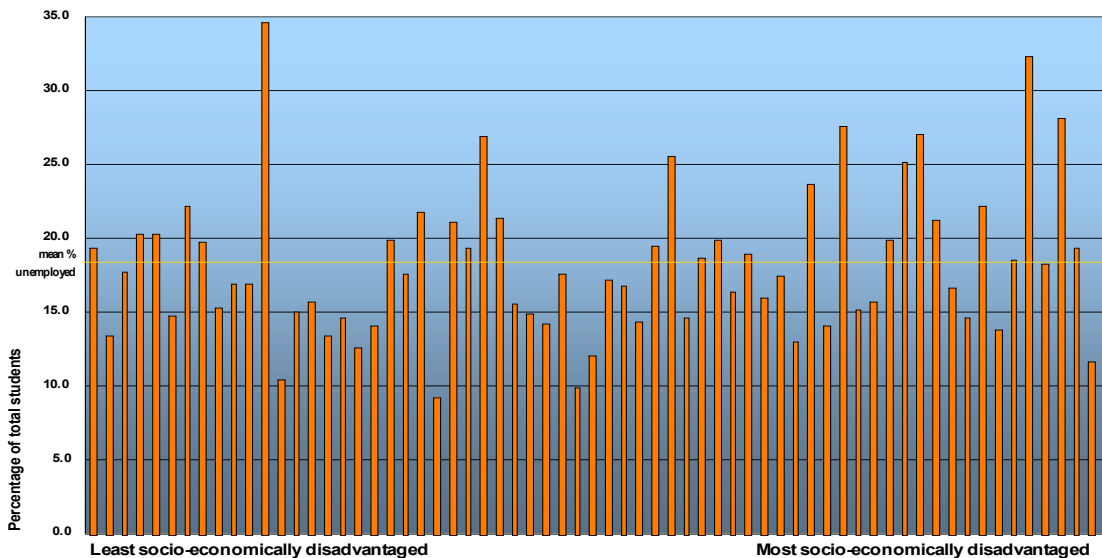
Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVET, ABS 2001.

While high proportions of severely disadvantaged students were located in regional as well as capital cities, capital city TAFEs tended to have higher proportions of students from the lowest SES decile than major city or regional TAFEs. Western Australia was the only state where this trend was reversed and the proportion of the most disadvantaged students was highest for TAFEs in remote areas.

## Unemployment

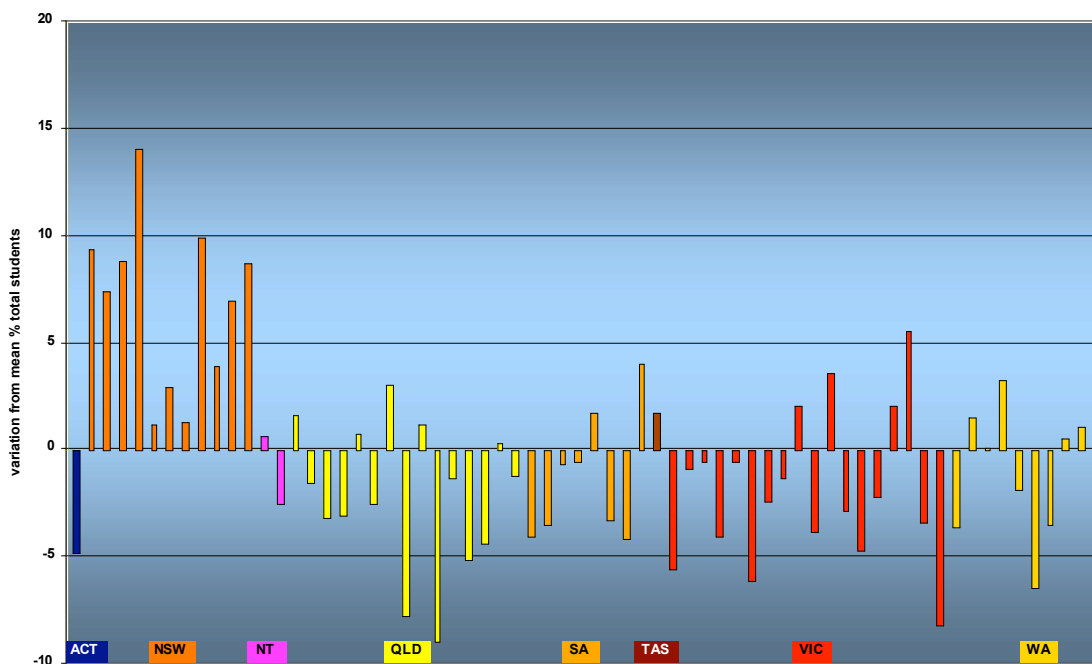
Unemployment, particularly long term unemployment, clearly disadvantages mature age students and young students from socio-economically disadvantaged families. However, analysis of the data revealed no discernable patterns to the incidence of high proportions of unemployed learners in TAFEs, in relation to TAFE location type. TAFEs with the most socio-economically disadvantaged students were slightly more likely to have above average proportions of unemployed students, as Figure 9 below illustrates. There were also state/territory differences, as Figure 10 below shows.

**Figure 9 Percentage of students unemployed by mean TAFE SES, 2004**



Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVET.

**Figure 10 Variation from the mean TAFE % of unemployed students, grouped by state/territory**



Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVET.

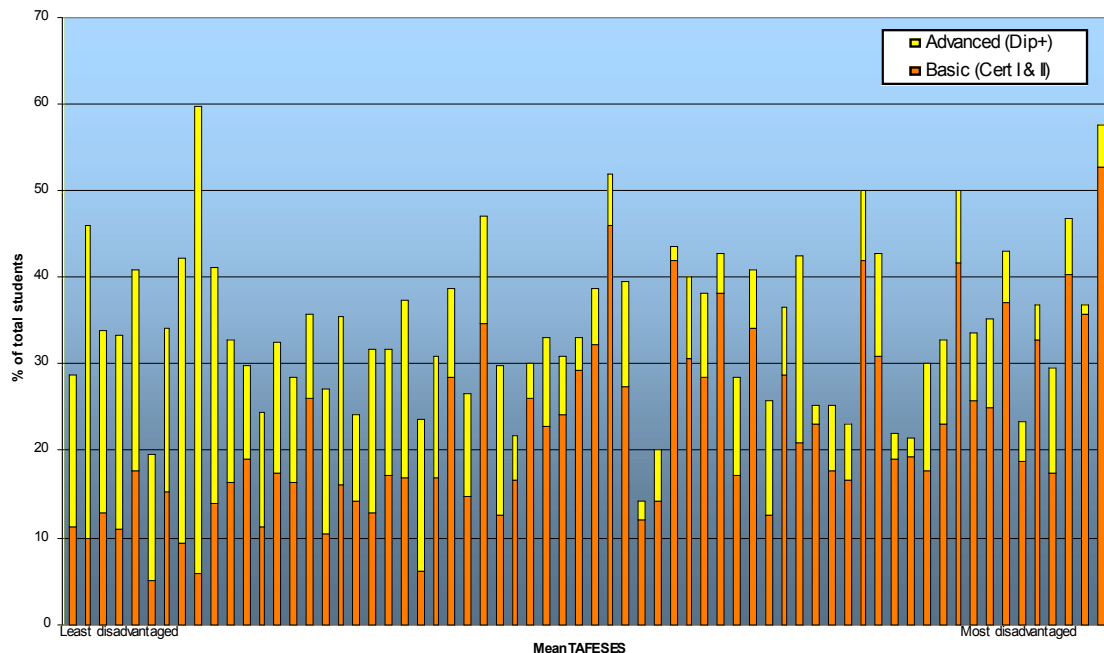
All New South Wales TAFE's had higher than national mean proportions of students who were unemployed while in most other states and territories, there were TAFE's with both higher and lower than mean proportions.

## Level of study

There is a strong relationship between the socio-economic disadvantage experienced by TAFE students and the AQF level of study in which they are enrolled. As Figure 11 below illustrates,

TAFEs with the most socio-economically disadvantaged cohorts (determined through calculation of a mean SES value for all the students in each TAFE) tend to have much lower rates of participation in the Advanced (Diploma and higher) level programs than TAFEs with the least socio-economically disadvantaged cohorts. Conversely, the most socio-economically disadvantaged cohorts participate in much higher rates at the Basic (Cert I and II) levels of study, less likely to result in strong employment outcomes.

**Figure 11 Participation in advanced and basic VET by mean TAFE SES, 2004**



Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVET.

## Complexity of disadvantage

TAFEs with high proportions of students from a particular disadvantaged group face the challenge of making effective provision for access, successful participation and outcomes for that group. However, some TAFEs have high proportions of differently disadvantaged students, for example, high proportions of LBOTE students, students with a disability, early school leavers and those whose socio-economic status falls into the lowest decile SES. Clearly, these TAFEs face a more complex task in developing inclusiveness strategies to meet the needs of large numbers of students with potentially different issues and needs.

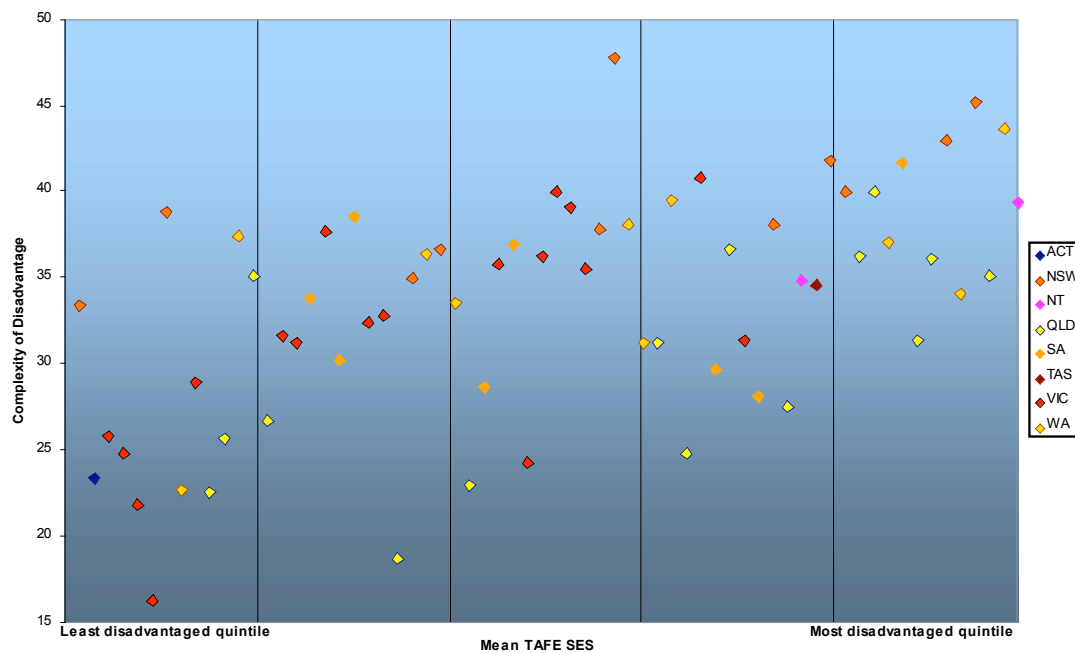
To facilitate analysis of the different levels of complexity of disadvantage that TAFEs need to address among their student populations, we have developed a Complexity of Disadvantage Index. All TAFEs were ranked, according to their relative density of students from each of the disadvantaged and/or targeted groups listed below and then a mean rank across the seven groups was calculated to indicate each TAFE's relative complexity of disadvantage. Thus, we were able to identify the TAFEs with high relative densities across these disadvantaged groups.

- ◇ Indigenous people
- ◇ People with a disability
- ◇ People speaking a language other than English at home
- ◇ Early school leavers (who have not completed Year 10 of secondary education)

- ✧ Most socio-economically disadvantaged people (lowest decile SES)
- ✧ 15-19 year olds (a commonly targeted group)
- ✧ People older than 45 years of age

Complexity of disadvantage had strong correlations with some of the other indicators of disadvantage. Figure 12 below shows the levels of complexity of disadvantage for TAFEs by their mean TAFE SES, with their jurisdictions indicated. The vertical panels indicate the five socioeconomic quintiles (bands of 20%) with the least disadvantaged quintile on the left and the most disadvantaged on the right. TAFEs with the most disadvantaged students were more likely to be required to address higher levels of complexity of disadvantage than those with the least disadvantaged students.

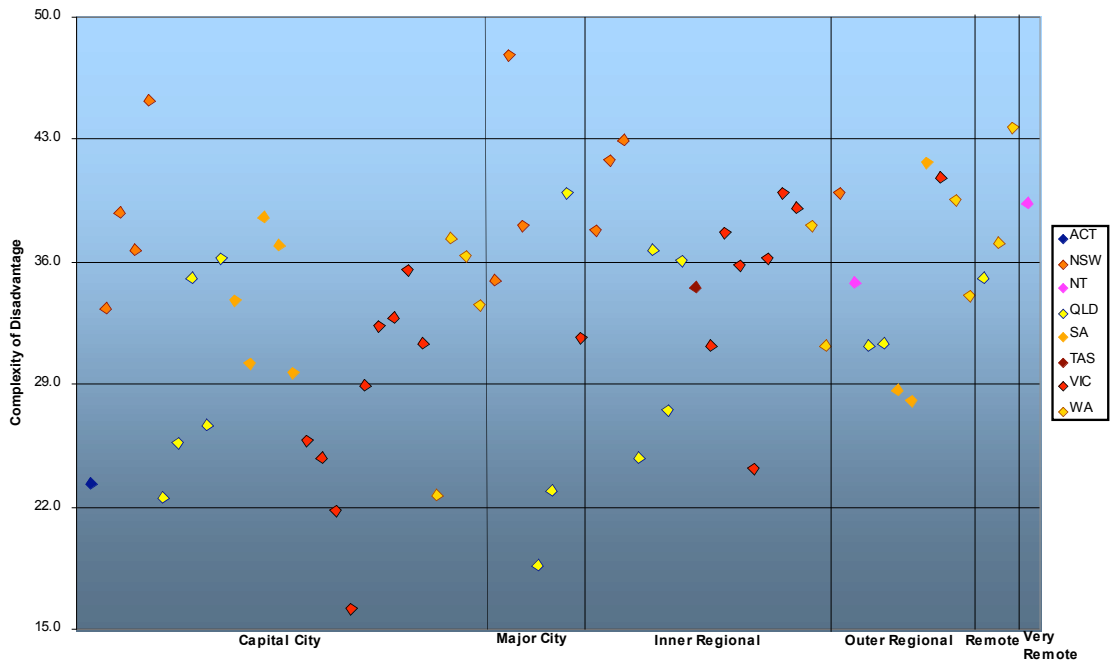
**Figure 12 Complexity of disadvantage for state/territory TAFEs by mean TAFE SES, 2004**



Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVET, ABS 2001.

There was no consistent connection evident between complexity of disadvantage and the location of a TAFE. However, as Figure 13 demonstrates, for some states, Victoria in particular, complexity of disadvantage in TAFEs was greater in regional areas than in the capital and major cities. This trend was also evident for NSW, Western Australia and Queensland though not as strongly as for Victoria. The 10% of TAFEs experiencing the lowest levels of complexity of disadvantage were delivering to students in capital and major city locations.

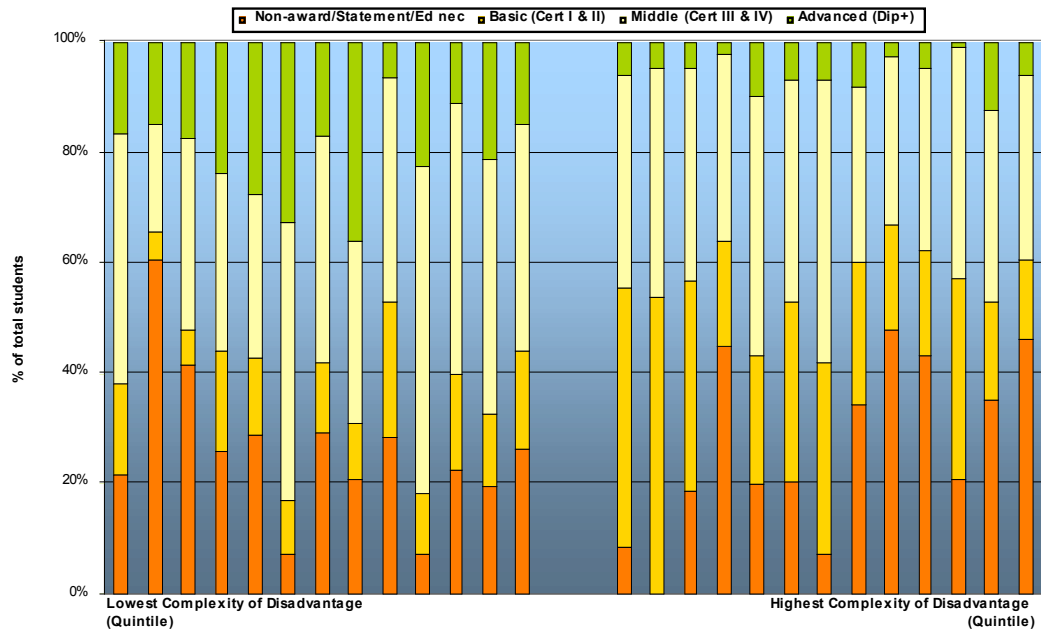
**Figure 13 Complexity of disadvantage by level of remoteness by state/territory, 2004**



Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVET, ABS 2001

There was a relationship evident between complexity of disadvantage and participation in higher level AQF programs, as Figure 14 below shows.

**Figure 14 Complexity of disadvantage by AQF level of participation**



Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVET

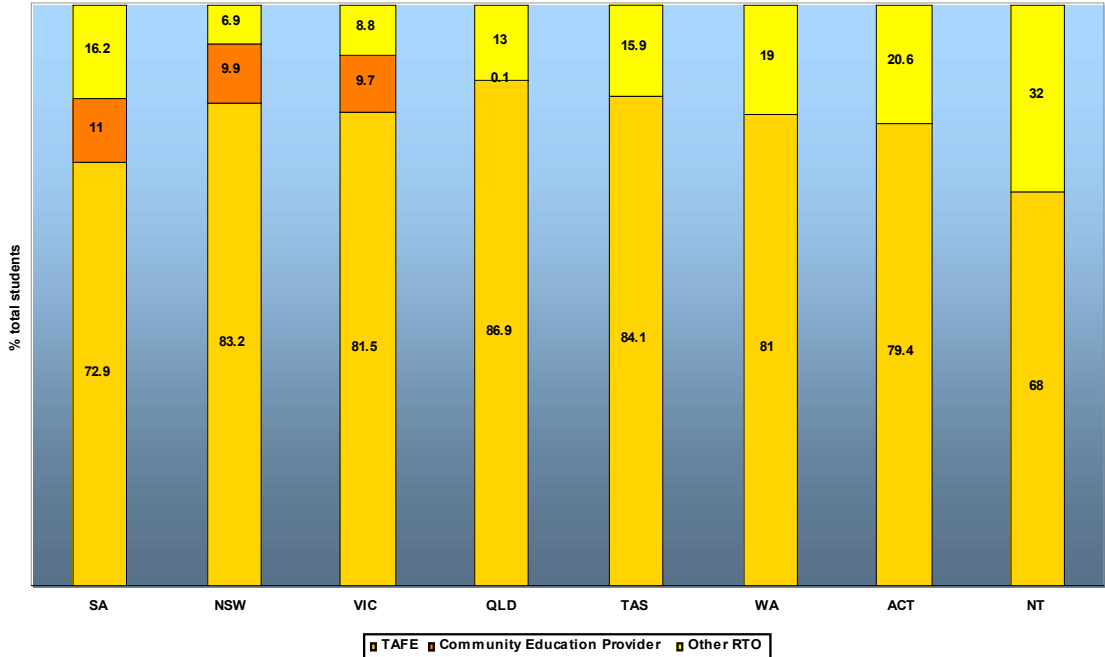


As Figure 14 above indicates, at the TAFEs with the highest levels of complexity of disadvantage, a far smaller proportion of students was participating in advanced (Diploma and above) level programs than at those TAFEs with the lowest levels of complexity of disadvantage.

## Other provider types

TAFEs do not operate alone as providers of VET but in contexts with different levels and types of provision by private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), community education providers and secondary schools providing VET in Schools programs. Figure 15 shows the proportions of VET enrolments by provider type, for each state/territory.

**Figure 15 VET provision by provider type, 2004**



Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVET

Community education providers deliver substantial proportions of VET in three states: Victoria (9.7%); New South Wales (9.9%) and South Australia (11%). Across these three states, there is much stronger participation in community education providers by women than men: (66% in NSW, 70% in Victoria and 71% in SA). There is also much lower participation of young people in community providers than in TAFE or in Private RTOs. However, if we consider the rates of participation of various disadvantaged learners in community education providers across these three states, compared with rates in TAFE and Private RTOs, it is clear that the role these providers play as an equity provider differs significantly across states, as Table 4 below shows.

**Table 4 Rate of participation (%) of student groups in TAFE, community education and other RTOs, NSW, Victoria and South Australia, 2004**

State	Provider Type	Indigenous	Disability	LBOTE	Without Year 10	15-19 year olds	20-24 year olds	Still at school	Lowest decile SES
NSW	TAFE	4.6	11.1	24.3	11.9	26.1	17.6	10.4	11.5
	Community Ed	2.9	4.7	15.9	10.0	6.4	8.5	1.8	5.6
	Other RTO	6.0	1.2	15.3	11.0	25.4	22.2	5.1	10.4
VIC	TAFE	1.0	4.9	17.2	10.6	23.5	19.0	5.6	15.3
	Community Ed	1.1	10.6	14.7	16.8	10.9	9.2	3.3	16.2
	Other RTO	0.9	5.9	11.4	10.6	26.0	24.1	7.8	17.8
SA	TAFE	4.2	6.8	12.8	8.5	21.0	18.6	9.1	14.1
	Community Ed	1.8	10.6	14.6	16.1	3.7	8.4	3.4	15.6
	Other RTO	6.0	2.6	6.1	11.2	37.3	24.1	10.9	19.2

Source: 2004 AVETMISS data, NCVET

In NSW, rates of participation of learners who are Indigenous, have a disability, who have not completed Year 10 and whose socio-economic status places them in the lowest decile SES are lower in community providers than in TAFE or in Private RTOs. The reverse is true in Victoria, where community education providers have greater proportions, than TAFE or Private RTOs of learners who are Indigenous, have a disability, have not completed Year 10, and whose socio-economic status falls within the lowest decile SES. Similarly, South Australian community education providers cater to greater proportions of some disadvantaged cohorts than TAFE and Private RTOs do in that state.



# Factors impacting TAFE inclusiveness: Case studies of three Australian regions

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# Key messages

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Part of the larger project *A well-skilled future: Tailoring VET to the emerging labour market*, this report of three cases follows on from a national survey of TAFE institutes and state/territory training authorities to investigate, in more detail, how regional factors impact on TAFE capacity for effective inclusiveness. Inclusiveness strategies are crucial for optimising the skill levels of disadvantaged people to assist in meeting the future skill needs of the workforce.

- ✧ These case studies demonstrate the diverse drivers for TAFE inclusiveness across different regions and the important influence regional context has on capacity for TAFE inclusiveness practice.
- ✧ Regional infrastructure and community capacity for facilitating participation in VET are crucial factors in determining TAFE capacity for inclusiveness. Where there was a severe lack of community support mechanisms, TAFE capacity was considerably reduced. Where TAFEs had access to a broad range of existing community support structures, the inclusiveness capacity of the TAFE was significantly enhanced.
- ✧ Competition between TAFEs and other VET providers may achieve higher rates of overall VET participation, but an environment of competition hinders the exchange of knowledge and the consolidation and sharing of resources. Poor relationships between TAFEs and other regional stakeholders were also demonstrated to impede effective TAFE inclusiveness.
- ✧ Those TAFEs that have developed open, effective and mutually beneficial relationships with the agencies that can address these needs, have a greater capacity to provide timely and appropriate non-educational support and for sustainable inclusiveness.
- ✧ It is the extent to which TAFEs proactively seek out these networks and attempt to gain an understanding of the needs of their industry, community and individual clients that determine how effective their responses will be.

Increasingly, inclusiveness strategies within TAFEs are incorporating non-educational, community capacity building and brokerage roles which evidence from the national survey and case studies would suggest these are roles for which TAFEs have not received sufficient and sustainable resourcing. Further consideration needs to be given to where these 'non-training' roles of TAFEs fit within the greater responsiveness of the VET sector and how TAFE institutes can be supported to fulfil these roles and pursue greater social inclusion in their regions.

# Executive summary

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This report is a component of the research program entitled *A well-skilled future: Tailoring VET to the emerging labour market*, in which the evolving labour market and changing work organisation and management in the context of vocational education and training (VET) sector are examined. The research was undertaken by a consortium of researchers from the National Institute of Labour Studies and the Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning of the University of Melbourne.

This report of three case studies follows on from a national survey of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes and state and territory training authorities and the development of a set of typologies for identifying different approaches to inclusiveness across the national sector, documented in *The impact of TAFE inclusiveness strategies* (Volkoff, Clarke & Walstab 2007). The national survey explored internal TAFE practice and the various drivers of inclusive practice, including national and state/territory policy, industry needs and disadvantaged cohort needs. Building on the findings of the national TAFE survey, the aim of the case studies was to investigate, in more detail, the impact of regional factors on TAFE inclusiveness strategies.

## Background

In this research, the term ‘TAFE inclusiveness’ is used to describe the strategies, programs, approaches, mechanisms and policies that TAFEs use to address barriers to accessing, participating in and completing VET in their communities and amongst their existing cohorts of learners. This research has adopted a broad definition of disadvantaged or equity/targeted groups of learners, to reflect the diverse groups that TAFEs across the national sector reported identifying and targeting within their own catchments. Disadvantaged learners were defined as those facing barriers to accessing, effectively participating in and successfully completing TAFE study due to individual, environmental and/or systemic factors. Particular groups such as Indigenous peoples, 15-19 year olds and people from low socio-economic backgrounds were used as examples in these case studies.

The national phone survey of TAFEs had revealed fundamental differences in the approaches that they took to inclusiveness and a correlation between the capacity of TAFEs to engage key disadvantaged learner groups and their level of development of inclusiveness strategies. Three distinct approaches to inclusiveness were identified from the national survey and categorised as: compliance (those primarily driven by government equity targets), existing cohort (those primarily driven by the needs of learners already engaged with VET) and community obligation (those primarily driven by broader disadvantage and learning needs of their catchment communities). Evidence from the case studies supported the finding from the national survey that VET landscape and regional environment play a significant role in determining TAFE capacity to develop effective responses to identified barriers to VET.

## Aim

During the national survey, regional dynamics and inter-agency relationships within a regional VET landscape were described by interviewees as having an impact upon both the capacity for inclusive practice and the effectiveness of internal TAFE models of inclusiveness. The aim of these three cases studies was to explore in more detail the ways in which regional factors might drive, facilitate and/or impede effective inclusiveness strategies. The key research questions were:

- ✧ How have the TAFEs' capacities for inclusiveness in the three regions been influenced and molded by regional factors?
- ✧ How has regional TAFE inclusiveness practice evolved in response to regional characteristics that varyingly facilitate and restrict inclusive practice?

In each region, the research sought to identify the dynamics of the VET landscape and critical issues of disadvantage and institutionalised and structural barriers that impacted on the capacity for effective TAFE inclusive practice. The research also highlights examples of innovative and/or effective inclusiveness strategies that were facilitated by, drew on or were stimulated by regional factors. All three case study regions had complex social, economic and educational profiles. In order to build a wide-ranging illustration of the environment in which the TAFEs were operating and to help identify the significance of different regional factors for TAFE inclusiveness, the research examined six key factors in each region: Demographic factors; Economic factors; VET landscape; Community factors; Educational factors; and Institutional and systemic factors.

## Methodology

The three case study regions were selected in conjunction with researchers conducting research for the companion volume, *Participation in vocational education and training across Australia: A regional analysis* (Walstab & Lamb 2007). Regions displaying higher or lower than expected levels of participation in VET in the context of their demographic and economic characteristics were selected. The regions were not linked to a type of TAFE inclusiveness identified through the national survey and it was not the intention of the researchers to use the case studies to highlight well or under developed inclusiveness strategies, as assessed using the typologies and the national survey. Rather, the three regions each provide an illustration of how regional factors shape TAFE inclusive practice. The three regions selected were: Ovens Murray region, Victoria; Midlands region, Western Australia; and Hume City region, Victoria.

Following selection of the case study regions, an initial phone interview was conducted with the TAFE contacts within each region, focussed on identifying the key personnel within the institutes and the key stakeholders within the region who would be invited to participate in the case study. An on-going desktop review was conducted prior to, during and after the fieldwork. Documentation, sourced from education and training, community, local government and support agencies, included program descriptions and evaluations of targeted VET programs, environmental scans, internal equity policy documents from VET providers and some internal provider data relating to participation of particular student groups.

## The regions

### Case study one: Ovens Murray

The Ovens Murray region, in regional Victoria, was characterised by rapid population and economic growth in its two regional centres. High levels of regional youth disengagement, wide-spread levels of low literacy and numeracy and strong participation in VET amongst those from a low socio-economic background were the key factors driving TAFE inclusiveness strategies. A well



established community education sector was identified as stimulating TAFE innovation while also reducing some demand for TAFE. A high rate of overall VET participation, strong industry demand for skilled labour and the presence of two Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) that fostered partnerships between TAFE and other stakeholders were factors identified as facilitating effective TAFE inclusiveness. Competition and suspicion between providers was hindering collaboration and cross-sectoral partnerships. There appeared to be limited involvement by local governments in promoting or driving VET participation and provision.

## Case study two: Midlands

A geographically dispersed population, a significant population of Indigenous peoples and high levels of socio-economically disadvantaged people were driving inclusive practice. Strong links between the TAFE and the school sector and well developed relationships and strong collaboration between the TAFE and Indigenous communities were described as enhancing capacity for TAFE inclusiveness. Spread across a large geographic area, including inner regional, outer regional and remote locations, this region was experiencing relatively low rates of participation in VET, a factor perceived to be hindering TAFE inclusiveness strategies. The dominant industry sector (agriculture) was reported to be generating very limited demand for training and few opportunities for targeted employment pathways programs. Insufficient support service infrastructure around the TAFE and poor regional IT capacity were identified as hindering provision for remote learners.

## Case Study three: Hume City

Situated on the urban fringe of Melbourne, this region was experiencing low school retention, significant levels of people from a low socio-economic background, a large migrant and non-English speaking background population and people with low levels of previous educational attainment. All these factors were identified as demanding responsive and effective TAFE inclusiveness strategies from the regional TAFE providers. The region was characterised by high rates of overall participation in VET and a heavily populated VET landscape. A local government strategic focus on education and provision of community learning resources, a strong community education sector and formalised processes for inter-agency knowledge sharing were identified as facilitating TAFE inclusive practice. Poor regional transport infrastructure, a volatile economic environment and some poor relationships between the TAFE and schools were identified impediments to effective TAFE inclusiveness strategies.

## Key observations

The case studies demonstrated the diverse drivers for TAFE inclusiveness across different regions and the important influence regional context has on capacity for TAFE inclusiveness practice. Each region illustrated how an awareness of disadvantaged learner needs alone is insufficient: the evidence reinforced the findings from the national TAFE survey that effective TAFE inclusiveness is very rarely achieved by TAFE institutes in isolation. Effective inclusiveness practice requires the evaluation and exchange of knowledge about learner disadvantage and application of collaborative and cohesive approaches. What is evident from the three case studies is that within some regional landscapes, TAFE institutes have better access to external resources that facilitate inclusiveness and are less impeded by regional factors restricting learner participation. Not all communities in which TAFEs operate experience a pre-existing commitment to supporting disadvantaged people or valuing education. All three regions provided evidence of how TAFEs are in a position, in partnership with other agencies, to stimulate and build a commitment to learning and community obligation around them.

All three regions were experiencing or predicting significant population change and there was a common sense of unease about the preparedness of the regions to respond to and capitalise on the

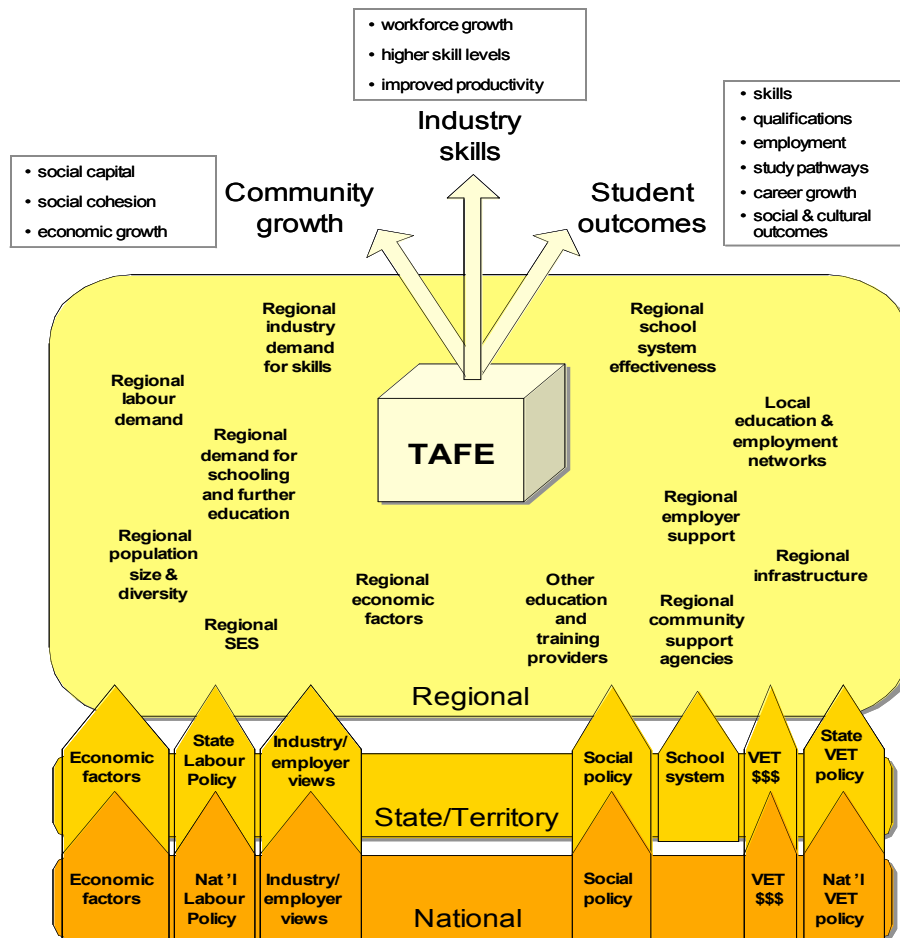
benefits of that change. Enhancing and sustaining TAFE inclusiveness practice in the midst of changing and diversifying populations requires an awareness of not only the needs of existing learners, but also reliable processes for anticipating the needs of evolving catchment communities. Competition between individual VET providers, between different VET sectors, between VET providers and the school system or between different regional stakeholders was shown to not only limit capacity for knowledge exchange but also to have a severe impact on TAFE capacity for inclusiveness.

# Introduction

## Background to the study

This report is a companion volume to *The impact of TAFE inclusiveness strategies* (Volkoff, Clarke & Walstab 2007), the reported findings from a national survey of TAFE institutes and state and territory training authorities in which different approaches to TAFE inclusiveness across the national sector were identified. From this survey, a set of typologies for identifying inclusiveness strategies was developed. The national survey explored internal TAFE practice and the various drivers of inclusive practice, including national and state/territory policy, industry needs and disadvantaged cohort needs. Interviewee responses also provided an insight into how TAFEs engage with and reflect their regional environments. Leading on from the findings of the national TAFE survey, the aim of the case studies was to investigate, in more detail, the impact of regional factors (see Figure 1 below) on TAFE inclusiveness strategies.

**Figure 1 Model of TAFE impulses and outputs**



Source: Volkoff, Clarke and Walstab, 2007, p.9.

In this research, the term ‘TAFE inclusiveness’ is used to describe the strategies, programs, approaches, mechanisms and policies that TAFEs use to address barriers to accessing, participating in and completing VET in their communities and amongst their existing cohorts of learners (those already engaged with VET). TAFEs face the challenge of successfully balancing the multiple roles of responding to industry skills needs, addressing individual skill needs and promoting community strengthening. Being inclusive of disadvantaged people, in programs that are connected to and relevant to industry, is a vital part of meeting these responsibilities. This research has adopted a broad definition of disadvantaged or equity/targeted learners, to reflect the diverse groups that TAFEs across the national sector reported identifying and targeting within their own catchments. Disadvantaged learners were defined as those facing barriers to accessing, effectively participating in and successfully completing TAFE study due to individual, environmental and/or systemic factors. Indigenous peoples, people with a disability, women, people living in rural and remote areas, 15-19 year olds, mature aged people (45+), early school leavers (those with below year 10 educational attainment), those from low socio-economic backgrounds (SES), people with a language background other than English (LBOTE) and unemployed people were particular groups used as examples in these case studies. These groups are examined for a number of reasons, including their identification and prioritisation by different TAFEs in the three regions and the availability of Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS) data relating to their participation.

The national phone survey of TAFEs revealed fundamental differences in the approaches that they take to inclusiveness. In addition, the capacity of TAFEs to engage disadvantaged learner groups was correlated with their level of development of inclusiveness strategies. Three distinct approaches to inclusiveness were identified and categorised as: compliance (those primarily driven by government equity targets), existing cohort (those primarily driven by the needs of learners already engaged with VET) and community obligation (those primarily driven by broader disadvantage and learning needs of their catchment communities). A common theme emerging from the national survey was that, for TAFEs in all three categories, their VET landscape and regional environment played a significant role in determining their capacity to develop effective responses to identified barriers to VET. Evidence from the case studies supported this argument, and further illustrated how effective TAFE inclusive practice is not achieved in isolation and often involves drawing other providers, community stakeholders and industry into training planning, development and provision.

The fieldwork for the case studies paid particular attention to the significance of community partnerships within the inclusiveness strategies of VET providers in the three regions. Recent research has highlighted the role of community partnerships between providers and other stakeholders in establishing inclusive programs and delivery (Stokes, Stacey and Lake, 2006; Allison, Gorringer and Lacey, 2006) and the potential for local government involvement in supporting and facilitating inclusive VET provision (Waterhouse, Virgona and Brown, 2006). In recent times, the Commonwealth and several state/territory governments have also implemented strategies aimed at community strengthening and building community capacity. The case studies documented in this report attempt to identify the impact of a range of regional factors (demographic, economic, community, educational, institutional and systemic) and the impact of the regional VET landscape on a TAFE’s capacity for inclusive provision.

## Aim

During the national survey, regional dynamics and inter-agency relationships within a regional VET landscape were described by interviewees as having an impact upon both the capacity for inclusive practice and the effectiveness of internal TAFE models of inclusiveness. The culture of an institute, influenced by its historical role and its perceived place in the community was also reported to have a significant impact on its capacity for and approach to inclusiveness. The aim of these three cases

studies was to explore in more detail the ways in which regional factors might drive, facilitate and/or impede effective inclusiveness strategies. The key research questions were:

- ❖ How have the TAFEs' capacity for inclusiveness in the three regions been influenced and molded by regional factors?
- ❖ How has regional TAFE inclusiveness practice evolved in response to regional characteristics that varyingly facilitate and restrict inclusive practice?

The research also highlights some examples of innovative and/or effective inclusiveness strategies that were facilitated by, drew on or were stimulated by regional factors in the three regions.

All three case study regions had complex social, economic and educational profiles. In order to build a wide-ranging illustration of the environment in which the TAFEs were operating and to help identify the significance of different regional factors for TAFE inclusiveness, the research examined six key factors in each region: The six factors examined were:

- ❖ Demographic factors (e.g. population growth/decline, density of disadvantaged groups, )
- ❖ Economic factors (e.g. industry growth/decline, demand for skills, diversity/homogeneity of industry)
- ❖ VET landscape (e.g. number and type of providers, cross-sector and cross provider relationships)
- ❖ Community factors (e.g. regional non-educational stakeholders, support infrastructure)
- ❖ Educational factors (e.g. rates of participation, levels of educational attainment)
- ❖ Institutional and systemic factors (e.g. flexibility/rigidity of funding regimes, availability of staff and resources)

## Methodology

The three regions for case studies were selected in conjunction with researchers conducting research for the companion volume, *Participation in vocational education and training across Australia: A regional analysis* (Walstab & Lamb, 2007). This study used regression analysis to predict VET participation given key regional data and to identify 'exceptional' regions with unusually high or low rates of participation despite what might be expected given their industry base and population. Regions displaying higher or lower than expected levels of participation in VET in the context of their demographic and economic characteristics were selected. The regions were not linked to a type of TAFE inclusiveness identified through the national survey and it was not the intention of the researchers to use the case studies to highlight well or under developed inclusiveness strategies, as assessed using the typologies and the national survey. Rather, the three regions each provide an illustration of how regional factors shape TAFE inclusive practice. The three regions selected were:

- ❖ Ovens Murray region, Victoria
- ❖ Midlands region, Western Australia
- ❖ Hume City region, Victoria

The case studies build upon the qualitative data gathered in the national TAFE phone survey (Volkoff, Clarke & Walstab, 2007) and the analysis of 2004 AVETMISS data. Following selection of the case study regions, an initial phone interview was conducted with the TAFE contacts within each region who had participated in the national survey. These preliminary conversations focussed on identifying the key personnel within the institutes and the key stakeholders within the region who would be invited to participate in the case study.

An on-going desktop review was conducted prior to, during and after the fieldwork.

Documentation was sourced from education and training, community, local government and support agencies to both further inform the case study sampling and to develop detailed regional

profiles. Documentation included program descriptions and evaluations of targeted VET programs, environmental scans, internal equity policy documents from VET providers and some internal provider data relating to participation of particular student groups. During the fieldwork, documentation was also gathered from interviewees to supplement the interview data. As shown in Table 1, in addition to interviewing representatives from VET providers, consultations were also conducted with representatives from local government, community organisations, schools and industry.

**Table 1 Interview participants**

Type of interviewee	Number of respondents		
	<i>Ovens Murray</i>	<i>Hume City</i>	<i>Midlands</i>
TAFE Staff	12	12	10
TAFE Management Staff	5	7	3
Community Education Provider Staff	7	5	
Representatives from Local Government	4	2	1
Representatives from Industry/Business	3	3	1
Representatives from Community Organisations	5		1
Private providers/group training organisation staff		1	1
Representatives from Local Learning and Employment Networks	2	2	
School staff			4
State government staff			5

In all three regions, the TAFE's involved in the case studies were not operating entirely within the region under examination and they had campuses and/or delivery locations in neighbouring and other regions. Data used in this report to illustrate regional VET delivery are sourced from 2004 AVETMISS (Source: NCVET) and include only that data relating to delivery which occurs within each region, unless otherwise specified. While conversations with interview participants often covered issues for the providers as a whole, the interview data included here refer only to those campuses and delivery locations within the three selected regions.

## Report structure

Chapter two of this report examines each region individually and the final chapter draws on those findings to offer some conclusions about the impact of context on TAFE inclusiveness.

# The case studies

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Each of the case study regions reflects a different VET landscape. These case studies aim to examine the relationship between different regional contexts within which TAFEs are operating and the inclusiveness strategies they implement. The case studies do not attempt to provide an evaluation of individual TAFE institute practice. Therefore, providers are not identified nor named within the case studies.

To help illustrate how various regional factors drive, facilitate and/or impede TAFE inclusiveness strategies, a sample of strategies described by the TAFEs as being effective and/or innovative have been drawn from each case study. Extended regional profiles for the three case study regions are included in *Drivers of participation in VET: three regional case studies* (Walstab and Clarke, 2007).

## Case study 1: Ovens Murray

### *Introduction*

TAFE inclusiveness in this region appeared to be predominantly driven by the need for access to VET and pathways to employment for a significant regional population of at-risk and disengaged young people. Some poor inter-agency relationships amongst regional stakeholders appeared to affect the capacity for knowledge sharing and consequently the capacity for community responsiveness and TAFE inclusive practice. Strong economic growth, high demand for skills and a large network of support providers were all factors described as conducive to effective TAFE inclusiveness. This region was very diverse and the impact of several regional factors was not uniform across the region.

### *Demographic factors*

The Ovens Murray region is internally very diverse, both demographically and geographically. There are two regional centres, Wodonga and Wangaratta, both of which have experienced significant population and economic growth in recent years. Wodonga is located on the regional and interstate border, a position that facilitates and attracts inter-regional traffic for training, employment and access to services. Recent population fluctuations differ markedly outside the two centres, with some of the growth of the regional centres reported to have been at the expense of several declining surrounding rural towns.

Disengaged youth, older low-skilled people (both employed and unemployed) and those isolated from training in rural and remote areas, were consistently identified by interviewees as the key groups generating the need for inclusive responses. Young women, aged 15-19, who had disengaged from school before completion were described as particularly vulnerable and requiring a range of holistic inclusiveness mechanisms to facilitate effective re-engagement with learning. More than three-quarters of 15-19 year old girls studying in VET, who had not completed year 10, were enrolled in non-award or basic level courses. It was suggested by some respondents that young girls in the region did not benefit in the same way as boys from apprenticeship opportunities.

Long-term unemployed people, including those made redundant by factory closures in recent years, working and non-working mature aged people, who were low skilled and had low levels of literacy and numeracy, were also frequently identified as major disadvantaged groups within this region. Unemployment rates in the regional centres were slightly higher than the overall rate for Victoria (5.9% and 5.7% for the two regional centres compared with 5.4% for Victoria overall, DVC 2006). Several interviewees described a worsening standard of living for unemployed people in the region and pockets of severe socio-economic disadvantage in the two regional centres.

People with disabilities, particularly those with mental health illnesses and acquired intellectual and physical disabilities, were reported to be a group for whom effective VET provision was still a challenge and for whom post-study employment outcomes remained poor. This issue was of particular importance as learners with mental health illnesses were described as increasing in numbers.

A vast majority of respondents from several organisations expressed concerns about the attitudes of young people towards work. A number of interviewees went as far as to suggest there had been a “*generational shift*” in expectations and perceptions of the labour force and that young people were “*not interested in a long-term commitment*” to one job or one industry. Interviewees described an increasing mobility of young people after completing their VET qualifications. One TAFE interviewee reported that twelve months after completion of one of its trade training programs, half of completers had left the region, a majority to interstate labour markets. This exodus of skilled labour and the perceived attitudes of young people towards employment were described as having generated a level of anxiety amongst employers, particularly those taking on apprentices. TAFE staff and some other community representatives suggested there was a concern amongst employers that input of employer resources in support of apprentices would be wasted if the apprentices left after only twelve months. While TAFE interviewees described awareness within their institutes of the importance of providing skills for the broader national labour market, they emphasised the need to work with regional employers to address concerns about the perceived ‘exodus of skills’.

### *Economic factors*

The Ovens Murray region has a strong industry base. Drought and downturns in some manufacturing sectors and in agriculture were reported to have tempered some benefits of the recent economic boom. Despite this, demand for skilled labour is strong and some large employers in Ovens Murray and surrounding regions have resorted to importing workers from overseas, amidst reported recruitment challenges associated with the ageing workforce and an outwardly mobile youth population.

Many respondents described the regional TAFE-industry relationships as “*still developing*”, but there were indications that strong employment incentives and demand for skilled labour were having some positive impact on TAFE inclusive practice by generating opportunities for TAFE-industry collaborations in targeted employment programs for particular disadvantaged groups. Aged care and manufacturing are growth industries in the region, but with both Wodonga and Wangaratta based on the major interstate transport route, transport and logistics was described as the dominant growth industry driving increasing demand for skills.

While one TAFE was described both by its own staff and by external respondents as being heavily engaged with industry, the other TAFE was described by some interviewees from outside the VET sector as suffering from a lack of credibility and an historical disconnection from some local employers. There was also a concern expressed by some respondents that there were regional industry sectors that were being neglected by regional TAFE provision: viticulture and tourism and hospitality were particularly mentioned.

Equity staff at one TAFE spoke about on-going difficulties in achieving successful post-completion employment outcomes for members of many equity groups, particularly for students with a disability and those with mental health issues. While these staff endorsed those programs which



actively linked students with the labour market, they reported that prevailing negative employer and community attitudes towards mental health and disability posed a seemingly insurmountable barrier for many students. Reported negative employer and community attitudes included perceptions learners with disabilities could not be productive in the workplace and that they required a large amount of support and employer input.

### *VET landscape*

The region has a relatively high rate of participation in VET, observably driven by the strong employment incentives for training and a heavily populated, competitive VET landscape. As noted earlier, there are two TAFE institutes operating within the region. One TAFE is based in Wodonga and has two vocational training centres and four study centres located in various small rural towns in the region. This TAFE reported a cross border agreement with a TAFE operating in a neighbouring region in New South Wales. The NSW TAFE, operating within Victoria as a private Registered Training Organisation (RTO), reportedly delivers a significant amount of employment based training in the northern half of the region. This TAFE was co-located with a university campus and this arrangement was perceived to be beneficial to effective articulation and transition.

The other TAFE operating in this region has a campus in Wangaratta. This Wangaratta campus is one of two main campuses of an institute which is administered from the other main campus in a neighbouring region. There is a small campus of this institute thirty minutes drive across the regional border from Wangaratta, which was reported to offer limited provision in the trades. Anecdotal evidence suggested there was considerable inter-regional traffic to Wangaratta for access to trade training.

The region has a relatively low Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) profile, with 63 per cent of delivery occurring at the non-award/statement of attainment and basic (Certificate I and Certificate II) levels, compared with a national participation rate of 48.7 per cent. Only 5.1 per cent of delivery is at Diploma level. Participation at the non-award/statement of attainment and basic levels is particularly high amongst 15-19 year olds (58.8%), the highest rate in Victoria and the sixth highest of 100 Australian regions. The data also indicates that almost half of region's 15-19 year old school completers are participating at these low levels (49% and 48% for males and females respectively).

Nineteen community education providers (known in Victoria as Adult and Community Education or ACE providers) operate in the region, including two large, well established providers, one each in Wodonga and Wangaratta. These two ACE providers were described by other regional stakeholders as being highly competitive with the TAFEs and “*having their finger on the pulse of the community*”, being “*smooth operators*” and “*very business savvy*”. Both of these large ACE providers have been operating for more than thirty years and are significantly larger in size than the ACE providers in the region. ACE providers play a significant role in the region, contributing more than 30 per cent of regional delivery. Overall, Private RTO provision is comparatively small. As Table 2 below indicates, the ACE sector was playing a particularly significant role for women and the unemployed.

**Table 2 Distribution of selected disadvantaged and targeted learner groups across provider types, VET delivery in Ovens Murray, 2004**

	TAFE	Community Education	Private Providers	Total
	%	%	%	%
<i>All VET delivered in Ovens Murray</i>	65.5	30.1	4.4	100.0
Early School Leavers (below Year 10 attainment)	62.7	31.6	5.7	100.0
15-19 year olds	66.7	25.9	7.4	100.0
Women	50.1	46.1	3.8	100.0
Unemployed people	57.9	41.1	1.9	100.0

Source: NCVET (AVETMISS, 2004)

There was some evidence that the strong competition between the TAFE and ACE sectors, particularly in the regional centres, had some benefits for the overall inclusive practice of regional

providers, by stimulating both sectors to devise innovative mechanisms for supporting participation by disadvantaged learners. There was a concern expressed by some respondents that the TAFEs were not effectively reaching potential learners outside the two regional centres. TAFE capacity to engage remote learners was reported as difficult in towns without a TAFE delivery site. Collaboration between the large ACE providers in the regional centres and the smaller ACE providers in the outlying rural towns appeared to have enhanced the capacity of this sector to 'reach' a broader cross-section of the regional community. There were also partnerships between ACE providers and secondary schools outside the regional centres.

There were some concerns expressed by respondents outside the VET sector, that the community providers were not equipped to provide a level of vocational delivery equivalent to that of the TAFEs and needed by employers, and that young people engaged with community education providers may suffer as a result of this. ACE providers themselves described positive and effective relationships with industry and employers. There were some concerns raised by respondents from ACE providers about the impact on their industry training provision of restrictive funding and limited access to expert staff.

The scope of delivery for youth of the two large ACE providers appeared to influence the types of programs that the TAFE sector was delivering for young people, particularly the level of delivery. Senior secondary certificate programs appeared to be predominantly provided through the community education sector. One of the large ACE providers had also recently registered as a school, to address the needs of a cohort of young people who had disengaged from school and needed a pathway beyond the Year 10 level study achievable through the Certificate in General Education for Adults (CGEA) that the ACE provider was already providing. This alternative school provision, while still in its infancy, was described as having been embraced by the new students. Representatives from the TAFE operating in the same regional centre as this ACE provider reported being in the planning stages of offering a mainstream Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) program and were not currently offering any senior secondary provision. Both TAFEs in the region were offering programs targeting 15-19 year olds, a majority of which were focussed on Year 10 equivalent programs and often targeted towards "*young people who are at serious risk of failing to re-engage with education*" and involving customised learning programs and holistic support. One TAFE had incorporated a flexible timeline, extending the normal six month course to ten months to allow for the additional needs of the learners. Two respondents from outside the VET sector suggested that the ACE providers were more appealing than the TAFEs to severely disadvantaged young people because of their smaller, "*less threatening environment*". While there was continuing local debate about the preferred study location for the 15-19 year old cohort, there was general agreement that alternatives to school provision were needed and that both TAFE and ACE had a role to play.

Almost a fifth of regional VET delivery (17.8%) is employment based, although the data indicates that a majority (75.5%) of this provision is to learners travelling into the region for employment and VET training, with less than a quarter of employment based opportunities accessed by learners residing in the region. Anecdotal evidence supported this observation and several respondents suggested that a capacity for travel and regional mobility were significant factors in people gaining access to apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities.

The two TAFEs are responding to similar demand from most key disadvantaged learner groups (e.g. people with a disability, unemployed people) and both have very small Indigenous cohorts, reflective of the small Victoria Indigenous population (0.6%). Their age and gender profiles are markedly different, as Table 3 indicates. One TAFE is also catering to a greater density of people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

**Table 3 Proportion of selected disadvantaged and targeted learner groups in TAFE, VET delivery in Ovens Murray, 2004**

Learner groups	TAFE A	TAFE B	Mean for Inner and Outer Regional TAFEs*
	%	%	%
People with a disability	4.2	4.0	6.9
Indigenous people	0.9	0.3	3.6
People from the lowest decile SES	5.4	13.1	6.8
Early school leavers (below Year 10 attainment)	12.6	15.8	10.2
15-19 year olds	15.2	32.5	24.4
People 45 years or over	25.4	18.8	21.7
Unemployed people	10.0	11.4	17.4
Women	32.0	42.5	44.9

Source: NCVET (AVETMISS, 2004)

Notes: Figures include delivery for campuses within the region only.

\* TAFEs which delivery a majority of their provision in Inner and Outer regional locations as classified by ABS.

### *Community factors*

The region was described as having a very poor public transport infrastructure. Many interviewees shared the sentiments that the inability of would be students to access a training delivery location was a “critical, unresolved issue” and that “non-existent” public transport options for young people, people with a disability and those from a low socio-economic background were a major barrier to education, employment and community service provision. Respondents from local government acknowledged the lack of transport infrastructure, but were yet to implement any strategies for addressing the issue.

The concentration of community and support service provision in the two regional centres was described as a ‘magnet’ for disadvantaged people from the surrounding rural areas, creating a density of differently disadvantaged people in both centres and straining existing support services, including TAFE equity resources. While the regional centres were experiencing an increase in young people, the surrounding towns reported facing a critical age imbalance. One concerned respondent explained that:

...there are places like [the small towns] where there are very limited opportunities for young people and a lot of the agencies in those places, including the schools, are focused on convincing young people to go away, which I think in terms of the vibrancy and sustainability of those communities, is incredibly short sighted.

There are two Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) operating within the region, both of which described engaging in a range of activities related to the region’s VET provision. The LLENs were described by several other respondents from the VET sector as “the most significant change” in addressing youth issues in recent years. Both LLENs were involved in facilitating partnerships between the VET sector and the region’s schools, local government and industry. One LLEN was also facilitating school provision negotiations for shared VET in Schools (VETIS). Both LLENs had conducted broad employer surveys to identify the causes of perceived rifts between industry and the local TAFE. This information had been disseminated and had sparked local debate about the direction of the regional training system.

Both TAFE institutes reported engaging regularly with community agencies within their catchments and contributing to several partnerships with community organisations, including support service providers. Interaction with support agencies was dominated by two-way referrals, but also involved knowledge sharing and community forums. Support service provision differed markedly between the two regional centres. TAFE staff in the larger of the two centres described a “near oversupply” of community support service provision and the challenges posed by forming links and working relationships with multiple agencies. There was particular mention made of the difficulty in dealing with the diverse agendas of the agencies delivering job placement, community support and disability support. There was a contrasting view from interviewees in and around the other regional centre, who described the area as lacking in community service resources. A youth support service

provider operating in regional centre was identified by many stakeholders as playing a very significant role in the region and actively facilitating access to and participation in training. Respondents highlighted the strain placed on this sole youth services provider for that area, an organisation described as “*bursting at the seams*” as the only port of call for homeless and disadvantaged youth.

Local government was reported to have a fairly limited role in the region’s VET provision and delivery. One local government had recently launched an education strategy, described as aiming to promote more cohesion and collaboration between educational institutions within the municipality. This council was also partnering with the TAFE for a jointly-run community library. Partnerships between the VET sector and local governments were described as being in their infancy but also a “*step in the right direction*” focussed on “*as a pooling of resources*” and “*about getting some synergies and stopping duplication*”.

Connectedness to community was perceived to be a major factor in the capacity of each TAFE to be effectively inclusive. Emphasising the importance of community connectedness, one TAFE interviewee explained “*We are part of [this town], we are part of the fabric of the place. Our board is made up of the citizens of [this town] and they understand their role.*” However, one of the TAFEs was described as suffering from an historical “*disconnection*” from its community, which had led to a strengthening of its competing ACE provider, particularly in relation to industry training. A number of respondents, including those from businesses and industry, suggested that this TAFE was perceived to be inflexible in its curriculum and delivery methods and often unwilling to respond to industry criticism of its programs. The approach to governance was also proposed to be a factor that affected the provider’s responsiveness.

Partnerships and community connectedness were regarded by several TAFE respondents as being particularly important for effective youth programs. One TAFE interviewee described their organisation’s youth programs as being:

...all about building partnerships with agencies and schools to provide opportunities for those disadvantaged groups. There’s a range of partners involved with those. Our people work actively on boards, with agencies, meet with them on a regular basis.

### *Educational factors*

Youth disengagement from education appeared to be the most significant issue facing the region and was commonly identified as a social issue driving both the high rate of participation in VET and TAFE inclusive practice. This group included homeless youth, early school leavers, young sole parents, young people experiencing drug and alcohol issues and those involved with juvenile justice. Issues of school retention and youth exodus from smaller regional towns to the regional centres and to Melbourne were of significant concern to almost all interviewees.

Employers and local government representatives consulted during the fieldwork emphasised the severe impact of low literacy and numeracy on labour market outcomes. Respondents suggested that the issue was particularly prevalent amongst 20-24 year olds and people 45 years and older.

The interviews revealed there is a degree of suspicion between TAFE, community education providers and school staff within the region and this appears to have hindered cross-sectoral partnerships in the past. At the time of the fieldwork, both regional centres were undergoing mergers in their secondary school systems. In both centres, TAFE staff expressed concern about the impact of the change on at-risk students and those not strongly connected with school and community. Particular mention was made of historical ties in the community to either the ‘academic school’ or the ‘techie’ school. In both regional centres, interviewees voiced their concerns that students and families from the ‘perceived to be less academic school’ could be potentially unwilling to embrace the merged school. It was feared that this would inevitably exacerbate the school retention issue. Misconceptions about VET and VETIS (i.e. cost, pathways, credibility) amongst school students, parents and the general community were regarded as hindering effective

relationships between the TAFEs and schools. At the time of the fieldwork, there were efforts underway to “*build bridges*” and strengthen cross sectoral relationships. Several non-VET respondents saw the current level of competition as “*unsustainable*” and “*unproductive*”.

There were predictions that the establishment of one of the Victorian Government’s Technical Education Colleges (TEC), within one of the TAFEs, would be an extremely positive development for the regional centre in which it was to be based and that it had the potential to address a perceived lack of seamlessness between VETIS and post-school VET and to foster more understanding and recognition of VET within the school system. The TEC model, rigorously supported and promoted by local government, was described as “*addressing the need for a school focus on VET*”. Some respondents also suggested it would also alleviate some of the negative community attitudes towards VET. There were still doubts about the ability of the TEC to address the training needs of residents in the smaller surrounding towns and isolated areas but it was viewed as a “*positive step*” for developing effective pathways across the community and across education sectors. There were some equity issues expressed, relating to availability of places for students outside that secondary college and the potential of streaming into the TEC of “*difficult*” students.

### *Institutional and systemic factors*

There were several systemic factors identified by TAFE interviewees that were not unique to the region, but had a significant impact on TAFE capacity for inclusiveness. The most commonly reported of these systemic barriers were perceived restrictive funding regimes and course completion timelines that were incongruent with the additional needs of some disadvantaged learners. One respondent summed up the complexity of this challenge:

For the severely disadvantaged, the support and achievement needs to happen in stages. There are jobs out there, but some of the disengaged young people might not be able to read or write, not have a house to live in and have a juvenile justice or substance abuse problem. Just keeping them engaged and getting them ready for support from an employment agency is a long process. (TAFE equity staff member)

Low rates of self-identification amongst disadvantaged learners were also reported to be a major challenge. Failure to self-identify, stemming from a range of different cultural reasons associated with disclosing disability and disadvantage, was described as having an effect on funding and therefore an impact on TAFE capacity for implementing inclusiveness strategies. Several respondents shared the view expressed by one TAFE staff member who said:

It is a matter of us training our teachers to identify those signs that might indicate that the learner has got that disadvantage.

Issues with staff turnover and a lack of available expert staff in some areas, particularly in e-learning and online delivery, were also reported to adversely impact on inclusiveness capacity, particularly in providing for those in rural and isolated areas and those lacking physical mobility and opportunity to attend on-campus learning. These staffing issues were reportedly associated with the regional location of the TAFEs, an ageing TAFE workforce and strong jobs growth in other industries. One TAFE respondent explained the difficulties in providing online delivery:

We haven’t got teachers trained to deliver online and develop online materials. Our teachers are still at that stage where they are still developing this material. It is certainly an area where we want to increase our delivery. We have set our own strategic targets to increase online delivery.

## Impact of regional factors on TAFE inclusiveness

### *Factors driving demand for TAFE inclusiveness*

- ✧ High levels of regional youth disengagement and low school retention.
- ✧ Strong participation in VET amongst 15-19 year olds and those from a low SES background.

- ✧ Well established community education sector, with strong provision for disengaged youth driving TAFE to be innovative in their youth programs and also reducing some demand for this cohort.
- ✧ Wide-spread levels of low literacy and numeracy demanding effective programs for a range of cohorts.

#### *Factors facilitating TAFE inclusiveness*

- ✧ High rate of overall VET participation, generating economies of scale.
- ✧ Opportunities for targeted employment pathways programs through strong industry demand for skilled labour.
- ✧ The presence of the Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) in providing information about employer and industry needs and facilitating partnerships between TAFE and other stakeholders.
- ✧ Strong community support infrastructure for one TAFE, which was operating in a regional centre with a plethora of support providers and agencies.
- ✧ Cross-sectoral partnerships, where existing enhanced TAFE capacity in smaller towns and more isolated areas.

#### *Factors impeding TAFE inclusiveness*

- ✧ Competition and suspicion between providers hindering collaboration and cross-sectoral partnerships.
- ✧ Limited involvement by local governments in promoting or driving VET participation and provision.
- ✧ Lack of community services for one TAFE, operating in a regional centre with only one youth support agency.
- ✧ Lack of regional public transport infrastructure and isolation from TAFE provision for people in small towns and those lacking mobility.
- ✧ One of the TAFEs suffering from an historical “*disconnection*” from its community.
- ✧ Attitudes amongst employers to some learner groups (people with a disability, people with mental health issues, people with low literacy and numeracy) creating difficulties in relation to securing of employment placements and employment outcomes difficult. Perceptions about the mobility of skilled youth also posed a barrier to organising apprenticeships.
- ✧ Staffing issues including staff turnover, lack of available expert staff and the ageing TAFE workforce.
- ✧ Misconceptions about VET and VETIS hindering effective relationships between the TAFEs and schools.

## TAFE inclusiveness strategies

All TAFE interviewees reported some forms of targeted inclusiveness strategies. In most cases this took the form of specialised programs for particular disadvantaged and targeted learner groups. The described approaches commonly emphasised the need to identify and address not only personal or individual barriers facing particular members of equity groups, but also some systemic barriers that hinder successful progression through VET and transition to employment.

While there were no particular disadvantaged learner group occurring in very large numbers within the region, there was a diversity of disadvantaged learner groups and a diversity of support requirements, which generated a complexity of issues and learning needs to which the TAFEs must respond.

In response to demand from learners facing severe disadvantage and serious issues that impact on their capacity to participate in VET, such as homelessness, alcohol and drug abuse, recent incarceration, mental illness, parenting responsibilities, long-term unemployment, low literacy and numeracy, low levels of previous education and poor literacy and numeracy skills, several respondents emphasised the importance of celebrating and valuing individual achievement. Building confidence and study skills for learners who had often experienced repeated educational failure was also considered to be very important. Supporting this concept of 'learning to learn' and contextualising success within a learner's previous learning experience and level of disadvantage, was reported to be difficult for a number of reasons. Targets for enrolments at higher AQF levels emphasised employment outcomes in the short-term which was often unrealistic for learners with severe educational disadvantage. Negative community attitudes made it hard for equity staff to develop programs that provided work placements for learners needing job experiences. There were also difficulties associated with providing effective non-educational support for some learners, lack of services in some areas and confusion of service provision in others.

One TAFE respondent explained, "*some of these students barely have enough money to feed themselves and they don't know what it is to succeed at something*". A strong argument put by respondents was that successfully engaging these particularly disadvantaged learners, even at low AQF levels, set them on a pathway to potential study at higher levels, created opportunities for them to develop skills for learning and increased their chances of gaining sustainable employment in the future. To support this work, one TAFE provided targeted professional development for staff working with at-risk and disengaged youth.

Interviewees working with disadvantaged cohorts highlighted the effectiveness of programs that focused on pathways and were designed to achieve an end goal of employment or readiness to engage with an employment agency. They emphasised the need for gradual progress with severely disadvantaged and disengaged participants and called for system recognition that it takes longer for these students to achieve outcomes than the traditional, often restrictive, timeframes that are set within the funding and performance agreements.

Interviewees from all providers emphasised the value and importance of enthusiastic and motivated leadership and staff. A representative from one of the TAFEs, which had in the last few years gained a new CEO, spoke about how the change of leadership had driven a cohesive approach to inclusiveness and community oriented provision.

At one of the TAFEs, the learners services unit housing the equity and support staff was embedded within the teaching department responsible for equity, general education and access programs. This structural approach was described as "*...a unique department in [this] TAFE*". In this structure, teaching staff, general student support staff and equity staff were based together in the one department. One interviewee described the arrangement as "*...a good relationship, because the people we support are primarily within the learning department.*"

### *A 'Learner Manager System'*

In responding to the need for more formalised pathways support, one TAFE had developed and was about to implement a 'Learner Management System', which would monitor and provide support for students who "*lack the existing personal resources*" or social capital to independently access and navigate their post-completion options. The strategy was aimed at supporting transitions to employment, "*keeping the learner in learning for longer*" and maximising the availability of information for students to make informed decisions and effectively exploit their learning. In describing this strategy, one TAFE respondent explained:

We're looking at a learner management system all the way through their learning journey. So if someone is approaching the end of their course, we'll be pointing out the alternatives for them once they've finished their qualification, or even before they've finished their qualification.

This initiative was driven by a two main factors: the need for enhanced support of learners as they complete training in light of rapid industry growth and diversification; and the fact that significant numbers of learners lack existing family or community infrastructure to help them make successful transitions to employment.

### *Tripartite arrangements*

While there was general agreement from all TAFE interviewees that partnership and collaboration were important to their inclusiveness strategies, there were strong suggestions that collaboration was hampered by competition. Where partnerships existed, they were often driven by a need for provision outside the regional centres. Several TAFE staff reported that provision to smaller towns was aided by “*tapping into*” local knowledge and resources.

Partnerships described by the TAFEs often followed a tripartite model - where a TAFE was working with two external agencies or two sectors (i.e. schools and industry) to facilitate and support participation:

- ✧ One of the TAFEs was involved in a partnership with six of the region’s secondary schools and the area’s sole youth services provider. Launched in 2002, the program involved students aged 15-16 spending three days each week at TAFE studying for a Certificate II in Horticulture, and two days in their traditional school setting. The youth services agency provided a dedicated youth worker to support the students and “*facilitate collaborative links between schools, [the TAFE], community support agencies and the students and their families*” (de Vries, 2004).
- ✧ One of the TAFEs was also involved in a partnership with one a small local government to provide a pre-vocational program for disengaged young people. The partnership, facilitated by one of the Local Learning and Employment Networks, was described as project based and aimed at building self-esteem and fostering effective pathways into education and employment.
- ✧ There was a tripartite arrangement between a manufacturing employer, one of the TAFEs and a recruitment company focused on supporting re-engagement in the labour force by long-term unemployed people. This program had been initiated by the employer in response to severe recruitment difficulties.

### *Linking disadvantaged learners with industry*

The strong economic environment had both stimulated closer links between the VET sector and employers and also generated opportunities for the TAFEs to connect employer labour needs with employment needs of disadvantaged learner groups. One TAFE was adopting this model of linking provision for disadvantaged learners with industry priority areas for their Indigenous cohort. The initiative had stemmed from feedback from the Indigenous community and involved a concerted process of knowledge gathering. The TAFE conducted targeted consultations with multiple Indigenous organisations and the Commonwealth Department of Workplace Relations (DEWR) to foster the development of a program addressing skill shortages. The TAFE staff member involved in this program explained:

I went around to every Aboriginal organisation, and there about 20 of them. One of the things we had been offering to get people into education was an arts program. What we learnt from that discussion was that while that was an interesting program, it didn’t lead to employment and those people like the rest of the community wanted to have learning outcomes in TAFE and experience that had an employment outcome at the end of it. So based on the fact that we had a skill and labour shortage in the region, we brought DEWR into here and we had a forum with the Aboriginal communities talking about how they could work with us to overcome some of these barriers that they might have had.

This model of targeted provision for Indigenous learners used extended and flexible timelines and was being adopted for other learner groups such as the long-term unemployed, people with mental illnesses and parents re-engaging with education.



## Conclusion

The key finding from interviews in this region was that competition and suspicion between providers and various stakeholders (e.g. TAFE and some employers) were hindering collaboration and cross-sectoral partnerships. While interviewees from both TAFE and other stakeholders described well developed TAFE strategies for responding, in particular, to the high levels of regional youth disengagement, there were some concerns about the capacity for improvement and expansion of TAFE inclusiveness strategies within the current highly competitive environment. There was also a consensus amongst TAFE interviewees that regional initiatives were heading in a more partnership based direction.

## Case study 2: Midlands

### *Introduction*

Interviews in this region were conducted with TAFE staff and regional stakeholders in several towns across this geographically dispersed region. While there were different perceptions expressed across locations, there was a general consensus that the geographic spread of the region's population and the lack of high population density in any particular location were the dominant factor adversely impacting on capacity for effective TAFE provision. The existence of remote populations and a significant number of Indigenous peoples were key drivers for inclusiveness strategies.

### *Demographic factors*

The Midlands region, located in Western Australia to the north-east of Perth, makes up 70 per cent of the larger 'Wheatbelt' district. Midlands has a very geographically dispersed population with just over 52,000 people living across 110,546 square kilometres, or an area half the size of Victoria (ABS 2005). There are no major cities within the region. Instead, more than thirty small towns are scattered across the district, with three main centres: Northam (population approximately 10,000, town and surrounds); Merredin (population approximately 3,500) and Moora (population approximately 2,500) (ABS 2005).

There is a sizable Indigenous population in the region, comprising 4.2 per cent of the population in Midlands, slightly higher than the state average of 3.2 per cent (ABS Census, 2001). Indigenous learners were the group most commonly nominated by interviewees as facing barriers to education and employment, with respondents from most regional stakeholders describing them as experiencing significant levels of disadvantage. The Indigenous population in this region was also described by a community stakeholder as having "*no real profile within the Indigenous affairs portfolio of the state*" and "*not [located] in a limited number of communities...[but] scattered right across [the region]*". TAFE interviewees described difficulties in targeting resources for the cohort of Indigenous learners because of this geographic dispersion. The TAFE had also experienced difficulties accessing special purpose funding.

There is a small population of NESB migrants living in the region. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this group is particularly hard to engage, due to their small numbers and their tendency to be located on isolated farming properties. Due to the small cohort size, TAFE interviewees also reported difficulty in accessing targeted funding for this group.

Interviewees from the TAFE and elsewhere reported significant migration of young people to Perth. One community respondent described the result as "*a population structure which sees a loss of*

*people between the age of 15 and 30.*” A district education office report citing Ministry of Planning data, indicates that:

... population levels in the 16 to 24 age group remain dangerously low, falling from about 9,000 in 2001 to a predicted 6,500 in 2021 (DET WA, 2004).

The most common reason given for this youth exodus was a lack of educational opportunities. One respondent, who had been heavily involved with the establishment of the TAFE, suggested that prior to its opening, *“the services that were offered were either non-existent or really miserable”*. There were also some concerns, both within and outside the TAFE, that since its establishment, the TAFE had struggled to cement its provision as competitive with that available in the city.

Several interviewees reported high levels of disengagement from education amongst those young people who remained in the region. Of the total number of 15 to 19 year olds in the Midlands District, 62 per cent were engaged in education and training, compared to a state figure of 69 per cent (DET WA, 2004).

Socio-economic disadvantage was also a factor driving demand for inclusive provision. With rising housing prices in Perth driving some more socio-economically disadvantaged people out of the metropolitan housing market, the Midlands region was reported to be attracting increasing development of government housing and people not able to afford to live in the city. While the opinions of respondents were mixed on the impact that this was having on the region, there were some suggestions that it was increasing the density of socio-economic disadvantage.

#### *Economic factors*

The region has an historical reliance on the wheat industry and agriculture is still the dominant sector. Urban sprawl from Perth and a predicted population boom are also expected to generate significant growth in the building and construction industry in the next few years. A number of TAFE respondents suggested that part of the reason for the low rate of regional participation was that the agricultural sector did not generate high demand for training. There are few large businesses based in the region, with small businesses being the norm. A number of interviewees identified government departments as the dominant employers, particularly in the areas of education, health and employment/welfare services.

#### *VET landscape*

As referred to above, the Midlands region has a relatively low rate of VET participation. There is one TAFE operating in the Midlands region, with three campuses and four satellite locations within the region and a further four locations in a neighbouring region. The institute was established in 1994 and respondents described its initial role as filling a gap in vocational education and training that in the past had only been delivered in a minimal way in the form of ‘outreach’ from an institute based in the outer suburbs of Perth.

There are also a private RTO and group training company operating in the region, but only 2.7 per cent of learners studying VET in the region were studying at the private RTO in 2004, although this has reportedly increased in more recent years.

There are four senior high schools in the region (including a college of agriculture) and 12 district high schools. All of the schools have some capacity for VET in Schools delivery, and each of the senior high schools reported strong links with TAFE. In particular, the proximity of the senior high schools to the TAFE campuses was perceived to be reinforcing these ties. However, there was limited transition by school completers to further training at the TAFE in the region. TAFE staff viewed VET in Schools programs and school-based apprenticeship and traineeship programs as important tools for engaging young people in training, *“getting kids involved. I think there’s a growing awareness of the need for the continuum, the lifelong learning”*.

The region has a low AQF profile, with the proportion of students participating in basic level qualifications (9.1% at Certificate I and 34.2% at Certificate II) double the national average (5% Certificate I and 15.7% Certificate II). A further 51 per cent are studying middle level qualifications (36.7% at Certificate III and 14.7% at Certificate IV), which again is higher than the national average (26.4% at Certificate III and 12.2% at Certificate IV). There is very little activity at the Diploma or above level in Midlands, with 1.6 per cent of those studying in Midlands enrolling at this level (compared to 11.5% nationally). A significant proportion of learners are participating through online and remote access, including through correspondence (18.1%).

The age profile of VET learners indicates a sharp drop-off in participation after 20 years of age and this trend was supported by anecdotal evidence from TAFE respondents. In 2004, more than a quarter of learners (26.1%) were aged 15-19, while 20-24 year olds made up only limited proportions of the overall cohort (11.8%).

The TAFE in Midlands had attracted a high proportion of Indigenous people to their courses, with 14.3 per cent of learners in 2004 identifying themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This is a much higher level of indigeneity than found in the general population of the Midlands region (4.2%), and higher than for TAFE's servicing similar levels of remoteness across Australia (where the average is 8.3%, see Table 8 below).

**Table 4 Disadvantaged and equity group learner cohorts, studying at TAFE in Midlands, 2004**

Learner groups	TAFE	Mean for Inner and Outer Regional and Remote TAFEs
	%	%
People with a disability	7.5	6.8
Indigenous people	14.3	8.3
Early school leavers (below Year 10 attainment)	12.9	10.5
15-19 year olds	26.1	24.0
People 45 years or over	19.0	21.4
Unemployed people	14.6	17.3
Women	49.7	44.8

Source: NCVER (AVETMISS, 2004)

### *Community factors*

Both TAFE respondents and several community representatives highlighted the impact of “*service delivery difficulties*”. There was a particular focus on the challenge of delivering to a very geographically dispersed population with very limited access to public transport and disjointed community infrastructures. There are 28 small local governments in the Midlands region, ranging in population size from just 250 to 6,500. One community respondent suggested that “*the disadvantage in this region is to do with fragmentation*”.

While the TAFE is the dominant tertiary provider in the region, some members of the community felt that the TAFE had faced difficulty ‘marketing’ itself and there was a “*fairly poor understanding about what TAFE can do*”. There were some suggestions that perceptions of the TAFE were having an on-going impact on the institute’s capacity to connect with their communities. The exodus of young people to educational and training institutions outside the region was described as being, in part, due to the lack of breadth and depth of provision brought on by limited resources and funding.

Until recently there was a severe lack of IT capacity and the region still has a very slow speed internet connection, which poses a serious barrier to effective service delivery through online methods. The TAFE worked in conjunction with the Telecentres in the region to deliver online courses and also for videoconferencing.

TAFE staff described a limited capacity for partnership due to the geographic spread and fragmentation of community services and infrastructure. Liaison with the Indigenous communities and arrangements with businesses to provide targeted training to meet both industry skills needs and provide opportunities for disadvantaged and unemployed people appeared to be the most

common types of community engagement. Several interviewees highlighted the well developed relationships between the TAFE and the region's Indigenous communities. These relationships were described as crucial in developing effective strategies for engaging and supporting Indigenous learners.

### *Educational factors*

Changes to the school leaving age in Western Australia were highlighted as having an impact on demand for TAFE provision and there was apprehension about the capacity of the regional VET system to deal with an increase in school aged learners and capitalise on the potential increase in participation. The concerns expressed by TAFE respondents included a lack of “*multi agency support*” within the TAFE sector to provide holistic support to at-risk and disadvantaged young people and correspondingly, to provide a seamless transition from a high level of support within the school system to a relatively independent learning environment at TAFE.

A number of respondents suggested that the VET system more broadly was unprepared for increasing numbers of school aged students, particularly in terms of staff training and additional support resources. One interviewee sharing this view said:

I think the whole system didn't prepare for the school kids to come to study here. And that really is the biggest challenge we have to face in the next year or so.

A majority of the region's TAFE participants have not completed high school, with more than half (55%) with Year 10 or below educational attainment and a further 17 per cent having left school after completing Year 11 (this compares to 37.5% of learners in TAFE nationally having left school after Year 10, and another 14.5% after Year 11). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the high rate of incomplete schooling amongst VET learners is compounding the impact of low literacy and numeracy as a significant barrier facing learners in this region.

### *Institutional and systemic factors*

Several interviewees cited systemic issues of staff recruitment and changes to government funding initiatives, that evidence from the national survey suggested were impacting on TAFEs across the national TAFE sector. Perceived to be of greater consequence in the Midlands region was a severe lack of regional IT capacity. This was considered to be the key structural issue hindering inclusive practice and effective provision more broadly in the Midlands region.

TAFE staff consistently described difficulty in attracting, training and retaining expert and specialist staff, a necessary resource for effective inclusiveness strategies. Difficulties in staff recruitment were reported to be posing a threat to the capacity of the TAFE to continue effectively delivering a breadth of programs. Specialist equity staff, staff with expertise in responding to different types of disadvantage and staff with a capacity and willingness to travel to the various delivery locations were commonly identified as difficult to attract and retain. One respondent suggested that the lack of scope in the region's provision, connected to this restricted staff expertise, was another factor contributing to young people taking up training outside the region:

...there are also a number of people who access TAFE training in the city, through external or flexible delivery modes because we simply don't offer the programs that they are looking for.

Less than 4 per cent of learners studying in the region are participating in non-award/statement of attainment programs. Some respondents from the TAFE expressed concerns that restrictions within the training profile, as prescribed by the state training authority, made provision of some important non-accredited life skills and non-vocational programs very difficult. These programs were described by TAFE respondents and interviewees from other stakeholders as very important to inclusive provision for their potential to facilitate re-engagement with learning and because there was limited access to these types of programs across the region.

A number of respondents also spoke about how changes to the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP), had drawn Indigenous learners away from TAFE through the attraction of more money. There was a suggestion that after Indigenous learners had completed their maximum time in the CDEP, they would come back to TAFE. One respondent sharing this concern reported:

...we've lost 30 full time Indigenous students, which is very significant for a small campus within this region, simply through the Federal Government changes to the CDEP on July 1. It became more attractive for Indigenous people to go to those programs than to stay studying or stay in training. Because of the conditions attached to the CDEP, at some stage those people are going to have to come back ... The stats are going to look beautiful for the government next year because the unemployment rate will have plummeted in this region. But the truth of the matter is that it has simply transferred the problem.

## Impact of regional factors on TAFE inclusiveness

### *Factors driving demand for TAFE inclusiveness*

- ✧ A geographically dispersed population, a significant population of Indigenous peoples, and high levels of socio-economic disadvantage.
- ✧ Changes to the school leaving age in Western Australia and low rates of educational attainment amongst a growing population of disengaged youth.

### *Factors facilitating TAFE inclusiveness*

- ✧ Strong links between the TAFE and the school sector.
- ✧ Well developed links and collaboration between the TAFE and Indigenous communities.

### *Factors impeding TAFE inclusiveness*

- ✧ A very low rate of VET participation has limited the capacity for expansion of targeted programs, due to small cohort sizes and lack of resources.
- ✧ Existing and potential TAFE learners are geographically dispersed.
- ✧ An actual and perceived lack of regional educational opportunities to retain young people.
- ✧ The dominant industry sector (agriculture) does not generate demand for training or provide opportunities for targeted employment pathways programs.
- ✧ A lack of large businesses in the region have limited the employment options and incentives and decreased both demand for training and community capacity to fund training.
- ✧ Insufficient support service infrastructure around the TAFE to provide holistic support, stemming from the geographic dispersion of the region's population.
- ✧ Staff recruitment difficulties and poor regional IT capacity, restricting access for remote learners.
- ✧ Changes to the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) funding, drawing Indigenous learners away from the TAFE.

## Inclusiveness strategies

VET provision and inclusiveness strategies in the Midlands region, as illustrated above, face a significant challenge in the geographic dispersion of the catchment community, an issue that makes delivery particularly difficult for disadvantaged learners, including Indigenous peoples, people with a disability, young people and the small population of LBOTE migrants. The capacity for inclusive

practice in this region is also compromised by the difficulties in attracting, retaining and consolidating specialist staff and adequate resources. Despite these barriers, the TAFE has implemented some innovative inclusiveness approaches, particularly in support of Indigenous learners.

#### *Holistic approach to supporting Indigenous learners*

Both respondents from the TAFE and interviewees from other regional agencies, including a representative from the Indigenous community, described a range of strategies and resources that the TAFE was utilising to facilitate access and successful participation in training for Indigenous learners. Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff within the TAFE, as well as members of the Indigenous community, were very affirming of the support offered by the TAFE to Indigenous students. The TAFE has a team of targeted staff, including two Aboriginal Development Officers and five Aboriginal Program Assistants. These people were described as playing many varied roles in supporting Indigenous learners, including “*providing services*”, delivering compulsory cultural awareness training to new staff, working with lecturers to develop effective classroom techniques, “*to make sure they’ve enrolled...got their Abstudy...make sure that they turn up...do their assignments*”, monitoring progress and liaising with the Indigenous community.

Respondents from the TAFE spoke at length about the need for cultural awareness amongst TAFE staff who were working with Indigenous learners, particularly in relation to issues of shame, family feuding, funerals and the transient nature of some of the region’s Indigenous communities.

These staff also reported working to develop new programs and enhancing the responsiveness of existing provision. For example, the addition of life skills to Indigenous CGEA programs, in response to a need expressed by the Indigenous community for skills to interpret government documents and gaining a drivers licence. These staff also reported developing alternative and appropriate methods of assessment for some Indigenous cohorts, in recognition of the difficulties they can experience within traditional assessment regimes.

Several respondents also reported great success in the implementation of a state program, Course of Applied Vocational Skills (CAVSS) which involved team teaching for vocationally embedded literacy and numeracy skills. Rather than delivering literacy and numeracy training separately, the CAVSS program was being used to adapt the mode of vocational delivery to make it accessible to those with low levels of literacy and numeracy and in the process increasing literacy and numeracy skills.

The TAFE was also conducting a program targeting Indigenous people who were already in the workforce. The program, ‘Aim High’, incorporates a skills recognition process and alternative methods of assessing evidence of existing knowledge and skills, such as use of portfolios, observation and interviews. The program was developed in response to a concern that Indigenous workers often did not have the time to be formally trained or to enrol in higher qualifications once they were already working. This program was reported to be building on existing TAFE experience in using skills recognition processes with migrant learners.

#### *TAFE enterprises for providing practical experience*

As mentioned previously, practical and hands-on provision was seen to be important for both engaging learners and developing skills that would lead to meaningful employment opportunities. The TAFE had established an on-campus fully functioning plant nursery that is both a business and a training facility. Several respondents spoke about the numerous benefits of this approach, particularly in providing “*a lot of practical hands on training for the Indigenous students*”. The nursery was also described as “*one of the few nursery industry accredited nurseries attached to an academic institution in Western Australia*”.

### *Partnering with industry*

While unemployment in the Midlands region is fairly low (6%, ABS 2001), the rate for the Indigenous populations is almost four times as high (23.6%, ABS 2001). There was widespread concern from within the TAFE and Indigenous community about employment opportunities for Indigenous students on completion of their VET qualification. One way that the TAFE has been addressing the significant discrepancy in unemployment rates is through informal partnerships with local businesses to provide targeted training to meet skill needs and provide employment opportunities for Indigenous and other disadvantaged learners. The operators of a recently established enterprise approached the TAFE about setting up a training course with specific goals that would lead to possible employment with the company. They offered reverse scholarships for Indigenous students to undertake a Certificate II course in Rural Operations, providing hands on learning and work experience.

### *Engaging at-risk young people*

As mentioned above, in 2006 the school leaving age in Western Australia was increased to 16 years, and will increase again to 17 in 2008 (DET, WA 2005). The TAFE responded to this policy change in a number of ways. A bridging program for young people disengaged from school was operating for the second year. This one-semester accredited course, Gaining Access to Training and Employment (GATE), has a flexible curriculum structure which allows the TAFE to cater to the students' own interests and motivations, and design projects in response to this. Some planning needed to be undertaken to work out the best ways to assist this group to make transitions to appropriate TAFE courses once they completed the GATE program.

VET in Schools programs for students in Year 10 believed to be at-risk of disengaging from education and training included a Horticulture course (Certificate I). TAFE staff believed that the students responded well to the adult learning environment in the institute and the nature of the curriculum. As one TAFE respondent commented:

[These students] have found it academically difficult over in the school. Since they've been here ... they have just blossomed. They are hands on, they've been very keen, very interested in the work they are doing. From their first week when they had crossed arms and were very defensive ... now they are just so keen to learn.

While not necessarily targeting at-risk students, Aboriginal School Based Traineeships reportedly worked well with this group. Young people involved in the program attend classes at their school, at TAFE and undertake on-the-job training. According to one TAFE staff member involved in the program, this delivery combination along with interactive teaching methods had helped these young people re-engage with education and training:

And these kids don't like the school system, they don't like learning anything. They all went on to complete and that was an added thing. But just to see them change their mind and their viewpoint towards education was a big thing for me.

## Conclusion

This region provided an example of how, despite TAFE awareness of the needs of disadvantaged learners and a strategic commitment to addressing those needs, regional demographic and structural factors can severely restrict effective application of TAFE models of inclusiveness. Participants from regional TAFEs in the national survey frequently cited the severe impact of poor regional infrastructure on internal capacity for inclusiveness. The key finding in the Midlands region was that TAFE capacity for effective provision overall, and targeted provision for disadvantaged learners groups in particular, was substantially hindered by the dispersed regional population structures and lack of unified or cohesive community support infrastructure.

## Case study 3: Hume City

### *Introduction*

Severe socio-economic disadvantage, long-term unemployment, poor school retention and very culturally diverse catchment communities were identified as some of the key issues demanding responsive and effective inclusiveness strategies from Hume City's regional VET system. Strong community partnership was a dominant force in this region and appeared to be both driving and facilitating the capacity of the TAFE sector for inclusiveness. Issues of geographic isolation, poor regional transport and a volatile economic environment were key factors hindering effective outcomes of inclusive practice.

### *Demographic factors*

Hume City is located on the urban-rural fringe of Melbourne. The municipality is internally very diverse and was commonly described by respondents as consisting of three distinct sub-regions – Broadmeadows, Craigieburn and Sunbury. Broadmeadows, frequently described by interviewees as “*socially and economically depressed*”, comprises some large manufacturing areas and pockets of government housing. The area has a large migrant population with the 2001 Census indicating more than a third of residents were born in a non-English speaking country (ABS, 2001). Craigieburn is a rapidly growing new housing area, with a predominantly young population and has lower levels of school completion amongst its adult residents than Hume as a whole (Hume City Council, 2005). Craigieburn was described as “*pretty typical of all new outer perimeter housing estates*” and still coming to terms with the development of appropriate service provision. Sunbury is semi-rural, quite isolated in terms of transport routes and not as densely populated as the rest of Hume City.

Women returning to work and particularly single mothers, early school leavers, those with a language background other than English (LBO/TE) and those who have been long-term unemployed were commonly identified as facing significant barriers to engaging in education and training and gaining employment. One TAFE respondent highlighted the issue of inter-generational unemployment:

I think the cultural barriers are probably the largest barrier to participation in the workforce...not in terms of ethnic culture, more in terms of people's home culture, family culture and work ethic. We're dealing with people who are 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation unemployed, who don't actually understand the concept of getting up in the morning and going to work and going to your studies... they are quite entrenched in their families and their neighbourhoods.

Several TAFE interviewees described a perceived lack of awareness amongst parents, schools and the general community about youth pathways available through VET, with particular mention made of the aversion to VET pathways amongst some migrant communities, due to an historical preference for higher education.

### *Economic factors*

Hume City region has a well developed and growing industry base, including Melbourne Airport and various large manufacturing plants, such as Ford and Visy. In recent times, changing industry needs have led to downsizing and factory closures and several large businesses re-locating off-shore or to other parts of Australia. This volatile economic environment was described by a number of interviewees from TAFE as contributing to an increasing demand for re-skilling amongst older workers. It was also reported to be becoming more difficult to secure work placements as part of training in some areas, particularly for young people.



## VET landscape

Hume City has a large and diverse tertiary landscape, including an array of VET providers that appeared to be operating under a highly collaborative, community partnership model. There is one TAFE institute that is the dominant VET provider. The institute has a campus at Broadmeadows and a flexible learning centre at Craigieburn, plus five campuses/teaching facilities outside the region. A dual sector university based in a neighbouring region also has a small campus at Sunbury. There are nine community education or ACE providers, providing more than 8 per cent of the delivery to people living and learning within the region, and a small number of private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), attracting 0.1 per cent of learners.

The region has lower participation in non-award/statement of attainment and basic level programs than the national average (43.8% compared with 48.7%) and higher than national average participation at Certificate III and IV level (43.2% compared with 38.6%).

**Table 5 Proportion of disadvantaged learner and equity group cohorts by provider type, learners studying VET within Hume City, 2004**

Learner groups	TAFE	Community Education Providers (ACE)	Mean for Metropolitan TAFEs
	%	%	%
People with a disability	9.2	7.8	6.0
Indigenous people	0.8	0.2	1.5
People from the lowest decile SES	21.0	38.0	12.8
Early school leavers (below Year 10 attainment)	11.7	22.7	6.2
15-19 year olds	31.0	4.6	25.9
People 45 years or over	12.1	37.7	15.7
LBOTE people	12.0	41.3	22.7
Unemployed people	14.4	27.0	19.1
Women	35.8	80.7	46.2

Source: NCVER (AVETMISS, 2004)

There is strong regional demand for VET by 15-19 and 20-24 year olds. These age groups make up half of all learners studying VET in the region. However, more than two thirds (70%) of 15-24 year olds studying in Hume City, live outside the region. Regional VET providers are catering to high proportions of very socio-economically disadvantage people (see Table 4), with the ACE sector experiencing a greater density of socio-economically disadvantaged learners than the TAFEs. Interviewees from the ACE sector described a regional policy of not seeking out youth enrolments, and the small proportion of 15-19 year olds in the ACE sector illustrate this. While the TAFE does have higher than average proportions of people from the lowest decile SES, people with a disability, early school leavers and 15-19 year old learners, the proportions of unemployed, mature aged people and women in TAFE in this region are lower than for other metropolitan TAFEs.

A number of interviewees from VET providers described “*diverse participation*” across the Hume City region and reported anecdotal evidence of higher participation rates in Broadmeadows and Craigieburn than in Sunbury. One TAFE respondent suggested that “*there would be quite high levels over in Broadmeadows and Craigieburn, and that might be swamping, overshadowing the figures, the picture in Sunbury*”. These respondents suggested that limited availability of provision and limited transport across the region may contribute to lower participation of learners from Sunbury. The data indicates higher participation rates<sup>1</sup> in Craigieburn (21.9%) than in both Sunbury (12.0%) and Broadmeadows (15.1%). This suggests that the density of provision available in the Broadmeadows area may not be necessarily translating to accessibility for some potential learners living in the region.

<sup>1</sup> Participation by 15-64 year olds living in Hume City, and studying VET (accredited and non-accredited) in any region.

Respondents from both TAFE and community education providers described two-way referrals between the sectors and there were some suggestions that each sector had particular strengths in catering to the needs of certain groups. For example, the region's community education providers were described by interviewees from within the sector and by respondents from TAFE as working effectively with LBOTE learners and that engaging these learners initially through the community education sector was sometimes more successful than through TAFE. One TAFE respondent suggested that:

...despite what we think, migrants and others still think that it's still not easy to go into the door of the TAFE. Some of them are more attracted to their local learning centre where the coordinator might be of the same background and talk the language.

### *Community factors*

Two local government established learning centres play a major role in facilitating regional VET delivery. One of these, a large, specifically designed community learning precinct with an associated network of providers and community stakeholders, is a key player in the VET landscape. The learning precinct's physical infrastructure includes a library and various learning spaces which are used by the region's VET providers for delivering accredited and non-accredited training. In addition to the TAFE, the dual sector university and the community education providers within the region that are members of the network and that regularly deliver through the learning precinct, there is a TAFE from a neighbouring region, two other extra-regional universities and several extra-regional community education providers that also access the local government's facility in order to deliver to the local community. What is evident from discussions with regional stakeholders outside the VET sector is that there is a great depth, breadth and diversity of provision, with a broad range of providers involved.

Respondents from both TAFE and ACE were overwhelming positive about the contribution of the learning precinct and the network to the region's VET capacity. Several respondents described concerns amongst some providers during the initial development of the facility. There had been a concern amongst these providers that the local government was attempting to go into direct competition with existing VET organisations. These fears have since abated with the knowledge that the local government does not intend to play a delivery role, but is rather focused on facilitating the delivery of existing providers.

There was a consensus across respondents that the local government's learning precinct and network of stakeholders had achieved immeasurable benefits for the collaboration and partnership between providers. Emphasis was placed on the benefits of knowledge sharing and interconnectedness between organisations. Several interviewees referred to an enhanced valuing and understanding of what each organisation did and how that was important to the overall provision of the region. While most stakeholders highlighted the benefits for their own interaction and dialogues, the main contention was that the collaboration was of most benefit to the community and to learners. One respondent, voicing an opinion expressed by many VET interviewees, explained:

In the end, if we are all working together, that means we can add more provision for these learners. We can provide a lot more pathways and a lot more learning out there. And the more we know about what somebody else does, we can refer people onto there, or others can refer them onto us. It's just opened the doors for people. There are great benefits in being able to do partnerships. (community education provider respondent)

At the time of the fieldwork, the local government was about to conduct a survey of community attitudes to education, as a follow-up to a similar survey conducted prior to the opening of the learning precinct and to measure the extent to which the initiative had addressed these issues. The anecdotal evidence was that the initiative had been successful in enhancing community knowledge about VET and promoting the value of education. The initiative, targeted at the community as a

whole, was also seen to be addressing “*the issue about family support, value of education, a whole lot of factors [that] come into play [and] determine people’s aspirations as to what they do.*”

A number of TAFE staff shared the view that community education providers had an important role to play and that engaging learners through partnerships with community providers was a significant part of the their effective approach to inclusiveness. One TAFE respondent suggested:

TAFE and university are still a little bit distance, for some people, for new migrants, for new people to areas. Where as the local learning centre is generally in the shopping centre and so they can drop in, they can have a cup of tea, they’ll have a talk in Turkish. So it is another way of engagement. You have got to have multiple pathways, multiple entries or doorways into the TAFE and ACE is an important one for that.

Poor public transport infrastructure and limited access to existing transport routes were cited by a vast majority of interviewees, with many sharing the opinion that “*the issue of travel and lack of transport is significant*” and poor access was hindering participation for significant numbers of people. Sunbury and Craigieburn in particular were seen as quite isolated, with limited bus operation between the main train lines. One respondent from a VET provider explained:

The further out you go in Hume, the infrastructure problems start arising. I know for a fact that we’ve only just got a bus line that is linking in to where our centre is in Craigieburn. Until then, the bus stopped half way and you couldn’t access it; you had to walk or you had to drive.

### *Educational factors*

A majority of interviewees emphasised that youth disengagement from education was the most critical issue for the regional VET system. In recent times, Broadmeadows in particular has faced a well documented school retention issue (Teese et al 2006), that was identified by almost all interviewees as generating significant demand from 15-19 year olds and a major driver for the region’s high VET participation. Strong transitions to VET destinations by the region’s high school completers and early school leavers were evident (On Track 2005), which further illustrate the demand for VET from 15-19 year olds and the need for responsive TAFE provision for this cohort. School level programs (Year 11/12) make up 1.2 per cent of VET delivered in the region. A small number of TAFE respondents suggested that restricted availability of VETIS programs in the region’s schools, due to declining student numbers, financial constraints and cultural reasons, may have hindered community understanding about VET and VET opportunities. Relationships between the TAFE and schools were described by several community stakeholders as strained. Some respondents highlighted cultural differences in attitudes towards VET, with particular reference to the aversion to VET pathways amongst some migrant communities, due to an historical preference for higher education. One interviewee reported:

We have lots of NESB young people doing Year 11 and 12 at the TAFE, as VCE. But in the more traditional trades, we have lots of people from Anglo backgrounds. It is almost like, the parents from the Anglo backgrounds know that trades are okay and that you can make a lot of money as a ‘tradey’ and that’s okay as an aspiration for them. Where as lots of the young people we get who are from CALD backgrounds, their parents want them to be professionals and go to university, even when this is unlikely.

Several TAFE respondents suggested that a “*wall*” remained between TAFE and schools and that the serious student retention issue had prevented schools from connecting with TAFEs, for fear of losing more students. There were also concerns about students being unaware of the connections between VET training and employment:

I think the...challenge is...to make sure that students can see the outcome of ‘well if I do that course, there’s the job there’. [They] need to know that what [they] are doing is going to give [them] a meal ticket.

Overall, the region has low rates of educational attainment, an issue of disadvantage clearly represented within TAFE enrolments. Several interviewees, from both the VET sector and other organisations, raised concerns about the mobility of high achievers out of the region and suggested that this trend intensified the challenges for the VET sector in providing for the densely disadvantaged cohort that remained. This exodus was also described as having a negative impact upon local human capital development. The anecdotal data about higher achieving students exiting the region for study, both during the final years of secondary school, and for tertiary study, is partly supported by the regional AVETMISS data. As Table 5 illustrates, learners leaving Hume City for VET study elsewhere were more likely to have completed Year 12. Similarly, early school leavers (left before completing Year 10) are more likely to be engaging with local VET providers than heading outside the region for VET.

**Table 6 Highest school level completed by learners living and studying VET within Hume City, 2004**

Highest School Level Completed	Learners living and studying within Hume City Region	Learners living in Hume City region & leaving region for study
	%	%
Below Year 10	23.0	12.3
Completed Year 10	25.8	18.4
Completed Year 11	18.0	17.3
Completed Year 12	33.3	51.9
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: NCVET (AVETMISS, 2004)

Several respondents from VET providers expressed a concern about an inequality of access to employment based training opportunities by the region's disadvantaged learners. Given the high demand for trade skills associated with the region's residential growth and the large manufacturing industries, trade apprenticeships were perceived to be effective pathway to sustainable employment, particularly for disengaged young people. The 2004 AVETMISS data indicates that more than 1,600 students living outside Hume City entered the region for employment based training. In stark contrast, only 165 students residing within Hume City were engaged in employment based training within Hume City. Low literacy and numeracy skills were identified by TAFE staff as one of the key impediments to disadvantaged students gaining and successfully completing apprenticeships or traineeships. Two interviewees linked the prevalence of poor literacy and numeracy skills with the region's struggling school system.

#### *Institutional and systemic issues*

Low rates of self-identification by disadvantaged students during the enrolment process were an ongoing concern within the TAFE sector. So too were the unavailability of some services needed to effectively support learners facing a range of issues, such as homelessness, mental illness and low English language proficiency. One respondent used the example of sourcing interpreters to illustrate the significance of this challenge and its impact upon capacity for supporting learners:

Because of the socio economic geographical position...there are inherent problems in securing certain types of support that are taken for granted elsewhere in Melbourne. I speak specifically here of interpreters, we have struggled for many years to get interpreters for students.

Respondents emphasised the need for accurate and timely data, to inform inclusive practice. At the time of the fieldwork, one provider was undertaking a major survey involving secondary school students in years 9 to 12 aimed at identifying "what determines them wanting to undertake TAFE or higher education in this region and the issues preventing them". The local government was also gathering data to inform the development of targeted delivery through the community learning precinct.

## Impact of regional factors on TAFE inclusiveness

### *Factors driving demand for TAFE inclusiveness*

- ✧ High levels of youth disengagement and low school retention.
- ✧ Significant levels of low-socioeconomic status people and people in government housing.
- ✧ Large migrant and LBOTE population.
- ✧ Low levels of previous educational attainment.

### *Factors facilitating TAFE inclusiveness*

- ✧ High rates of overall participation in VET and a heavily populated VET landscape.
- ✧ Local government strategic focus for education and providing community learning resources and facilitated partnerships.
- ✧ Active support service provision, including a Local Learning and Employment Network.
- ✧ Strong community education sector, engaging in effective partnerships with the TAFE sector.
- ✧ Positive community attitudes towards TAFE.
- ✧ Formalised processes of inter-agency knowledge sharing.

### *Factors impeding TAFE inclusiveness*

- ✧ Poor regional transport infrastructure.
- ✧ Volatile economic environment and changing and diversifying industry profiles.
- ✧ Some poor relationships between the TAFE and schools.
- ✧ Low rates of self-identification by disadvantaged learners.

## Inclusiveness strategies

The main TAFE in this region was observed to have an intensely embedded, whole of institute approach to inclusiveness and a strategic focus on community connectedness. All respondents from the TAFE spoke about their “*community obligation*”. There was a consistent awareness amongst interviewees from both TAFEs operating in the region of the level and breadth of disadvantage of existing learners and the broader catchment communities. Issues of severe socio-economic disadvantage and low prior educational attainment were key factors driving inclusive practice.

Discussions with TAFE respondents in this region highlighted the importance of not only supporting access but also *promoting* access. Although VET provision in Hume was described as having been very good for many years, there were concerns that community aspirations and awareness of the benefits of VET pathways were low. One respondent who shared this view argued that:

...what is needed is to raise the aspirations of people in the municipality. It's not so much an issue that there isn't provision of programs, but there isn't the aspiration amongst a significant proportion of the residents to go on to VET and higher education.

TAFE respondents indicated that inclusiveness strategies were considerably enhanced by the local government's commitment to community learning and the presence of the local learning precinct. Accessing learners in geographically isolated parts of the region was a major problem facing the TAFEs.

### *Alternative provision for at-risk and disengaged youth*

The main TAFE has a large and multi faceted approach to the issue of ‘at-risk’ and disengaged youth and it has responded to the school retention problem by offering a broad range of VCE and Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) programs, as well as traditional apprenticeships

and pre-apprenticeship programs. In 2004, more than 320 students were studying at Year 11 and 12 level at TAFE in Hume City, compared with 420 enrolled at Year 12 in all the region's secondary schools combined. This is a stark indication of the extent of the school retention issues facing the region. A Post-Compulsory Education Program department within the TAFE is responsible for spearheading the targeted youth delivery. The unit was described as proactively seeking information about young people from community agencies, facilitated by the "*positive relationships*" between various regional stakeholders brought about through the local learning network. The TAFE was also engaging in two-way referrals in its efforts to "*pick-up*" the disengaged cohorts. The TAFE had taken the approach of embedding holistic support mechanisms within its VCAL programs in an attempt to address the financial, health and emotional issues that may have an adverse impact upon students' participation. In many instances, TAFE staff reported brokering links between their students and external health and social welfare agencies.

### *TAFE as major player in community learning*

The local government's community learning precinct and network were reported to be major conduits of inclusive practice for the TAFE. The TAFE was described by both its own staff and other interviewees as a "*key player*" in the precinct and network. The precinct and network were universally perceived by TAFE respondents to be extremely beneficial for all providers because they allowed seamless and ongoing exchange of knowledge between providers and a non-competitive approach to student referrals, provision sharing and collaborative development of innovative and responsive pedagogies. Several respondents reported cross sector referrals of students. There was a general consensus that the initial stages of the local government's initiative had sparked suspicion amongst some providers. However, "*very open, productive*" dialogues, facilitated by the local government, had reportedly overcome any potentially damaging sectoral divisions.

The community learning precinct model was found to be particularly effective in facilitating and promoting engagement with learning by LBO TE migrants. Several respondents emphasised the important role of community education providers in creating an entry point to learning for LBO TE learners and that the enhanced understanding about the capacities of different organisations had allowed more effective referrals between the providers. A significant proportion of learners at community education providers (41.3%) were from language backgrounds other than English. One TAFE interviewee, articulating the importance of a strong relationship with ACE providers suggested that "*You have got to have multiple pathways, multiple entries or doorways into the TAFE and ACE is an important one for that.*" A respondent from a community education provider also explained:

...we would imagine that if somebody fronted up to an ACE organisation and they would be better off going to a TAFE, that they would be referred to the TAFE. And that's the sort of dialogue we have with providers...If a person walks into an ACE organisation and their pathway is for employment, and they've got year 12 qualifications, we'd be expecting, nine times out of ten that they would be referred to the TAFE.

The TAFE was involved in delivering formal English language classes in community locations, that one respondent from the TAFE described as "*part of that working with local communities or community centres and becoming known as being part of those*". Several TAFE respondents shared the opinion that partnering with community education providers and delivering community learning was a very effective way of establishing contact with migrant communities and promoting TAFE as a supportive learning environment.

While it is important to acknowledge the impact of the local government's role in promoting and facilitating education and training in the region, what was observed and reported in Hume City was that the local government tapped into an already existing dynamic within the VET sector for proactive responsiveness to diverse community need.

### *Developing specialist skills for staff*

In 2004, the TAFE worked with a university to develop a professional development program. A 2004 report from the TAFE described the program as addressing the “*need for a different skill set from our teachers other than those required for the more traditional adult student population*”. The identified skill needs included strategies for dealing with poor attendance, challenging behaviour, low self-esteem and engaging young people. Reports from TAFE staff in Hume City were congruent with those gathered during the national survey which indicated that staff professional development was a key component of effective inclusiveness strategies.

### *Fostering connectedness to learning*

In many of the TAFE’s programs, there was an emphasis placed on flexible and culturally appropriate delivery modes, location, pedagogy and staffing. This approach was taken in response to the large population of migrant and LBOTE people in the community. One type of strategy following this philosophy was the contextualisation of English language training for migrants:

Rather than English language, we’ll run English for motor mechanics. You are actually working with an engine that they know about in their own language, and for men in particular, it’s easier – it is a quicker transfer of knowledge than ‘that cat sat on the hat’.

## Conclusion

TAFE capacity for effective inclusiveness in Hume City was considerably enhanced by the region’s well developed mechanisms for knowledge exchange. Evidence from the national survey strongly suggested that multi-dimensional information about learner disadvantage, from a range of sources and perspectives both within and beyond TAFE borders, was a crucial component in responding to learner needs in a timely and appropriate manner. TAFE inclusiveness strategies in this region benefited from an environment featuring collaboration and partnerships. As well as taking advantage of existing community capacity, TAFE inclusiveness in this region was also aiming to stimulate community obligation for supporting and promoting participation in VET.

# Conclusion and implications

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These case studies have identified the diverse drivers for TAFE inclusiveness across different regions and the important influence that regional context has on capacity for TAFE inclusiveness practice. Each region illustrated how the capacity of the TAFE sector to be inclusive of a broad range of learners is neither isolated nor distinct from the sector's responsiveness to the training needs of individuals, industry and regional communities. The case studies demonstrated that an awareness of disadvantage alone is insufficient: the evidence reinforced the findings from the national TAFE survey conducted as part of the research for the report, *The impact of TAFE inclusiveness strategies*, that effective TAFE inclusiveness is unlikely to be achieved by TAFE institutes in isolation. Effective inclusive practice requires the evaluation and exchange of knowledge about learner disadvantage and application of collaborative and cohesive approaches. What is evident from the three case studies is that within some regional landscapes TAFE institutes have better access to external resources that facilitate inclusiveness and are less impeded by regional factors restricting learner participation.

## Planning for demographic and economic change

All three regions were experiencing or predicting significant population change and there was a common sense of unease about the preparedness of the regions to respond and capacity of the regional VET systems to capitalise on the potential benefits of that change. Enhancing and sustaining TAFE inclusive practice in the midst of changing and diversifying populations requires an awareness of not only the needs of existing learners, but also reliable processes for identifying, anticipating and adapting to the needs of evolving catchment communities. In order to position themselves to most effectively respond to these changes in a timely way, TAFEs are looking to new ways of engaging with their regional partners to build networks and gather information that will inform their inclusive practice. It is the extent to which TAFEs proactively seek out these networks and attempt to gain an understanding of the needs of their industry, community and individual clients that determines how effective their responses will be.

## Sustainable inclusive VET provision

Effective TAFE education and training does not take place within a vacuum, and there is evidence to suggest that a great deal of the demand being placed on TAFEs in terms of support for disadvantaged learners is demand for holistic, non-educational responses (those that address multiple aspects of a learner's disadvantage) that TAFEs have not historically been established to provide. TAFEs are not set up or resourced to address the broad spectrum of learner needs independently. Those TAFEs that have developed open, effective and mutually beneficial relationships with the agencies that can address these needs have a greater capacity to provide timely and appropriate non-educational support (e.g. support service referrals, customised provision, etc) and for sustainable inclusiveness.

Competition between individual VET providers, between different VET sectors, between VET providers and the school system or between different regional stakeholders can impede capacity for TAFE inclusiveness. Competition between VET providers may achieve higher rates of overall VET participation, but an environment of competition hinders the exchange of knowledge and the



consolidation and sharing of resources – two elements identified throughout the case studies and national TAFE survey as necessary for effective TAFE inclusiveness.

## Community infrastructure

The consultations in three diverse regions have highlighted the important link between community attitudes towards fostering learning and supporting disadvantaged people, and the perception a TAFE institute has about its inclusiveness obligations.

While individual learner characteristics may hinder participation in and successful outcomes from VET, the infrastructure and environment in which TAFEs operate also have a substantial impact on the types of strategies that can be adopted and the breadth and level of support that can be used to facilitate effective learning. Poor systems of public transport are still a dominant issue facing already disadvantaged communities and further inhibit their physical capacity to access VET delivery locations. While TAFEs can and do go beyond their existing locations to deliver in the community, the issue of regional transport infrastructure, for both educational and service delivery, needs to be addressed.

## Community connectedness

How a TAFE is viewed and perceived has an impact on its capacity for effecting positive change in the educational attainment and educational aspirations of its community. A lack of connectedness or sense of community ownership was demonstrated to adversely affect both participation rates and provision for some equity and targeted groups. TAFE credibility in the community and feelings of belonging to and comfort within the TAFE learning environment are inherently important for many different learner groups and these are intangible elements that not all TAFEs manage to develop. Evidence gathered during the case studies suggests that success relies on good teachers, effective and strong TAFE leadership and a commitment to and awareness of the diversity of prospective learners in VET, combined with the capacity to tap into and promote a whole-of-community responsibility to address issues related to disengaged and disadvantaged people. Undoubtedly, not all communities in which TAFEs operate experience a pre-existing commitment to supporting disadvantaged people or valuing education. TAFEs are in a position, in partnership with other agencies, to stimulate and build a commitment to learning and community obligation around them.

## Developing and maintaining TAFE capacity

The capacity to attract, develop and maintain staff expertise, sustainable resources and momentum was particularly pertinent in the two non-metropolitan regions. Support for disadvantaged learners is needed at all points of the learning journey: access, participation, completion and transition to employment/further study. The case studies illustrate how some TAFEs were pro-actively positioning themselves as both learning and community service brokers. They were marrying resources from both the TAFE and their community to optimise access and maximise available support for people from disadvantaged groups to successfully engage in learning.

## Implications for policy

The TAFEs examined in these case studies illustrated how TAFE institutes can not operate in isolation to respond to the diverse needs of disadvantage learners. Increasingly, inclusiveness strategies within TAFEs are incorporating non-educational, community capacity building and brokerage roles. Evidence from the national survey and case studies would suggest these are roles for which TAFEs have not received sufficient and sustainable resourcing. Further consideration needs to be given to where these 'non-training' roles of TAFEs fit within the greater responsiveness of the VET sector and how TAFE institutes can be supported to fulfil these roles and pursue greater social inclusion in their regions.

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# Glossary

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<b>ABS</b>	Australian Bureau of Statistics
<b>ACE</b>	Adult and Community Education
<b>AQF</b>	Australian Qualifications Framework
<b>AVETMISS</b>	Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard
<b>CALD</b>	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
<b>CGEA</b>	Certificate of General Education for Adults
<b>LBOTE</b>	Language Background Other Than English
<b>LLEN</b>	Local Learning and Employment Network
<b>NESB</b>	Non-English Speaking Background
<b>RTO</b>	Registered Training Organisation
<b>TAFE</b>	Technical and Further Education
<b>VCAL</b>	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
<b>VCE</b>	Victorian Certificate of Education
<b>VET</b>	Vocational Education and Training