

Tracking our success: How TAFE institutes measure their effectiveness and efficiency— Case studies

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This document was produced by the author(s) based on their research for the report *Tracking our success: How TAFE institutes measure their effectiveness and efficiency*, and is an added resource for further information. The report is available on NCVER's website: <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>

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The case studies

This report is the support document to *Tracking our success: How TAFE institutes measure their effectiveness and efficiency* by Josie Misko and Sian Halliday-Wynes. It comprises reports on each of the nine technical and further education (TAFE) institutes that have taken part in the study.

Information was collected via in-depth interviews with chief executive officers and their senior and middle management teams (including faculty directors and educational managers responsible for trade and non-trade programs, marketing, human resources, financial management, administrative services, student services, quality assurance or their equivalents).

In each case study we begin with some brief descriptions of institute characteristics, including main programs offered, and goals and values. We then examine key processes and information used to develop strategic plans and budgets to measure progress towards targets. This is followed by a discussion of how institutes understand the markets in which they operate and the quality of their provision. We end by reports of issues and problems and suggestions for improvement.

Each case study has been validated by the relevant institute director.

Hunter Institute

TAFE NSW – Hunter Institute is located in the Hunter Region of New South Wales. Its main campus is located about 150 km north of Sydney in the Newcastle/Hunter Region. It is the largest regional provider of vocational education and training (VET) in Australia, with 15 campuses, an annual enrolment of nearly 57 000 local and international students and 2500 expert teachers and support staff. The institute offers courses at 15 campuses including Belmont, Cessnock, Glendale, Gosford, Hamilton, Hunter Street, Kurri Kurri, Maitland, Muswellbrook, Newcastle, Ourimbah, Scone, Singleton, Tomaree and Wyong.

Main programs

Hunter TAFE offers programs in all of the following areas: business and computing, engineering, health and community services, primary industries, construction, environment, tourism and hospitality, maritime, transport, access and general education, and arts and media.

Identifying goals and values

Hunter TAFE has organised its strategic objectives around goals for achieving economic, social and environmental sustainability, and effective governance. Its values are about people, leadership, its staff, engagement with customers, industry and communities and celebrating success. Also important are the front action principles of the Australian Business Excellence Framework: leadership, strategic planning, data, information and knowledge, and people.

Its key objectives are to attain:

- ✧ *Economic sustainability* in terms of student activity: course completions (measured by the number of course complete enrolments), module completion rates (measured by the number of ‘pass’ module enrolments as a proportion of total confirmed enrolments), course attrition rate (measured by the number of ‘withdrawn and discontinued’ [from all modules] course enrolments as a proportion of the total number for the course).
- ✧ *Social sustainability* in terms of staff activity: (measured by unscheduled absences, sickness, industrial action and some forms of family and community leave)
- ✧ *Environmental sustainability* in terms of utilities, fuel and green gas emission (measured by average water consumption, monthly electricity consumption, and greenhouse gas emissions associated with Hunter Institute electricity consumption)
- ✧ *Effective governance*: measured by institute management costs, ISO audit non-conformances, total complaints as a percentage of total enrolments in core and non-core funded programs.

The Hunter TAFE Strategic Plan is derived from strategic objectives and targets that have cascaded in turn from the NSW State Plan, Commonwealth agreements, the NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training (BVET) Plan and the Department of Education and Training corporate plan. Faculty plans cascade from the Institute Strategic Plan. Work plans for teaching sections cascade from the faculty plan.

The Hunter On-line Planning Environment (HOPE) is a relational data base which has been introduced to enable online development and tracking of initiatives, strategic priorities and targets for faculties and for the institute as a whole. Having these plans online makes it easy to make adjustments as environments and needs change. The HOPE system has been successful in receiving a TAFE NSW Quality Award.

Achieving budgets and targets

The institute's Purchase Agreement with the NSW State Government drives the implementation and monitoring of financial and non-financial budgets for the institute as a whole and for its different faculties and units. The Planning and Sustainability Services Unit has worked hard to provide faculty directors and head teachers with the information they require to arrive at realistic estimations of the enrolments they can expect in their programs for the following year. This includes synthesised information on federal and state government priorities, relevant research reports, regional labour market trends, local skill shortages, industry and community expectations, major works, enterprise relocations and new industrial or residential developments. Faculties will also consider historical data. Once the Purchase Agreement has been signed the institute will set about achieving the targets.

It is not until the enrolment period has ended that educational managers and faculty directors are in a position to know whether they are able to use all of the annual student hours (ASH) they had estimated for their different programs. Before the semester begins a Tally Room meeting is held to consider how each faculty is progressing towards achieving the ASH targets for its particular area,¹ and to move ASH from low-demand areas to high-demand areas. Before this Tally Room meeting, however, faculties will have also considered how each of its teaching sections is placed to meet its ASH targets and how ASH can be moved from areas of low demand to areas of high demand within the faculty. If enrolments exceed allocated ASH the institute will try and renegotiate with TAFE NSW for more funds. It is rare that faculties providing User Choice funded programs will turn any apprentices or trainees away based on lack of ASH. If circumstances really prevent the faculty from taking on more apprentices or trainees, then alternative methods of delivery are explored until there are sufficient places for apprentices and trainees to attend traditional training.

Head teachers are in control of their own budgets, and must monitor progress towards targets. A clerk who is solely dedicated to User Choice or government business will help relevant faculty directors to administer claims for funding.

The institute has tried to facilitate the recording and monitoring of activity by implementing the online 'Buddy' system. The Buddy system, developed by the institute's Finance Team, has been established to help head teachers and administrators to gain instant access to data which records progress towards targets for delivery. Now head teachers are able to see how their planned teacher hours are matched against actual teaching hours, and the wage costs of individual teachers. It also enables them to view actual expenditure at the individual transaction level. If budgets are overspent, faculty directors may either choose to renegotiate ASH or decide that they will balance this over-performance with revenue from commercial ventures. The Buddy system is well regarded and has been shared with other institutes, including Western, Western Sydney, and Sydney, and has received a TAFE NSW award.

The Strategic Business Development (SBD) and Finance Units monitor core and non-core budget activity, keep a regular check on progress towards delivery targets, and provide regular analyses to managers and senior managers. When there are any anomalies, faculties are asked to sort these out. Each month these units will also provide the Institute Board of Management (which involves

¹ In New South Wales ASH is divided into Resource Allocation Model (RAM) areas. These areas are broadly based on industry sectors and provide a systematic and uniform way for reporting and planning.

faculty and campus managers and managers of facilities, finance, human resources, and planning and sustainability units) with reports on year-to-date activity against delivery targets, and a comparison on previous year-to-date performances.

Twice a year the institute undergoes a statewide Profile Review, where course completions, module completions and course attrition will be considered. Each faculty group will be involved in a Profile Review twice a year and a formal Budget Review annually, with informal monitoring through reports to the Board of Management each month. The Strategic Business Development and Finance Units will both touch base with faculty directors and educational managers before their one-on-one budget reviews with senior administrators.

The institute is keen to grow its business and to this end it has identified commercial ventures which will also help it cross-subsidise programs which may not be able to be delivered—and therefore make meeting targets more difficult—without some injection of funds. A number of commercial ventures also provide workplace experience for students as well as return a profit.² Sometimes a course that has been developed to appeal to the international market (especially courses with articulation pathways to university) can also turn out to be attractive to local students. At other times domestic courses may be developed with an eye to promoting them to the international market. When faculties find that a course has been or is likely to be too costly, they will consider whether alternative and less expensive modes of delivery might be suitable. If possible faculties may occasionally supplement programs as a way of developing goodwill and ongoing business relationships with enterprises.

This focus on the ‘bottom line’ is apparent in service units. Budgets are checked on a monthly basis. If there is overspending directors will try to find out reasons for the discrepancy. If there is no easily identifiable reason, then more investigations are made. Where possible every effort is made to juggle between funds to meet targets. If budgets are underspent, then there is also more investigation to find out if all expenditure has been accounted for. Generally overspending is minimal.

It is clear that there is a key focus on planning to drive success and achieve efficiencies. ‘We know up-front what it should cost and make efficiencies wherever there are shortfalls.’ Nevertheless, limited integration of statewide HR and Financial systems make it difficult to derive accurate costing on how much it costs to train trainees. ‘It is only an estimate [albeit] a good estimate’ (Finance administrator).

Meeting industry needs

Hunter TAFE uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate its ability to meet the needs of specific industries. Indicators include uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships, successful completions, achievement of competencies, and demand for commercial products. Also important are data on customer complaints and findings from surveys of employers (including the NCVET Survey of Employer Use and Views [SEUV]) and focus groups. The performance of apprentices and trainees in workplaces (captured in work-placement log books), and end-of-program interviews with employers are also used to understand whether training is adequate and relevant. Career Connect Services which link employers to students and students to employers is also a useful source of information.

² The Arts and Media faculty runs a production house which will provide management and production for events like the Newcastle Music Festival. Students are also involved in curating and mounting exhibitions for the Newcastle Art Gallery.

Vocational Training Orders determine approved training requirements for apprenticeships and traineeships in New South Wales. They identify what training will be funded by the government and what qualifications will be issued. Training packages developed by industry skills councils describe the competency standards that will be achieved. Industry advisory committees for different industry areas also help the institute to identify the type of provision that is required, and give feedback on performance. Also important are the knowledge that teachers gain in their joint development of training plans with employers and their visits to workplaces to conduct or validate workplace assessments for apprentices or trainees. End-of-program interviews with employers are also used to evaluate institute effectiveness.

The institute's close ties with industry associations, employment agencies (including Australian Apprenticeship Centres), other registered training organisations, state government service agencies and group training companies are very important for the institute as a whole, as well as for trade faculties, teaching sections, managers and teachers. They help the institute to maintain currency and relevance of training content, practice and equipment and materials and relationships and networks with industry. The institute is a member of the Hunter Region Apprenticeship and Traineeship Association.

The employment of part-time teachers still working in their areas of expertise provides key industry contacts as well as sources of information about workplace practice. Another mechanism is to have teachers return to industry to update skills and knowledge.

TAFE NSW has implemented an online service for employers (Employer e-services), which enables employers to access apprentice or trainee results online. Four thousand employers have signed up to the service; however, only about 10% have activated their accounts. Half of these are from Hunter TAFE. At Hunter the officer ('clerk') who is dedicated to administering government business will contact employers, visit the business, and help them go online.

Up-to-date information on new and emerging industries which may drive demand for training is also brought to the attention of the institute by teachers and managers who have strong networks in industry, and representatives of industry on the Institute Board. This is complemented by memberships of professional bodies, regional industry forums, and industry associations. Each campus director is on the local Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Attendance at industry functions and award ceremonies are also key collecting information about how the institute is perceived by industry and community stakeholders.

The institute has introduced a Customer Relationship Management system to track customer contacts.

Meeting student needs

The institute uses a range of indicators to understand whether it is meeting student needs. Course completions, attrition rates, class attendance, and module completion rates are monitored. Also important are results from state, national and institute surveys of student satisfaction, as well as in-class surveys used by teachers. The NCVER's Student Outcomes Survey (SOS) is used in a general sense to get an understanding of how the institute is performing against national averages. This information is complemented by feedback from employers about the quality of training, increases in commercial business, and teacher assessments of workplace practice. The standardised TAFE NSW instrument for understanding the VET experience of students has previously been administered and analysed locally every two years. From 2009 the institute will be using the student and employer surveys developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to meet its now mandatory student and employer satisfaction reporting requirements against the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) 2007 Quality Indicators. Also monitored to judge effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery are student referrals to student counsellors and their uptake.

Another example of how the institute understands the effectiveness of training is through the informal channel of monitoring which students are offered employment (most often the case for better students), as well as monitoring employer requests for suitable recruits. Some faculties also run Cluster Meetings and team meetings which will have agenda items dealing with student issues including complaints. However, complaints processes are monitored systematically at institute-level to understand issues which are causing problems and actions that can be implemented to address these difficulties. Although international students are generally treated in similar ways, the institute must address a set of specifically legislated requirements regarding pastoral care, attendance monitoring, and learning support.

Understanding relevant markets

The Marketing Unit at Hunter TAFE is keen to have up-to-date information on local and regional economic environments and community attitudes to training to develop and implement an appropriate marketing strategy. This includes training and labour market statistics, research reports, relevant newspapers (especially *Campus Review*) and websites, government media releases, results of market research and formal and informal personal contacts and professional networks. The high-level profile review undertaken by TAFE NSW has also been used to give an indication of the economic landscape and the demand for training. The most frequently used statistics are those available from the Regional Economic Development Board, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Hunter Valley Research Foundation, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (especially the census statistics).

The institute has linked with others to finance research on issues affecting the Central Coast. One such study looked at why the Central Coast Institute was experiencing high rates of attrition from secondary education. This research provided them with information about the range of student non-participation, attrition and unemployment issues being experienced in the region and how the demography of the Central Coast had an impact on TAFE training uptake and completion.

Surveys of students and communities are other mechanisms used by Hunter TAFE to understand the markets in which it operates. The Hunter Region Omnibus Survey was conducted to understand community attitudes to Hunter TAFE. For the past ten years Hunter TAFE students have also completed a survey which asks them to report the source of their information about course enrolment, whether they telephoned the Hunter Course Information Centre, or visited the website. They have also been asked to indicate whether they would use online services to enrol or pay for their course fees. This information is used for evaluation and continuous improvement.

Hunter TAFE endeavours to understand what its competitors are providing. The Hunter Valley Research Foundation has conducted studies of training being offered or delivered in the region which have been used to support business cases for extending the scope and depth of training programs. The marketing department keeps a check on the costs of courses and fees being charged by other providers. Course Information Centre staff undertake web and mystery shopping strategies to collect information on competitors.

The Marketing Unit has developed a process of gaining information of institute significance from all 15 campuses. A template has been developed which allows staff to register any items of interest occurring on their campus.

The Public Relations Officer sends an email to all Campus Directors on a monthly basis which contains the information template. Campus Directors distribute these to all staff who then return the template to the Public Relations Officer. This provides for greater input from some of the more remote campuses.

The institute makes sure to provide local newspapers, television and radio stations with promotional stories about TAFE. It places advertisements in the local paper on behalf of different faculties and teaching sections, and then follows up with teachers to obtain feedback on whether the advertisement has produced the desired outcome. It is important that there are mechanisms in place to ensure that information on events being run at campus or faculty level is provided to the Marketing Manager for public relations purposes. In this way arrangements can be made to ensure that senior TAFE personnel are at the function should key government, employer or community stakeholders be attending.

Data on increased student satisfaction, enrolments, participation in promotional events, commercial income and decreased attrition rates are used as indicators of marketing success, while data on increased complaints are used to identify issues and problems. 'If attrition rates go down we like to think we are giving them the information that helped them select the right course' (Marketing Manager). Public relations activities are tailored to the type of media being used. There is high take-up of media releases. The use of an 'advertising equivalence' figure is based on the space given to the media release in the paper, and the calculation of a cost per annum if they were to advertise it: 'We have had a good strike rate' (Marketing Manager).

Success in competitions and awards also provides evidence of effectiveness. The Hunter TAFE has been awarded a TAFE NSW Best Marketing Award and an Australian TAFE Marketing Award: 'This gives us recognition that the brand is successful' (Marketing Manager).

Website evaluations are conducted to make sure that each faculty or business unit's web page remains current. Librarians run a website evaluation and seek structured feedback from students.

Managing people

Hunter TAFE believes in developing the capability of its staff and gives them opportunities to develop skills and knowledge to help them undertake their jobs. A system of performance reviews helps to identify areas for professional development. Performance reviews of faculty directors and educational managers are focused on how faculties and sections are progressing against ASH targets, commercial budgets, staffing issues and workforce planning issues.

The institute has provided head teachers (responsible for developing and monitoring their own budgets) with workshops on business literacy. Stress management, classroom management, technical currency updates, currency of industry programs have also been offered.

The Human Resources (HR) team attend state-wide HR managers meetings, where ideas and concerns are shared once a term. The HR team is also considering ageing workforce issues, workforce and succession planning and programs are offered to staff to help them with transition to retirement. A 'Life after TAFE Expo' is held where exhibitors have booths on topics including superannuation, travel, tai-chi, health and wellbeing, and volunteering.

An institute employee portal which interfaces with the institute website allows the HR team to interrogate data and provide information and reports on:

- ✧ workforce statistics and succession planning
- ✧ OHS policies and procedures and standards
- ✧ employee services including awards, conditions and forms
- ✧ performance management policy documents (there may also be room to include information about competencies achieved in professional development programs).

Indicators that are used to evaluate the effectiveness of industrial relations (IR) strategies are the number of unscheduled absences (due to strikes), sick leave, number and complexity of issues between unions and the Institute Consultative Committee (a meeting of the unions and Institute

Management). Other indicators of performance are the number of formal complaints received. These are reviewed on an annual basis and reports are provided to central office and the Equal Employment Opportunity office. Indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of OHS strategies include the number of workers on compensation claims, the net costs incurred in the claims, and the number of staff utilising the institute's corporate gym program.

Staff Exit Surveys also provide other information about the effectiveness of operations. These are initiated by the HR team and held face-to-face with resigning staff. There is no compulsion to agree to an Exit Survey and often staff members who are leaving because they are unhappy refuse to participate in the interview. If staff resign and leave before the HR department has been able to set up an interview an exit survey is mailed out to them, and this is followed by a telephone call. Having staff involved in such exit surveys helps the HR department to identify any system issues that can be fed to faculty directors. When reasons for leaving are because of clash of personality or personal issues there is no reason to pass this information on and it remains confidential.

The statewide Employee Opinion Survey is used but the institute is looking to develop a new survey in connection with the Hunter Valley Research Foundation.

Employees who require counselling and assistance are linked to Employee Assistance Providers. Because this is mostly used for personal issues, the institute only monitors information on the numbers of people who attend. There is no information kept on the names of those who attend or the reasons involved. A Health Welfare Advisor provides pre-placement medicals, advocacy support, and rehabilitation services. If staff members are required to go overseas for work they are provided with safety information.

The HR Business Partners initiative has been introduced to provide HR support to faculty directors, teachers and business unit team leaders. Its aim is to address issues before they escalate into formal complaints, stress claims and industrial issues.

Learning from the successful practice of others

Staff will learn from the successful practice of others through exchanging ideas and information, through membership of internal and external groups and networks, and attendance at external events. Meetings, projects and workshops are used for cross-fertilisation, networking and sharing of ideas within the organisation. Staff will attend state and national awards nights (including NSW TAFE Quality Awards and national training awards), the annual 'Showcase of Innovations and Initiatives', and the former 'Reframing the Future' events. Relevant staff members are encouraged to be involved in a TAFE NSW one-day Industry Trade Show (hosted in turn by different NSW institutes). This event aims to showcase good practice in products, services, staff development, and corporate systems development. Staff are encouraged to attend regular meetings of statewide TAFE NSW role-specific groups and curriculum centres. Locally they will be involved in community and industry forums (including community meetings, breakfast and dinner forums). These external events are used to learn from others but also to showcase institute innovations. Attendance at graduation ceremonies is especially important for interacting with industry and community stakeholders, and also often providing learning about Aboriginal culture.

Staff of the Hunter Quality Unit (part of Planning and Sustainability Services Unit) have also acted as external auditors, or been on staff reviews to look at restructure for other institutes.

Achieving cost-efficiencies and effectiveness

Cost-effectiveness and efficiencies are measured by indicators like module completion rates, course attrition rates and course completion rates. Also calculated is the cost per teaching hour at individual course and module level. Some managers will also look at dollar cost per ASH and dollar cost per student. Hunter is generally below the state average in most of these costs.

Another range of indicators is used to look at the effectiveness of different training models. These include per unit dollar cost per ASH for different cohorts of students and for different delivery modes (including blended learning, recognition of prior learning (RPL), workplace training for traineeships, or face-to-face delivery). Workplace delivery is used in a large proportion of User Choice funded programs and other commercial funds; however, it may be more cost-efficient for some cohorts of students than others. For example, workplace delivery for IT traineeships has been found to be quite cost-effective because most of their training is done online. By contrast, workplace delivery in the Certificate II in Business Administration is less cost-effective because students require more support which adds more cost. Combining a mix of delivery modes can sometimes improve the cost-effectiveness of programs.

Class size is used as a measure for efficiency, with higher class sizes often associated with lower training costs. Other indicators of effectiveness are positive feedback from employers, high completion rates, and success in competitions and awards (including World Skills Competitions, teaching awards, and NSW training awards).

Regular team meetings are held to discuss what is going well and what is not going so well. Faculty directors will also meet twice a year with head teachers. When head teachers get together they will talk about their concerns. Performance facilitators allocated to head teachers and teaching sections will also assist in monitoring the budget.

The institute is constantly benchmarking itself against statewide averages including those for corporate services areas to achieve cost-efficiencies.

Maintaining quality assurance processes

The concept of ‘working in the business and on the business’ is a key driver of quality processes at Hunter TAFE.

Internal and external reviews and audits against the AQTF 2007, NCVER activity audits, and internal and external audits against ISO 9001 standards are the key formal quality assurance mechanisms for considering improvements to processes across all programs. There are numerous external audits to ensure compliance with legislative requirements and industry standards. These include audits of financial processes by the Auditor General’s Department, IT security, OHS (for example, confined spaces), and non-destructive testing, animal care and ethics (for VET nursing and Equine Studies programs), and maritime standards as required by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA—maritime studies and marine engineering). ‘Red Tape Busters’ based on staff suggestions for limiting overly bureaucratic processes is another mechanism for continuous improvements.

Internal reviews for AQTF 2007 purposes follow an annual cycle which begins with a workshop for internal auditors to inform them of any changes to AQTF 2007 requirements and to allocate them to teams for audit. Auditors will complete an audit template and identify any opportunities for improvement. These are then entered into the HOPE system so that when faculties and teams do their planning they will be reminded of the actions that need to be completed. The results or audits also link into the Performance Reviews of individual faculty directors. Before these reviews commence Quality Improvement Unit staff will visit faculty directors to see whether they can close any ‘actions’ that remain outstanding from their audits. ISO audits provide an external validation of

quality assurance processes in place and are also used to support the AQTF. Results of these audits are then reported back to the monthly meeting of the Institute Board of Management.

When ‘actions’ fail to achieve closure or issues persist within and across faculties or teams then there is a business case for establishing a broader project to investigate a solution as part of the following year’s strategic planning processes.

Suggesting areas for improvement

Exit surveys and more in-depth and long-term studies (between one and five years after training) of the destinations of graduates were frequently requested. One challenge is getting contact details of graduates; another is to find out where they have gone and what they are doing. This includes the number of different careers or jobs experienced, and whether individuals had acquired jobs in their training fields. Categorising this information by different age groups was also felt to be of help. Any data on how training has affected performance in the workplace is also lacking. As well as helping the institute measure its inputs and its outputs, contact with graduates can help to promote further training. If TAFE graduates have been able to move into degree courses (especially important for accounting, management, human resources and information technology graduates) this information can be used in promotional campaigns to recruit students who have started but not completed their programs.

Although national surveys like the SOS and SEUV are felt to be informative at a general level there was a request for a larger sample able to capture information at both industry and local regional areas to enable meaningful comparisons. The institute wants to gauge employer satisfaction with training; however, this is especially difficult for those employers with diverse workforces (for example, large retailers like Woolworths). It was felt that if employer surveys are to be useful then it is important that they obtain information about whether apprentices are learning what they need to know, and whether employers understood their role in training. If they are to be run at the institute level it will be important to have a dedicated person to conduct the survey and analyse the results.

With the movement to outcomes-based auditing there was a concern that it might be difficult to identify successful outcomes and to determine that it was the training that produced the outcomes. There was also a concern about how to arrive at judgments of outcomes related to compliance issues.

A major problem in measuring employment outcomes based on a formula which takes into account the costs of training is that it is not too meaningful for general education programs. ‘We are getting better at developing individual learning plans and moving them on to the next phase (that is, into a faculty program)’ (Faculty Director).

A number of suggestions were made for improving data quality to enable accurate and meaningful comparisons and conclusions. These include nationally consistent definitions for indicators like ‘utilisation rate’, and codes for students who do not complete a course because they got a job. It also includes better formulae for calculating completion rates for apprentices.

If institutes are to ensure compliance with government legislation and industry requirements then they need to be made aware of changes. An online alert system to say that certain awards, policies and guidelines have been changed would help them ensure that their practice was compliant and current with industry standards.

It is difficult for teaching sections to monitor cash flows on any given day because the statewide financial system has not been set up to do this. Limited integration between statewide HR and financial systems means that billing systems are unable to link teachers’ time to specific tasks or programs. ‘We know we paid so many hours but we can’t pull out course, classroom, or funding sources’ (Senior administrator). The institute ‘Buddy’ system is perceived to help in some ways but

the data can't be drilled down sufficiently to give an accurate snapshot. 'If we want to know how much it costs to train trainees we can't make an accurate costing, it is only an estimate [albeit] a good estimate' (Senior administrator).

The challenge of offshore programs is to ensure that partner organisations are doing their bit, and use system and assessment events that have been agreed upon. Arrangements need to be made so that staff from both countries can discuss progress and identify issues that need to be addressed.

North Coast Institute of TAFE

North Coast Institute is one of ten institutes within TAFE NSW and enrolls nearly 40 000 students each year. Its 17 campuses are located between the Great Lakes region in the south to the Tweed Heads region on the Queensland border.

The main program areas are: Arts and media, Business services, Community Services & Health, Construction & Transport, General Education, Information Technology, and Manufacturing & Engineering, Primary Industries & Natural Resources and Tourism, Hospitality, Retail and Personal Services.

In the past the institute has received two- and three-gold star ratings by the national Institute for Trade Skills Excellence for its Aquaculture, Carpentry, Metals & Engineering and Electro-technology course delivery, and has been state and national Training Provider of the Year.

Identifying goals and values

The main goal or purpose of North Coast TAFE (outlined in the Institute Charter) is to ‘provide personalised vocational education and training to build prosperity, sustainability and innovation’. Its key ‘values in action’ are ‘being passionate about learning and innovation, striving to provide access and choice, employing great people to build a great business, collaborating in the interests of customers, delivering quality services ethically and sustainably, and partnering for the benefit of our region’.

Strategic objectives are organised around five key themes: ‘customers first; jobs, career opportunities, skills and qualifications for learners; workforce development and business improvement for employers; socio-economic and cultural capacity for communities; and responsible stewardship of our resources’. They are then broken down into more tangible and narrow strategic outcomes which talk about results, and provide specific direction for faculty business plans.

Three areas for strategic improvement for 2007–10 have been identified in relation to customers, collaboration (both internal and external), and sustainability (incorporating issues relating to climate change, the ageing workforce and Aboriginal culture).

The Charter, and its enactment, adopts an approach to strategic planning which recognises that organisations are human systems. From the institute’s point of view, this makes it imperative to focus on purpose, values and adaptability. A ‘Strategic Review’ approach is built into the Executive’s meeting processes, and is used to unpack issues, concerns, and required improvements for functions or programs—but all in terms of the Charter and its values and outcomes. The institute’s management structure is deliberately flat (and has been flattened another level recently) to ensure that unpredictable and random problems and issues are picked up early, triggering an ‘unscheduled’ Strategic Review if necessary. Ideally, this allows the Executive to initiate timely remediation before these issues become business-critical.

The institute has embraced the need to use meaningful measures of performance alongside national indicators of volume such as ASH. Their strategy, known as ‘Measuring what Matters,’ is an attempt to get staff to become sharper about collecting and interpreting useful evidence in relation

to the Charter. The ‘Sense-maker’ tool is being trialled as a mechanism to capture weak or early signals from staff or customers—signals that may indicate the need for early intervention. The results of this trial are not yet conclusive.

Achieving budgets and targets

The planning of budgets and targets occurs at three levels, with revenues (commercial, contestable, TAFE NSW purchasing etc) and targets forecast at the institute level and an agreement signed off with the primary purchaser, TAFE NSW. Within this all-funds business model, required margins from revenues are estimated to pay for support, operational and infrastructure costs at the faculty and support unit level. A degree of risk management is also agreed at this time, as most government contestable revenues do not include a margin to cover these costs. Commercial (rather than contestable) revenues are the only funds with full margins, and these are a relatively small proportion of the institute’s revenue streams, reflective of the market. Savings and ‘above target’ income generation strategies are negotiated as part of the process to determine the level of risk that will be underwritten. Teaching sections and faculties (‘business units’) run the third and parallel level of revenue forecasting, target-setting and risk management strategies when they do their business planning. Final approval of macro revenue estimates, targets and levels of risk is given by the Institute Executive (ten Directors, TAFE Services—with either or both faculty or support portfolios—and a Head Teacher).

Within the institute’s negotiated service delivery with the primary purchaser (TAFE NSW), there is an opportunity for targets to be reallocated to areas which experience higher demand or which are of greater significance to the NSW economy. For example, the targets for the Faculty of Construction and Transport, which incorporates all building trades (apart from electrical) and trades in maritime, aviation, automotive, auto-electrical, heavy vehicle, panel beating and spray-painting have grown significantly over recent years, with the number of apprentices growing from about 900 to 1500. ASH targets have increased from 370 000 to 526 000. To fund this demand, TAFE NSW has purchased less volume in areas of lower strategic significance to the state, such as Business Services and IT. Nevertheless, the institute has maintained service levels to individuals and firms in these sectors through commercial and Commonwealth contestable funding.

This purchasing agreement includes sanctionable targets relating to current priorities (e.g. ASH), as well as aspirational targets relating to future directions (e.g. completions of higher-level qualifications).

Within the institute, head teachers are the primary ‘business managers’ and are responsible for monitoring their budgets and targets. They are supported in this work through their faculty management and business support team, a culture of devolution, capability-building activities in business literacy, a customised and integrated ‘all funds’ system (BESS—Business Educational Support System), clerical support and access to strategic and tactical advice from a Faculty Resource Analyst (FRA) who helps them monitor and manage cash flows, margins, risk and performance against targets.

The institute has ready access to statewide systems for capturing information on the management of finances (TAFE Integrated Financial System [TIFS]), students (Student Information System [SIS]) including their enrolments (Mainstream Enrolment via Internet [MEVI]) and progress (CLAMS—Class Rolls). ASH is tracked through the statewide Data Warehouse, and payroll through LATTICE. The ability to access data on finances, students, staff and clients creates a better understanding of program performance against financial and non-financial targets.

Heads of sections are encouraged to diversify their revenue base and grow their services to customers by accessing all available government fund sources, as well as charging commercial rates for some products and services. A predetermined percentage of the price of any product is kept in the teaching section to offset risk-managed costs and to improve the running of the section,

including moving into new products and services. The percentage depends on the product, market and revenue stream and is calculated in BESS. This level of devolution provides incentives for sections to develop their services on an all-funds basis.

The Business Educational Support System is an institute-specific planning tool which enables the institute to capture information on all revenue streams. It calculates costs, approves invoices and communicates this information to TIFS. In doing so, it enables the institute to understand the effort invested, the returns received and the margins made or lost.

Accurate information on how course fees impact on students is especially important for North Coast Institute. In 2008 the institute applied a course fee of \$50.00 for non-Aboriginal clients and found that the fee had not acted as a barrier to enrolments (as enrolments had increased). When students can't pay the \$50.00 course fee counsellors will set up appointments with the Job Network so that they can access suitable funding. These arrangements are especially necessary in the North Coast where levels of education and income are all below the national average.

Meeting industry needs

A key indicator of effectiveness for any institute is the extent to which it is able to meet industry needs. North Coast TAFE has a variety of strategies to ensure it is able to collect information which will inform it of current demand for skills, implement responsive strategies and gain feedback on its performance. The institute is represented on community and industry groups (including industry reference and advisory groups, and peak industry bodies and associations). There is industry and community representation on the Institute Advisory Council. Business Capability Consultants work directly with enterprises to 'find and mind' their needs. This is complemented at a practitioner level with information in student logbooks and teacher engagement in workplaces during on-site service delivery.

Periodic Employer Satisfaction Surveys and market research inform strategic shifts in relation to the employer market. An example of a recent such shift is the institute's Targeting Employers Campaign, informed by both the broader research and specific local relationships at a sub-regional level.

The employment of part-time teachers who are also currently working in their areas of expertise helps the institute to stay abreast of current developments, and gives it the flexibility required to respond to new developments. Regular visits to workplaces by teachers and assessors, and employer participation in the development of training plans helps teachers of apprentices and trainees understand industry requirements and establish responsive training programs. A close relationship between the institute and the employer is essential if employers are to 'understand their critical role in [trade] training' (Faculty Director of Construction and Training). This helps to achieve the institute's aim to personalise its delivery to the needs of individual clients.

Faculties conduct surveys and focus groups of local employers to better understand the nature of their industry stakeholders. For example, the Business faculty has undertaken an environmental scan of the key characteristics of two of their sectors. It has found that both sectors have to address problems associated with an ageing population, skill shortages, staff turnover, and employment growth. Also important to planning a suitable program of training for these areas is looking at the requirements of the relevant training packages, and changes in legislation. Once these issues have been considered, faculties are in a position to determine changes to the course mix and to investigate different state and Commonwealth government funding programs. Increasingly, these funding sources are becoming contestable, with funds going to those who are in the best position to deliver the program.

The Institute Advisory Council meets four times a year in a different regional location. Once a year, the Council meets with mayors, general managers, economic development officers, CEOs of

enterprises and peak bodies including non-government organisations, personnel from the Regional Development Board and representatives of community groups. This provides a forum for discussion about skills development in the area, and also a venue for issues about TAFE training to be raised.

It was at one of these meetings that the institute director learnt from the CEO of a major transport company about the lack of training for the heavy vehicle industry in the Casino area. This led to the development of a program for apprentices which enables them to attend workplace training at a number of companies with suitable and up-to-date facilities and equipment.

Designing programs to meet the needs of employers is not always straightforward as not all employers in the same sector or across sectors want the same thing. Some employers want the traditional day release approach to training, while others want to take more responsibility for learning and will opt for either a fully on-job mode, or an integrated on-job, off-job approach across a cycle. Still others want the first stage of the program to be completed at TAFE, while subsequent stages are undertaken at the worksite. For this model, a travelling mentor/assessor has been employed to conduct assessments for later stages. Another model is the fully flexible off-job model of training, which allows employers to release their apprentices or trainees any day of the year. Under this second model, all students will come to the campus for their off-the-job learning and will be involved in self-paced training programs with teachers acting as facilitators and mentors.

The institute is keen to be responsive to industry needs and to adjust schedules to fit in with annual peak times. Training commencement and completion dates have been aligned to meet the needs of enterprises. For example, in one sector, courses are commenced in May and delivered in a 'compressed' form so that learning can be completed by September or October. This meets employer needs for having apprentices back on the job for the Christmas rush.

An 'External Relationship Management Matrix' is used to identify customer and stakeholder organisations which represent main external linkages and partners. It aims to streamline organisational and communication channels by identifying the 'best person to contact' for each group, and by allocating responsibility to an individual who will be the 'primary relationship manager'. Another aim is to identify other staff who have business, personal or local relationships with these groups, to help the primary relationship manager with information that can help the institute meet customer needs. The main groups are: economic and regional development; politicians; media organisations; community development agencies and groups; other education sectors and providers, commercial clients and industry bodies; and others (including government boards and committees, other TAFE institutes/groups; staff associations; international; future of ageing; ecological sustainability bodies). Every so often this matrix is reviewed to ensure that all key industry and stakeholder groups are 'covered'. A new online Customer Relationship Management system, which tracks contacts, will soon replace this matrix.

As a regional institute North Coast must be aware of how the costs for training are perceived by small enterprises in regional and rural areas. Costs for courses which are considered to be reasonable for metropolitan employers may be perceived to be too costly. To deal with such issues the institute has helped enterprises access relevant contestable funding or government grants that can be used to access training for industry. The institute has become involved in major government initiatives aimed at workforce development by partnering with industry to access such grants. At North Coast this is the key strategy that is used to leverage small businesses investing in training their existing workforce.

Meeting student needs

Traditional indicators of student success and other measures of behaviour are used to evaluate performance. These include statistics on course completions, performance in graded assessments, repeat business, awards, and referrals. Results of internal and external surveys of student

satisfaction and course or subject evaluations are also used. NCVER's Student Outcomes Survey (SOS) is generally used by senior managers to obtain a general indication of how the institute fares against national averages.

Teachers and head teachers are encouraged to undertake pre-course, mid-course and post-course surveys of their students. This information is used by the teachers themselves to improve their practice. In some sections head teachers will also conduct focus groups with students on course completion. Regular internal reviews aligned to ISO and AQTF emphasise the primacy of customer input into local decision-making, and the last ISO audit identified our internal review process as 'the best seen in any organisation'. The Organisational Development team may also make 'customer feedback' a topic for Strategic Review and will check the number of people who are getting customer feedback and how they are doing. Currently there is also a trial of an Online Student Survey but uptake continues to be slow.

The institute is also introducing job placement services to help students find jobs and has partnered with local government and the Business Chamber to help students to start up their own businesses.

Understanding relevant markets

North Coast TAFE uses its considerable contacts with industry and community stakeholders, and surveys of employers and students to understand its local training market. In 2007 it also contracted the Market Research Association to better understand 'Awareness and perceptions of TAFE on the North Coast'. The results indicated that the TAFE brand was highly recognised, that people felt good about TAFE and that it occupied a key position in the region and the community.

The institute uses the TAFE NSW Profile Review undertaken by Access Economics to understand industry demand for skills (using ANSCO groupings) at a macro level. The review uses census data and models predictions of skill demand. While it is useful at one level, the modelling smooths out the prediction over time and needs to be supplemented by local input to make it meaningful. North Coast planning personnel use the data in concert with much more local information. '... our people ... are close to them (that is, industry stakeholders) then you are in a better position to control your resources and customise training according to local needs' (Director, Educational Planning and Evaluation).

Gathering information on residential and industrial developments in the region is important in understanding any future training demand. This information can be acquired through regular contacts with economic development officers with the local council. Nevertheless, changing geographic boundaries used by different agencies for identifying Local Government Areas (LGAs) sometimes constrains the use of local area statistics for planning.

In trying to understand the international market, the institute takes into account institute-specific data, particularly product advantages, external data produced by Australian Education International (AEI), and regional statistics. Again, however, relationships are key, with recent growth stemming from successful work in India thanks to a local person with strong business and cultural ties to India linking in to the rise of the middle class in that market.

The institute has also involved staff in workshops to help them become more confident in marketing the business, presenting information to prospective clients, and dealing with the media. The 'talking to the media' workshops involved real journalists with real TV cameras. Other topics have included business literacy, unpacking training packages, and strategic conversations around priority issues. These workshops received positive evaluations in pre-and-post workshop surveys.

Checking websites of other providers is a key tool for helping the institute to understand what their competitors (including interstate providers) are offering. In one instance, the institute noticed that other TAFE institutes were running programs in Civil Engineering and that such courses were not available at North Coast. The reasons for this then became a question for further investigation.

Achieving cost-efficiencies

The analysis of financial information is also used to understand the cost-effectiveness of programs and to implement cost-efficiencies. A key indicator of efficiency is 'ASH yield' per teaching hour. This allows educational managers to compare their ASH yields with the performance of other programs. When their ASH yield is much lower than the ASH yield of other areas, head teachers will be asked to investigate reasons for the discrepancy.

Educational managers are encouraged to look at the number of people who are completing courses, and the effort that is required to achieve these completions. This is done at the unit level. 'Using completion statistics and reviewing these on an annual basis allows us to look for anomalies' (Educational Manager). Low unit completion rates and/or lower qualification completions may alert educational managers to consider the appropriateness of the qualifications being offered.

Given the institute's overall budget strategy as outlined earlier, the need for efficiency is built in to the business model and devolved. 'We want to work where [a focus on] 'savings' becomes a cultural part of the organisation' (Director Financial Operations). Full transparency with all staff about our financial position, revenue streams, costs and so on maximises the engagement of staff in looking for and achieving savings that improve, rather than 'clip' the business. For example, in the financial year 2007–08 the institute rolled out a technology, OH&S and sustainability strategy through Organisational Development that saved \$0.5 m in travel and accommodation costs as well as reducing carbon emissions and staff time on the dangerous Pacific Highway.

Devolution and transparency allow effectiveness impacts to be weighed up against efficiency drivers and opportunities. For example, the Community Services and Health Faculty identified that their high levels of staff efficiency were presenting a business risk because the levels of staff casualisation were limiting the capacity of the faculty to meet rapidly growing demand. The cost of more temporary and permanent staff has been offset by business growth, possible at the moment because of the market that faculty services.

Other efficiency measures relate to changing practice. For example, the Construction and Transport Faculty is aiming for cost-efficiencies by exploring the purchase of electronic simulator equipment as a way to reduce or abolish the significant expense associated with the purchase of consumables for use in air conditioning, welding and spray painting programs.

Where possible, the institute bids for capital opportunities to retrofit facilities and, since 2001, has halved its energy use per m², so containing costs as energy prices rise. The vehicle fleet has also been reviewed to contain the costs associated with increased vehicle use required to deliver more in the workplace. Some contracts (for example, cleaning) are statewide and the institute is not in a position to negotiate better deals.

International programs are a major target for strategic review, especially in institutes looking to grow their market share in search of business that offsets falling local prices. In this regard North Coast TAFE has reviewed its approach to developing this business, reduced internal costs and established a more focused approach to a reduced number of markets based on products for which it has a competitive advantage.

Managing people

In 2008 North Coast continued to focus on staff capability as a fundamental driver of business success. Both staff development specifically and workforce development overall are two of the Charter's seven 'Strategic Improvement Areas' of work for 2007–10. The workforce development

plan focuses on workforce planning and design, HR processes such as on-boarding³ and early intervention, and capability development including distributed and strategic leadership.

Capability development ‘at work’ is the cornerstone, and includes staff engagement in such things as the e-learning strategy, the targeting employers campaign, the business literacy program, the cultural competence initiative and the strategic improvement groups (SIGs). Critical capabilities are built through on-job learning, and supported by targeted staff development activities and access to RPL through the TAFENSW Workforce Guarantee.

The staff development budget is one of the few ‘sacrosanct’ budget lines, and while priorities shift and more efficient methods of delivering development activities are sought, this is not an area where ‘cuts’ are made. It is therefore important to evaluate programs which are meant to develop skills, knowledge and capabilities. The results of pre-and post-workshop surveys are used to identify whether these programs are useful or need to be changed. They can help to determine whether the program will be run again. In the past the institute used to deliver a majority of professional development for its staff in one central location: Coffs Harbour. This approach was costly but necessary at the time. Now the institute uses a face-to-face mode only when such a mode is essential, often opting for video conferencing and PC-based applications such as ADOBE Connect and Bridget to deliver programs in every campus and for all staff. Even when some form of local facilitator is needed at each site to assist, this is far more cost-effective than having to meet the cost of staff travel, accommodation and time to attend training in a distant campus. Such programs are also evaluated by surveys of participants and to date have been judged largely successful, particularly as they allow for much more ‘just-in-time’ and personalised activities.

North Coast has also decided to build staff understanding and capability around measurement. ‘We want to get sharper about evidence’ is a general theme voiced by senior administrators. The institute is focusing on developing long-term trend data as year-to-date (YTD) comparisons don’t provide meaningful information for evaluation and future planning. They have adopted the principle ‘Measure what Matters’ and staff are currently trialling and validating the ‘Sense-maker’ as an internal tool for gathering feedback. This tool can be viewed as an alternative to focus groups as it allows respondents to tell their own stories, classify their experience and compare themselves against other groups. The use of narrative and self-tagging is a way of capturing meaningful data, and can be instrumental in picking up early signals of prospective issues or problems.

All staff members at North Coast Institute are asked to respond to the statewide survey as well as internal staff surveys.

Maintaining quality assurance processes

The Quality Unit (Organisational Development) at North Coast is keen to embed a culture of continuous improvement into daily operations and to make the audit a ‘positive, supportive and educative experience’, rather than an ‘inspectorial’ one (Quality Manager). ISO quality assurance programs have been used to train lead auditors who have then gone on to train internal auditors. Lead and internal auditors work together to conduct internal audits and to suggest improvements to processes.

The quality unit coordinates internal and external audits and provides a summary of findings from external and internal audits to the institute executive. Reports typically deal with what is going well, and areas for improvement. Faculty directors will take these findings and follow them up with their

³ In this context, on-boarding refers to bringing new staff ‘on board’. In addition to completing an induction program with their line manager and an online orientation program, staff are asked to attend a half-day session with the institute director and other key staff to share information on business context, current and future challenges, and purposes and values. The session is also used to underscore how each person’s work matters and is essential to help to fulfil the Institute’s Charter.

faculties. The Quality Unit works directly with the faculty directors to help them implement improved processes.

Initially the institute designed its quality assurance system around the core processes of enrolment, teaching, assessing, and certification. Recently it has moved to a risk assessment model which identifies areas of high risk and areas for improvement, and focuses its auditing on these.

The importance of the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) legislation has also seen the whole international student area become a subject of 'internal review'. A schedule of internal audits is planned for the teaching sections that have overseas students.

Learning from the successful practice of others

A key practice is for staff to meet with counterparts and share information on trends, state policy, and best practice. Participation in conferences, collaborative projects, workshops and benchmarking exercises also helps the institute to keep up to date with new and innovative processes and practices. Visits to other institutes are also used to examine the potential in different ways of working.

The 'TAFENSW Quality Awards' event provides the institute with an opportunity to both showcase and learn about innovative approaches, products and practice.

The Curriculum Centres (now Skills Units) help to drive the effective sharing of information and run programs for the validation of assessment tasks and processes. They may also run other professional development programs, which bring together staff from a variety of institutes.

Institute involvement in regional partnerships and collaborations is a key mechanism for learning from other providers as well as stakeholders and customers. An example is the 'Innovative Development of Excellent Aged Services' or IDEAS project, which has brought together providers, industry and stakeholders from across the north coast to share strategies and develop new approaches to address the fast-growing skill needs of the aged care industry.

Suggesting areas for improvement

In regional areas there is room for a greater presence of industry training advisory boards and industry skills councils. As the national system gives them greater influence over skilling priorities, it is imperative that they find ways to give small regional enterprises good-quality opportunities to voice their skilling needs. Funding constraints have historically meant that industry training advisory boards and industry skills councils have not been able to communicate effectively at a regional level. Meanwhile, big business has had the resources to voice their needs and often priorities have been 'metro centric'. 'If regional institutes are to be responsive we need alignment between what we are hearing directly from enterprises and what is expressed in strategic documents within the national system' (Institute Director).

There is also a view that, as the nation drives efficiency through the training system, the facts about the costs of high quality and deep skill development have been overlooked. It is getting more difficult every year for the institute to deliver low-cost provision; for example, the institute faces low prices from purchasers, but have no control over industrial relations that determine the costs of wages and other benefits. 'We have lots of challenges but the good thing is that we are aware of them' (Finance Director).

Low prices come at the expense of infrastructure and support services, yet the institutes has (and remains committed to) strong community obligations to provide services and infrastructure in thin markets and small communities. Sixteen of Tony Vinson's 40 areas of significant cumulative and intergenerational disadvantage in NSW are in the north coast, (Vinson 2007) an area historically

underserved educationally. Along with other providers, the institute believes it needs to be addressing this gap, and that requires long-term investment. The new national funding is very welcome, but the price is wrong, and so is the focus. It's still all about places—which is a start, because that creates options—but it's not enough about the surrounding issues to do with the community's aspirations and identities.

In all, it's true to say that the national system still remains obsessed with volume—yes it's moving away from ASH but only to enrolments and qualifications. There is still little attention paid to broader outcomes in workplaces or communities, for example, the institutes recently had feedback from an employer that the teachers (who were doing on-job assessment of apprentices and trainees) had helped him reduce his production costs by 30%. He was having difficulty with the construction of a bus frame, and they helped him come up with a new frame design, a new welding technique, and a different gas type. The Head Teacher referred to it as a 'freebie' because it didn't involve any extra ASH and enrolments, but it was real workforce development and workplace innovation in action. Likewise, indicators of the value of what the institute does towards community capacity building remain elusive. And the institute believes that they could be doing lots more to support their graduates to become the region's entrepreneurs.

Despite the lack of a system 'value' for industry workforce development or community capacity building, the establishment by all staff of long-term enterprise and community partnerships is key.

There is also a need to understand the characteristics and motivations of international students who come to regional areas to study.

Gold Coast Institute of TAFE

Gold Coast Institute of TAFE (GCIT) is the largest registered training organisation on the Gold Coast in Queensland. It offers vocational education and training to over 15 000 domestic students and 1400 international students annually. It employs over 450 full-time equivalent staff, and delivers 65% of the entire VET training in the Gold Coast area. GCIT has five campuses at Ashmore, Southport, Ridgeway, Coolangatta and a marine training facility at Coomera. GCIT is also investing in a future creative industries precinct to be located at Coomera.

GCIT offers a range of courses and programs including: Access Education, Body Corporate, Business, Human Resources, Justice Administration, Management, Marketing, Office Administration, Real Estate, Retail, Small Business, Assessment and Workplace Training, Aged Care, Beauty Therapy, Child Studies, Fitness, Hairdressing, Horticulture, Human Services, Music, Nursing, Social Work and Multimedia and Software Applications. Trades include: Hospitality, Automotive, Carpentry, Construction, Electro-technology and Plumbing. The institute has developed a number of strategic alliances with other educational institutions in Australia.

Identifying goals and values

GCIT aims to produce highly skilled graduates who make a difference and a contribution to their places of work, their communities and to economic development of their regions, cities or countries. It upholds the values of excellence, care and consideration, service, fairness, respect and accountability.

Its strategic objectives are to:

- ✧ improve its operating position through increased efficiency and effectiveness
- ✧ increase market reach, both domestically and geographically
- ✧ inspire and motivate learners through improved quality and consistency of teaching and learning
- ✧ actively encourage industry to be involved in the learning experience
- ✧ develop key alliances
- ✧ raise the skill profile of their workforce
- ✧ raise the bar for customer service
- ✧ streamline product lines and identify areas for specialisation
- ✧ provide reliable and responsive customer service

To do this it is dependent on a team of professional, knowledgeable and empathetic staff who convey trust and confidence.

GCIT has recently acquired statutory authority status and its current Strategic Plan has been used to drive the cultural change required for the new governance arrangements. The plan is a three-year plan, which is reviewed on an annual basis, and referred to regularly by Executive to identify new objectives and key performance measures.

GCIT's new governance arrangements have changed elements of its relationship with the state training authority. In the past the institute would prepare a business plan to send off to the Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA). Now it prepares an Operational Plan which is sent directly to the Queensland State Minister for approval. This plan reflects the goals and objectives and key performance measures of the institute's Strategic Plan. Faculties and business units prepare an Action Plan, which also reflects the objectives and key performance measures of the Strategic Plan. Teaching teams within faculties then develop educational plans, which link to bids being made for the purchasing agreement. Before these plans are made the institute is dependent on faculties and the Executive team scanning their environment to understand current and potential training demand.

Understanding relevant markets

GCIT has implemented a number of strategies to ensure that it understands the markets in which it operates. A full-time market research officer has been appointed to collect and report on the demography of the GCIT catchment area, population projections, unemployment rates, and employment growth. Information on student outcomes from the NCVET Student Outcomes Survey and job advertisements by industry training group are also provided. This helps the executive team and faculties in strategic planning and preparing bids for government funding.

Information about markets is also gathered from analyses of competitor products and according to market segments (namely, adult learners, young learners, corporate clients, and special equity groups [migrants, disability, indigenous]). A market research analyst is also employed to contact each institute to find out information about course prices.

Market-relevant information is collected from surveys of students, industry reference groups and business satisfaction. A custom-made sales and marketing tool enables the institute to track qualifications over the last three years to see which products are selling and at which time.

Market information is collected in social conversations with other TAFE and private sector educators, and incidentally through contacts with suppliers, employers, students and community members. The institute is now expanding into the national market to provide or broker training for a range of national retail franchises. Arrangements are being made to have training delivered online and tailored to client needs.

GCIT understands its international market through a variety of strategies, including from information provided by the VET export office and participation on the working party of Queensland Education and Training International. It works with key agents in key countries and attends education expos (especially in new markets). The institute segments its international market by country and combines historical data on uptake to establish targets for each country with data on trends provided by Australian Education International.

Achieving budgets and targets

Before GCIT negotiates the purchase agreement with the government the Department's VET Investment Officer starts the negotiation process by providing the institute with information on Industry Training Groups⁴ on which the government intends to increase or decrease spending. The institute is able to challenge this decision if it does not accord with its own local knowledge about demand for training (including applications for courses made through Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre [QTAC]), job vacancies and industrial or business developments. To mount a

⁴ Industry Training Groups refer to categories of programs that are identified as being part of one group for government funding purposes.

challenge the institute must provide the government with a one-page business case. A good business case is reliant on the institute having undertaken its own extensive research about the demand for training. In all cases the development of the bid is also based on historical data.

GCIT's bid for User Choice and continuing international courses are often on the mark. In apprenticeship programs the bids are generally accurate, as managers know how many students are continuing in their programs and how many students have already been signed up to start. At the end of the first year of a two-year international program, managers will also be able to develop targets for the next year. Projections for the domestic market can be more difficult. For example, an institute may have 14 students who start a program but with only a third of these completing it. Such perceived shortfalls need to be 'built' into the bid if programs are to break even or make a profit. Managers need to be aware of areas which *will not* break even and take action as to what they will offer instead. The ongoing drought has affected the provision of horticultural programs, and educational managers have found it extremely difficult or impossible to achieve a break-even point in certain areas. This is why they have had to focus on programs (say like landscaping) that *will* return a profit.

When managers are confronted with programs that may not break even they will consider a variety of interventions. Rather than having two teachers allocated to two different classes, they may consider running one class with one teacher and one tutor. The important thing is to have as much as possible planned and then to be able to identify any risk management strategies. That is, 'you need to be on top of plan; you need to have plan A and a plan B if you need to change direction' (Educational Manager, Industrial Technology).

GCIT has an online costing template in place to help educational managers build their budgets for courses and programs. This template helps them to work out the direct cost of delivery by taking account of the number of students, number of hours, the rate per hour paid to teachers, and the costs of materials for a particular course. The costing model also works out a faculty administration cost (or an indirect cost of delivery) by taking account of overheads for particular courses. The model identifies the minimum number of students who have to complete their course if the institute is to break even. Where educational managers are looking to increase delivery the template is used to help them to work out the viability of doing so. Increases in provision have recently focused on skill shortage areas of health, trades, nursing and hospitality. Once educational managers identify program targets they provide these to the Sales and Marketing Team. This team uses their knowledge of the market and the prices charged by competitors to set a price for the course.

There is rigorous tracking of performance against these targets at monthly budget meetings. If there is attrition in courses, executive managers will discuss reasons for this with respective faculty heads. If it becomes clear that the program is not viable and there is nothing that can be done to turn fortunes around, the institute looks at ways that institute-wide cost savings can be made.

Once the purchase agreement has been signed, budgets and work plans for each work team drive training activity and evaluation. There is a close monitoring of performance against targets for revenue, employee expenses, supplies and services, and operating expenses at work team, faculty and business unit level. To help managers understand performance against financial and non-financial targets the Finance Team has a budget officer allocated to each faculty or resource or service unit. They generally help faculty directors, educational managers and other business unit heads make sense of what the numbers mean. This makes it easy for all to identify any potential issues early on in the budget cycle and to apply required remedies. Information on how teams are progressing towards financial targets is also regularly reviewed by the financial services unit in collaboration with section heads and faculty directors.

Once a month, the Executive Team meets with individual faculty directors to review budgets on a line-by-line basis. Revenue and outgoings are checked for government grants, fee-for-service, international business, employee expenses and supplies and services. If the faculty budget is 'in the

red' reasons must be investigated. Faculty directors will also meet with the Director, Educational Programs and Services before the monthly budget meeting to review how their performance is going.

The VET Sector Reporting (VSR) system in Queensland draws out numbers from the Finance and Asset Management System (the SAP) and the Institute Student Administration System (ISAS). Institutes may access the VSR website online and comment on year-to-date performance. The VSR then tracks institute performance in terms of dollars per annual curriculum hours (AHC), dollars per full-time equivalent (FTE), AHCs per total FTE, AHCs per training FTE. These measures can also be viewed in terms of regional TAFEs, near metropolitan and metropolitan TAFEs.

GCIT has implemented an 'Institute Reporting Dashboard' which is comprised of a set of simulated 'fuel gauge markers' to identify year-to-date performance against full-year targets for financial revenue streams (including, VET Revenue General, User Choice, International, Fee-for-Service, and Total Revenue). Another 'fuel gauge' represents non-financial targets comprising AHCs.

There is monthly reporting of performance against VET Revenue Grant (VRG) targets (that is, direct funding grant) to the Department of Education Training and the Arts. This includes dollars performance and Actual Student Curriculum Hours (ACH) performance. There is reporting against targets for participation in certificate IV and above qualifications, the percentage of RPL, and full-time equivalent students. This is reported in terms of separate cohorts (including User Choice, disability, mature age, international, and commercial groups). To meet targets for User Choice programs in skill shortages areas there may be a case for 'over-delivery' in other areas to compensate for shortfalls. This might mean increasing the number of students in programs which are able to take them.

GCIT has been judged the most profitable of the Queensland TAFEs. According to the finance director, it is because the institute has developed 'good strategic vision and our people know and want to meet the targets we are aiming for'.

Achieving cost-efficiencies

Educational managers and seniors managers are always looking at ways to improve cost-effectiveness and efficiencies: 'We have a can do attitude. 'If there is a challenge, we will find a way of returning a profit' (Director, Educational Programs and Services). Senior administrators also examine course level attrition rates to understand effectiveness of delivery.

There are a variety of other strategies that GCIT uses to achieve cost-efficiency. One is to reduce the number of nominal hours allocated to a specific module; for example, when a cohort of learners is judged to be able to complete a module in a shorter amount of time. There is rarely a case for reducing the nominal hours in programs for 'youth at risk' students, who often need extra hours of learning allocated rather than less. Another strategy is to look at reducing overheads by evaluating whether certain programs can best be delivered in the workplace or in distance learning modes. Solutions might also include developing partnerships with employers to deliver some of the training on the job, clustering units to obtain economies of scale, or increasing fee-for-service provision.

Because the Industrial Technology Faculty is usually busy responding to high demand in trade training, it will only use fee-for-service solutions as a last resort. License updating programs will be run whenever there is a full class of enrolments. This is why such courses are advertised well in advance so that if one course does not fill it can be postponed until such time when there are sufficient numbers to fill a course.

It is important for GCIT to find ways to improve cost-effectiveness of delivery. Changing the mode of delivery can help. For example, the nursing program recently changed its block model of clinical placement to achieve effectiveness and efficiency. The block model required one facilitator to be allocated to groups of six or eight students in their block programs. Today students will spend two days per week in hospitals on placements and one day per week at TAFE in lectures and workshops.

Where the program catered for 25 students per semester using the block system, it now caters for about 100 students by using a combination of lectures and practical placements throughout the semesters. Combining online learning with residential programs has also been used in massage courses, which has made them more cost-efficient to deliver. Efficiencies have also been achieved by placing all learning materials on a CD replacing learning materials in hard copy. This has been a big saving in human resources time and teacher effort.

When a new course is required, the educational manager works with a research officer to undertake a viability analysis. If a course is deemed viable an online costing sheet helps educational managers to identify the number of students that are required for the course to break even. Once these are identified information is provided to the Sales and Marketing team along with targets for enrolments. Should there be more demand for training in a certain course, then faculties may ask for the numbers of enrolments to be increased.

One cannot ignore the need to consider what one educational manager called ‘uncontrollable variables’, those things that no one can predict. For example, TAFE as a public provider has a responsibility to address issues of social inclusion and provide community service. If there is a demand to provide literacy and numeracy programs or training for students with intellectual disabilities or mental health issues, then it is difficult for TAFE to use a cost-benefit analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of programs. Typically, it will have to do much better in some programs so that some areas can be used to subsidise the costs of other areas. It was noted that there is always a ‘balancing act between maintaining educational quality and balancing the books’ (Business Improvement Officer).

Recently the institute has been funded to deliver a certificate III program under the new Productivity Places Program (PPP) aimed at helping job seekers move into employment. This funding does not cover the considerable effort required to improve the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills of these PPP learners. As the institute was not able to use any specific LLN funding for these PPP learners, it has decided to partner with Centrelink to access funding for learners eligible for the federal Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program.

Meeting industry needs

GCIT uses industry reference groups (IRGs) as reference points for analysing local industry needs as well as evaluating whether the institute is meeting such needs. Industry reference groups at GCIT are comprised of industry representatives, faculty directors, educational managers, teachers, trainers, and sales and marketing personnel. IRGs will meet a number of times throughout the year. Employer participation is high for some industry groups (for example, automotive) and low for others. A new strategy being trialled in the Industry Technology Faculty is to have all industry groups come together at the first part of an IRG meeting and then to break up into trade-specific groups for the next part of the meeting. The institute also runs a ‘Learning from Leaders’ program, which enables teachers and students to meet over lunch with industry leaders.

IRGs associated with the traditional trades are used to discuss program trends and training plan issues. Employers are asked to participate in assessment moderation and validation of assessment tools and to make comment about their satisfaction with the currency and relevance of training delivery and assessments. About four years ago GCIT asked employers to nominate the types of skills they were looking for in graduates. They nominated key competencies and employability skills. Now when new GCIT graduates get their qualifications they also receive a written statement which says that they have also achieved competencies in communication, teamwork, problem-solving and ICT skills.

Teachers in these areas are encouraged to go on industry-release placements for two weeks every year. This industry involvement ensures that the program is kept current with what is happening in industry, and how best to meet requirements.

GCIT gauges employer satisfaction with training, by surveys of employers who participate in industry reference groups (IRGs). Each industry teaching area has an industry reference group. In these surveys employers are asked to comment on the adequacy of the training package, the work readiness of students, and their preferred modes and times of delivery. The Institute Director believes that, although surveys of employers help the institutes to better understand industry needs, the institute must be careful not to set up expectations that may be too difficult or impossible to meet.

Productive links and networks with industry have helped Gold Coast teachers to acquire the necessary materials and equipment at no cost (including stoves for electrical trades, timber for carpentry trades, new vehicles for automotive trades, and \$200 000 worth of plumbing supplies for plumbing trades). Suppliers of this equipment, materials and machinery also stand to gain because apprentices will go back to their employers and discuss the latest technology they have used.

‘It is important to keep your mind open and on what is underlying what is going on, and hopefully you are not too busy to miss a sign’ (Educational Manager, Industrial Technology).

Meeting student needs

GCIT uses traditional key performance indicator (KPI) measures of student achievement and satisfaction to measure its ability to meet student needs. The main ones are attrition and course completion rates, repeat business, employment and further training destinations, and student satisfaction with training. At the departmental level, information on student performance in assessments and final examinations are also examined. If it is clear that there are high numbers who have not passed exams and completed courses, then teachers will examine the test items to try to determine if they have contributed to low scores.

Students are surveyed mid-way and at the end of modules, and at the start and end of programs. Results are used to identify what is going well and what needs improvement. Results of student surveys will be analysed by the Quality Unit and provided to educational managers, who will also inform teachers and students. The survey results are also sent to the Sales and Marketing Branch to inform their marketing activities. A student destination or exit survey of graduates helps the institute identify the proportion of respondents who go into further training and employment and those who return to the institute for more training (that is, repeat business). However, survey response rates are low and the lack of alumni arrangements and contact details makes keeping in touch with graduates and course completers difficult. Results of such surveys have indicated that 87% of GCIT students are in employment after three months. In addition, the Student Services department also keeps what the institute considers to be good data on the volume and type of counselling that is provided for students, and faculties. The data can be used to pinpoint potential areas of risk. Gold Coast Institute considers the costs of different surveys.

A state-based User Choice survey is used (and in some cases modified) by Queensland TAFEs to understand their apprentice and trainee satisfaction with TAFE and to enable them offer suggestions for improvement. The Gold Coast Institute of TAFE has come out as top public provider in terms of low attrition rates and high completion rates in User Choice programs. The Institute Director is of the view that, although such surveys provide GCIT with valuable information, it may be difficult to address all needs that students might identify. For example, students often complain about the lack of a canteen at one of the smaller campuses. The institute does not have the financial capacity to build a canteen at the campus. It has responded to such needs by arranging for vending vans to visit the campus.

Individual managers have their own strategies for keeping abreast of student needs and monitoring any issues that might arise. The Educational Manager of the Humanities Faculty (including

programs for enrolled nursing, complementary therapies, justice and TAA⁵ training) will conduct orientation programs and encourage students to make contact with her directly if they have any issues. As the office is located on the same floor as classrooms, students will drop in if there is a problem. The Educational Manager also drops in on classes to keep regular contact with students and abreast of issues. Each month she also holds focus groups with a few representatives from each class to discuss any problems or issues. When students are looking to withdraw from the course, an exit survey is conducted to find out the reason for withdrawal. If it is due to a literacy or numeracy problem, students will be encouraged to seek counselling and access further help. However, these issues are often captured early on. Attrition rates at GCIT are lower than the Queensland average.

As well as filling in general surveys of student satisfaction with training, nursing students at GCIT are also asked to complete surveys about their experience in work placement programs. For example, students will answer questions about whether hospital staff knew of the placement, welcomed them on arrival and understood what the student could or could not be expected to do. Their hospital clinical liaison officers and mentors are also asked to complete surveys about the quality, preparation and presentation of students.

One student issue currently being faced by the Industrial Technology Faculty (which looks after the trades) is associated with the operation of pre-vocational programs which have been used in some instances as mechanisms for keeping some adolescents (generally 15-year-olds) engaged with the education and training system. Unfortunately, it is not until these students get in to the TAFE classes that teachers get an understanding of the very low levels of basic literacy and numeracy of many of these students and their poor standards of self-discipline and social behaviour. The lack of prior knowledge about these students' difficulties means that it is hard for TAFE to allocate sufficient funding and time to get these students to an acceptable level of literacy. When there are such behavioural issues at GCIT, the institute will give the students a warning. If the bad behaviour continues (including putting themselves or other students at risk), the institute may call in the parents for a consultation. If bad behaviour continues, they are expelled from the program. The problem for these adolescents is that the prevocational program was often their last chance at turning their life around. If this 'last chance' is taken away, then the moral question becomes one of what do they do next. 'It is frustrating that we can't do more for those who have problems. [In] ten weeks it is too short a time to bring them up to the level so that they can pass the course. Sometimes two out of 14 students will reach a pass. Some don't turn up to class, some don't do assessments. We monitor attendance and results but there is only so much we can do' (Educational Manager, Industrial Technology).

Managing people

Individuals within teaching and business unit teams have an individual performance development plan which is reviewed three times a year. At GCIT teachers have a performance evaluation discussion with Faculty Managers every six months. These discussions are used to discuss opportunities for improvement. The institute has introduced a mentorship program, where teacher mentors will sit in classrooms to observe and provide teachers with advice on student management and training delivery and assessment practice. In addition, Quality Team staff mentor new and existing staff. The Business Improvement Unit provides release opportunities for senior teachers to learn about the quality improvement process as part of their development.

The objectives of the five-year Workforce Management Plan at GCIT are aligned with related objectives from the institute's Strategic Plan. The Annual Work Plan for the Organisational Capability Directorate (which has responsibility for human resources functions) sets out the

⁵ Training and assessment purification for VET trainers and assessors.

strategies for each financial year, while each work unit in the directorate will have an Operational Plan. In developing the annual plan the director of this unit will take into account a number of environmental factors. These include changes in the business environment, government directions, and alternative governance arrangements for trades training. Institute priorities, organisational structure, interstate employment arrangements, corporate relationships, retention and recruitment are other factors that need to be considered in the development of annual and work unit plans. The results of market research are also consulted to get an idea of where increased demand for staff will occur. For example in 2008 there was an increased demand for teachers of health, literacy and numeracy, fitness and recreation and property services.

Effectiveness of human resources provision is also gauged from the results of the statewide government staff survey (the QPASS survey now Employee Engagement Survey) and institute-based staff surveys. In 2009 the institute will participate in the Hewitt Best Practice Staff Engagement Survey. It is aiming to achieve on 75% of the indicators or reach this level of success in the next three years. The institute is aiming to become a Hewitt Best Employer; however, it will be especially difficult to target pay for performance.

The directorate also tracks information on the adequacy of recruitment and induction processes. New starters will be surveyed after six months about their recruitment and induction and whether they were able to get the information they required during these stages of their employment. The directorate is also interested in tracking the length of time it takes to recruit a new employee, the number of applicants for a specific job and the number of times that positions have had to be readvertised. Exit surveys (now available online) and face-to-face interviews are made available for those who decide to separate from the institute.

Scores on the satisfaction scales of the QPASS survey are key performance measures for the directorate. GCIT rates top in the state in about a third of the indicators used in the QPASS survey, strategic leadership, supportive leadership, and role clarity. Other indicators that are used to understand how well the institute is doing in this area include an examination of the performance indicators associated with each work plan. This includes the percentage of staff salaries used in professional development and the number of professional development days that have been used. Knowledge-sharing targets are also key performance measure at GCIT. To help reach these targets, the institute has established an online knowledge bank, where teachers can post information on professional development courses and workshops they have found valuable.

GCIT has also implemented an electronic database for recording the qualifications, work history, and teaching duties of teachers: the Teacher Profile Management System. Borrowed from Central Queensland TAFE, this system was suggested by the institute's Business Improvement Team (which also looks after Quality at GCIT) to ensure that teachers had undertaken the professional development activities related to competencies that were being delivered. The HR team will now record the professional development activities on ORION, the HR system, with faculties charged with updating and validating entries. Nevertheless, there is still a need for the HR function to provide the teaching teams with administrative support.

Maintaining quality assurance processes

The Quality Team at GCIT has been dedicated to developing processes and products to integrate the quality assurance role with the day-to-day operations. It has been responsible for preparing the institute for AQTF re-registration. GCIT students and staff are regularly surveyed to provide feedback. Staff and students are encouraged to give online feedback about any aspect of their training, including complaints, compliments and suggestions for improvement.

Recently the institute has revised many of its quality systems to meet AQTF 2007 implementation and re-registration requirements. A key approach has been to use the intranet to help teachers and administrators access key documents and procedures. For example, the 'Guide to operational

documents for GCIT teachers' is a hard copy and online resource which 'helps teachers to identify which documents to use and when'. It includes samples of forms to be completed and records to be maintained for AVETMISS, ISO and AQTF 2007 requirements, as well as forms for maintaining adequate records of attendance, staffing and other activities in teaching programs and administrative functions. There are also sample documents that inform the induction of students, study guides, and student complaints procedures. Also included are sample documents that apply to the supervision and mentoring of existing and new teachers, the development of teaching and assessment plans, and the validation and moderation of assessment tasks. Examples of question banks, general assessments, portfolios, third party reports and oral presentations are also to be found.

In preparation for the re-registration process the quality team decided that they would use a series of internal audits to examine documentation for a sample of six units in each qualification (there are 186 qualifications on scope). For each of these six units the team also asked for ten documents to be provided. Documents and processes were then audited against the AQTF 2007. Once these internal audits were completed feedback on any non-compliance and actions to be taken to address this was provided to the teaching teams. These actions were then implemented and monitored in the first half of 2008.

Training sessions providing specialist advice on how to improve processes and address shortfalls have also been provided. The aim is to make sure that teachers understand how the AQTF 2007 can be used to help their learning and assessment provision. One week before the external AQTF 2007 audit the institute was informed that the auditors wanted to examine 21 qualifications. Two days before the audit the institute was informed of the units that would be selected. The institute is planning to apply for assessment under the AQTF Excellence Framework in 2011.

Learning from the successful practice of others

Attendance at conferences and function-specific expert groups are key mechanisms for the institute to learn from the successful practice of others. Visits to other institutes within and across states and territories have also been used, especially in setting up the institute as a statutory authority.

Suggesting areas for improvement

When managers are asked to describe the type of information that will help them to improve effectiveness and efficiency, they often say they would like better information on employment and further training destinations of apprentices and trainees, and other domestic and international students, according to the courses they have studied. Although the institute has a strong repeat client base it is not good at evaluating non-users of GCIT training.

Other requests are for better information about the interests and values of industry and business clients, the characteristics of small businesses in the region, and enterprises who would partner the institute, including providing their facilities for training. The need for agreement at system level of the KPIs that will be used to measure performance of teachers and trainers, as well as staff in corporate or service units was also suggested.

Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE

Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE (MSIT) is part of TAFE Queensland and the second largest TAFE institute in the state. It was formed in July 2006 from the amalgamation of the non-trade elements of the former Moreton, Yeronga and Logan Institutes of TAFE and has a student population in excess of 25 000 per year. Its operating budget is approximately \$87 million. The institute offers over 400 programs in a range of areas (including business management and information technology, fashion and creative industries, beauty and hairdressing, hospitality and tourism, and health and community services). It is looking to increase training in the areas of health, aged care, employability skills, and fashion. It hosts apprenticeship and traineeship programs formally run by SkillsTech (the statewide trade and technical skills institute to lead product development and delivery for automotive, building and construction, manufacturing and engineering, and electric/electronic studies). MSIT's main campuses are Alexandra Hills, Loganlea, Mt Gravatt and Yeronga.

Identifying goals and values

MSIT's Strategic Plan outlines the institute's key goals, which focus on the values of diversity, innovation, integrity, wisdom, courage and creativity.⁶ Concepts from the Business Excellence Framework have been used to integrate and align planning with activities and outcomes around the key priorities of learning and assessment, leadership, people focus, client and community focus and management systems. The institute's key goals are to:

- ✧ promote a learning environment where their clients/partners achieve their full potential
- ✧ become recognised as a 'world class' service provider
- ✧ foster a talent culture that rewards excellence
- ✧ be an innovative, dynamic and client-focused organisation built upon foundations of continuous improvement, recognised as 'best in class'
- ✧ create a sustainable organisation, maximised efficiency and effectiveness and proactive re-investment in future growth.

Strategic objectives from the 2008 Queensland Skills Plan are matched to the institute's overall mission and to priorities under the Business Excellence Framework. Objectives from the Strategic Plan cascade into objectives for each portfolio. A 'report card' is used to measure progress against targets at monthly review meetings. Each educational or business unit manager also develops a matrix document which identifies training or business objectives and targets for each of the teams. They also be complete business activity statements (BAS) and complete a 'report card'.

For 2008 the key targets for the institute as a whole will be to increase commercial and international revenue, client retention and success; and attract and retain of staff. The Institute Director is

⁶ In fulfilling these values MSIT will aim to: Operate globally and be recognised for world class excellence in teaching and learning; provide integrated product offerings which are customised to workforce development needs and client's lifelong learning; empower all clients to apply sustainable practices in their vocations and workplaces; exceed clients' and partners' expectations; speak with one voice in developing and delivering training excellence.

adamant about the importance of evidence-based decision-making for identifying as well as evaluating its effectiveness and efficiency claiming, 'If we can't measure it we can't do it.'

Achieving budgets and targets

The budget is one key driver of planned activity and evaluation. Another driver is to use key dates and actions to guide performance. The aim is to have a 'balanced score card', where financial performance and other measures of progress are combined.

A scan of industry environments enables educational managers to understand the status of the job market, industry requirements and programs best placed to deliver the training. This knowledge is used to develop initial bids for government funding and identify opportunities for other business. Also important is the building in of a margin for attrition and profit (especially for fee-for-service programs).

Before new courses are introduced education managers use a formal costing template to assess the program's viability. This is especially important for the pricing of fee-for-service programs.

Once targets have been established, all delivery and non-delivery teams are focused on attaining targets. Each portfolio has a performance agreement with the Institute Director and an internal contract which identifies objectives, targets, actions and timelines.

Monthly budget reviews to track progress against targets (for staffing, finance, and training) enable senior and middle managers to implement any interventions that are required to ensure that budgets are met.

Each year during November or December, the institute conducts a review of its actual position in relation to predicted targets. If a target risks not being met, the institute ensures interventions are put in place to increase business and deliver the training.

An account management system is set up for each industry training group (the classification used in Queensland to group programs relating to a similar industry). An administrative officer from the Finance department is allocated to each portfolio to both keep an oversight of the portfolio's business as well as helping portfolio managers understand their budgets.

Recently, the institute has embarked on a review of market offerings. In reviewing delivery, the institute assesses programs that yield high enrolments, higher qualification outcomes and that have contractual delivery obligations. Also taken into consideration is future market trends and direction of VET delivery. This process allows the institute to remain focused on its future as a commercially viable organisation.

Meeting industry needs

The institute is committed to building strong relationships with industry and the community and uses a range of industry partnerships and engagement practices to drive provision and evaluate success. It is committed to developing close relationships with Queensland universities such as Griffith, and Queensland University of Technology to provide students with pathways to higher education. It has recently established a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Bunka Fashion College in Japan and has plans to implement an exchange program. Fashion students may also apply for an International Scholarship to Polimoda Institute of Fashion Design and Marketing in Florence, Italy.

The institute's Small Business Solutions initiative, which provides practical mentoring support to small businesses across Queensland, has been a key program for growing commercial business.

The Institute Director participates in a number of high-level cross-government committees and peak industry bodies and is regularly ‘on the road’ ensuring that MSIT is well represented in forums on business and innovation. This enables MSIT to stay abreast of current and projected developments in government policy and industry practice. It also helps the institute to focus on areas of specialisations which will ‘give more bang for the buck’ (Institute Director).

At the program level educational managers and their work teams meet with industry advisory reference groups and employers to gather information on industry needs and the relevance of their training (including course content) for the market place. It also enables them to engage with industry in the moderation and validation of assessments (a requirement of AQTF 2007).

Formal and informal partnerships and associations with well-known businesses or initiatives in fashion (Billabong, Mercedes Fashion Week), retail (Colorado), and music, design, animation and photography enables MSIT students to undertake relevant work experience, enter competitions and exhibitions, apply for international scholarships, and participate in industry festivals and events. Feedback from judges and employers helps the institute to evaluate the success of its training and helps students to improve their skills.

Results of client satisfaction and business satisfaction surveys and surveys of industry advisory groups, together with the strength of enrolments in particular programs, give MSIT an indication of the extent to which they are meeting industry needs.

Meeting student needs

Key indicators for measuring student success at MSIT include results in courses, retention rates, attrition rates, repeat business, and success in competitions. One faculty director believed that ‘repeat business’ was ‘the single most important indicator of whether we are meeting student needs’ (Educational Services Director). He also acknowledged that this had more relevance for metropolitan institutes, where students were more likely to have a choice of providers.

Also important are results of the Student Satisfaction Survey, which provides useful information on what students see as the strengths and weaknesses of their time in training. Local student surveys are also conducted at the end of each course and completion of each unit. These surveys ask students to evaluate not only their teachers, but also course content and materials. The results of the surveys are used at the team level to pinpoint issues. Complaints are also used as a key indicator of quality.

A key indicator of performance is the number of students who complete a course but do not achieve a pass. This information can provide delivery teams with an idea of the students who are struggling with learning. Support is then provided to ensure students remain on track with their studies. Interventions may include suggestions to the student to move to a lower-level program. This solution may be especially useful for international students who are struggling to complete courses which require substantial levels of English language literacy.

Student counsellors also have a role to play in assisting students from special groups (Indigenous, disability) and supporting those who are experiencing personal problems that are a barrier to their learning. Indicators include the number of students who have sought counselling and the number of students who have been counselled and actively enrol in a program.

Managing people

MSIT was formed through the amalgamation of three institutes (Logan, Moreton and Yeronga). A key post-formation task for the Institute Director and senior managers was to negotiate the coming-together of three different ways of viewing and doing things. A consultative approach was adopted to develop the MSIT corporate image and the MSIT brand. Today the focus is still on

using consultative approaches to identify which areas continue to cause frustration and need improvement. The institute is more externally focused and the staff are encouraged to identify areas where the institute has strategic strength.

Each staff member has an individual performance and development plan and these are used to encourage staff and ensure that staff members maintain qualifications and industry currency.

In addition to participating in the DET Employee Engagement Survey, MSIT also conducts additional staff surveys about professional development, currency of equipment, availability of space, adequacy of ICT systems, and cleaner responsibilities. These findings are used to implement improvements.

Understanding relevant markets

MSIT is especially focused on analysing emerging trends (at home and internationally) and the behaviour of competitors. The institute employs a researcher whose job is to conduct in-depth market analysis and produce a booklet which provides a broad coverage of the regional and urban market in the catchment areas. The institute has engaged the 'Red Group', a Brisbane market research agency, to survey students and customer service centres. Portfolio teams also ascertain the market for training through events like the 'Chef's Table', and industry breakfasts.

The institute has branded itself as an 'Innovative TAFE' and has focused on growing its 'Small Business Solutions'⁷ market and becoming a key centre for sustainability. Apart from continuing to support state environmental programs like 'Smart Rooms' and 'Intelligent Lighting', it also focuses on understanding how it can achieve growth in areas identified both by key industry sectors and the broader Queensland Skills Plan (QSP).

MSIT has decided that it must focus on those areas of skill demand that have been identified in the QSP and act upon intelligence on what is happening in different industry sectors. For example, Queensland Health has just published a report which claims that its workforce will be doubled by 2018. This suggests that there will be a market for the institute in the training of existing workers. There is also a potential market for the institute to deliver higher-level qualifications (certificate IV and above). At the same time the projected shortage of workers in the future may lead to a refocusing of how to 'engage the disengaged', which suggests that the institute must also aim for increased levels of training at the certificate I and II levels.

There is major growth in the international student market. The Institute Director spends time away from the institute developing and maintaining links and relationships with external industry, government and community bodies. In addition, the good links with universities and schools in the region mean that the institute can also advance its wish for a common learning strategy for the region. The Institute Director commented, 'For me, it is about being a real TAFE. I want to make sure we are meeting all markets in our catchment area' (Director MSIT). Students are given the opportunity to take advantage of the international linkages by being part of an exchange program.

Effectiveness in training delivery for Indigenous students at MSIT is gauged from feedback from the Indigenous Advisory Group, the Indigenous Support Officer, MSIT's Indigenous Business Development Officer and feedback from the local State Minister. The institute has recently established an Indigenous Health Centre on campus and has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Griffith University (Queensland) to gain a better understanding of how to support the Indigenous community and to raise levels of education. It has conducted a survey of Indigenous students and developed a report on the number of enrolments, the trends in participation and the number completing a higher qualification.

⁷ The Small Business Solutions program is a program which gives small business access to personalised support from mentors who have had the practical experience of running successful small businesses.

Effectiveness in delivering VET in Schools programs is gauged from surveys of students, as well as information on uptake and feedback from vocational counsellors.

Maintaining quality assurance processes

At Metropolitan South TAFE the aim is to embed quality systems into planning. To begin with the institute adopted a risk assessment approach to auditing so that only those associated with factors of risk were audited. In addition, the Quality Manager was taken off line full-time to help teams improve their AQTF processes. A People Manager was taken off line to assist with Professional Development Plans and to help identify training opportunities. The qualifications of all teachers have been checked to see if they required updating. Where teachers were delivering new training package qualifications they needed the new Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. If teachers had been teaching a long time and were experienced, the institute used an accelerated progression method to deliver the TAA. Where teachers have not been to an industry conference or back to industry the plan is to get them to do so in the next 12 months.

A Training and Assessment Strategy, which is to be completed by educational managers when they are completing their budgets for different programs, has also been introduced. This is a plan or document which identifies the competency unit being completed and the client groups being addressed. It should provide information on the vocational qualifications of teachers, evidence of their training and assessment competency, industry experience and currency, and professional development. The plan should also provide evidence on the involvement of industry, moderated and validated assessments, learning materials and assessment tasks. The successful implementation of this strategy means that the key elements of the AQTF (dealing with industry involvement, qualified and competent teachers, information prior to enrolment, and during training, and templates to be used) would be covered. Current teething problems relate to the difficulty of getting all managers to document minutes of their meetings with industry representatives. To deal with this issue the institute is looking to have an administrative officer help teams undertake this process.

When the institute was applying for re-registration, auditors provided the institute with a list of programs to have ready for audit. Two weeks before the audit 20 programs were selected and MSIT was required to have these ready for assessment. Because the Quality Unit did not want to be seen as focusing only on the programs listed, preparations for audit were made for every qualification, with the programs of focus narrowed at the end. Now the institute is developing its own Auditing Schedules based on their own risk criteria. 'To me if we get the quality criteria right we are meeting student needs' (Quality Manager, South Metropolitan TAFE).

Metropolitan South Institute has also adopted the principles of other frameworks like the Business Excellence Framework. They have used these principles to guide the structure of the strategic plan.

Learning from the successful practice of others

The 'Lead Institute' and 'Learning Networks' concept adopted in Queensland has meant that both administrators and teaching staff from MSIT have been able to come together as groups of like-professionals to share information and expertise to help deal with change. Furthermore, the network of TAFEs in the centralised system with its access to specialist skills and staff also works to help the TAFE brand maintain a competitive advantage. When MSIT becomes a statutory authority it will straddle the line between total independence and semi-independence. This means that it will be able to choose when they share and choose when they compete.

Suggesting areas for improvement

Suggestions were made for the development of performance indicators which are not directly tied to the delivery of AHCs and for identifying characteristics of students who do not choose to come to TAFE. There were suggestions for undertaking follow-up studies in enterprises to see whether training had improved productivity of existing workers and detailed analyses of demographic trends in regional areas. There was also a suggestion that student services should be recognised as providing input to the bottom line.

RMIT University

RMIT is one of Australia's largest dual-sector institutions and provides both university and TAFE programs. RMIT has a domestic student population of over 50 000 in its three Melbourne campuses and approximately 300 students in regional Victoria. RMIT also has campuses in Vietnam and offers programs in partnership with more than 20 overseas institutes. Fourteen thousand students are in offshore programs. Approximately one-third of RMIT's students are enrolled in TAFE programs.

Main programs offered

RMIT offers over 900 higher education and TAFE programs, ranging from general education to doctoral studies. It provides a comprehensive range of courses for students considered to be disadvantaged or marginalised and is committed to providing learning and training opportunities for Indigenous students. The TAFE programs on offer at RMIT are provided through each of the three dual-sector academic colleges: College of Science Engineering and Technology (the TAFE programs are offered through the School of Engineering TAFE and School Life and Physical Sciences); College of Design and Social Context (the TAFE courses are offered through the School of Education, School of Creative Media, School of Art, School of Fashion and Textiles, School of Design TAFE, School of Global Studies Social Science and Planning, and the School of Property, Construction and Project Management) and the College of Business (the TAFE programs are offered through the Business TAFE School). A particular characteristic of RMIT as a TAFE provider is its high proportion of diploma and advanced diploma programs (representing 65% of effort).

Identifying goals and values

RMIT's vision is to be:

- ✧ global in outlook and action, offering its students and staff a global passport to learning and work
- ✧ urban in orientation and creativity, reflecting and shaping the city of the twenty-first century
- ✧ the first choice provider of work-relevant learning in Australia, preparing students for professions and vocations of the future
- ✧ one of Australia's top research universities, internationally known for its applied focus and for excellence in research and research education in its chosen fields.

Its mission is to create and disseminate knowledge to meet the needs of industry and community and foster in students the skills and passion to contribute to and engage with the world.

RMIT also aims to:

- ✧ develop specific centres of 'excellence in research and scholarship that reflect [its] global engagement with industries and communities' [and] 'become one of the top 15 research performers among Australian universities'
- ✧ 'ensure flexible, useful pathways and learning opportunities for students'

- ✧ create stimulating and satisfying experiences for students which ‘celebrate diversity’
- ✧ ‘attract, develop, reward and retain staff who will ‘embrace the future with energy and creativity and who are focused on the needs of our students and our partners’
- ✧ ‘develop facilities and systems to support and sustain excellence in education and research [and] a sustainable platform for achieving our goals’.

The RMIT Council is the governing authority of RMIT University and participates in the determination of the university’s strategic direction, business plan, budget and the overall monitoring of the performance of the institution. Council membership includes external business and tertiary sector experts, ministerial appointees and elected staff and students.

Achieving budgets and targets

The RMIT Strategic Plan is shaped through the leadership of the Vice-Chancellor in collaboration with members of Council, the Executive team (including Vice Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellors, Director TAFE, Vice President Resources, and Deputy Vice Chancellor), Academic Board and the wider leadership group of the university, including heads of school and other academic leaders. The Strategic Plan is the key driver for the development of the University Business Plan, the Program Profile for Higher Education and TAFE, and subordinate business and operational plans of colleges, portfolios and schools. The Strategic and Business Plans include key performance indicators (KPIs), targets and benchmarks against which organisational performance is measured and monitored. The Director TAFE and the associate directors TAFE have particular responsibility for achieving the aspects of the Strategic Plan that relate to TAFE and are involved in developing strategies, planning operations and monitoring performance around TAFE operations. A series of Strategic Projects are implemented through the Office of Director TAFE to drive aspects of the strategic plan as they relate to TAFE, introduce new initiatives, and identify and implement operational and quality improvements.

A system of Program Annual Review is used for evaluating effectiveness and efficiency of programs. The heads of schools meet annually with the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Director of Policy and Planning and their Pro-Vice Chancellor for an Annual Program Review. This allows a review of achievement, viability, strategic alignment and quality. Discussions also centre on those programs which do not appear to strategically align to objectives.

The Policy and Planning Group produces indicators for the quality, viability and relevance (QVR) of programs used in Program Annual Reviews conducted in each school. Program coordinators assess the quality of their programs by taking into account student outcomes, including employment destinations, and responses to the institute’s Course Experience Survey (CES), and the national Student Outcomes Survey (SOS). The ‘viability’ of programs (profits versus costs of program or service delivery) and program ‘relevance’ in terms of strategic fit are assessed by the Financial Services group. Once the Annual Review is completed, a report is given to the Executive. The QVR indicators used in these reviews can help the institute to identify the programs that are most profitable, relevant and viable and consider which programs are no longer required and what new programs are needed to meet demand.

Prior to the annual managers’ planning retreat (an event which provides senior managers with opportunities to make decisions about strategic planning and institute directions), the Policy and Planning Group produces a ‘score card’ against business plan indicators for each portfolio. The ‘score card’ provides intelligence on profile performance (including over- and under-delivery against targets), financial performance, and feedback from students in RMIT Course Experience and Student Experience Surveys. Information from the NCVER Student Outcomes Survey is also taken into account.

The TAFE Director has responsibility for managing the relationship with the government funding agency, Skills Victoria, and for driving the TAFE 'profile' (the state operating grant) and other planning processes, and monitoring institute performance against targets. Regular 'dialogue meetings' with government officers and RMIT are aimed at developing an agreement that will best meet the needs of government and the needs of RMIT; agreed priorities and government funding drive performance and evaluation.⁸ The Online Planning Information System (OPIS) database is used to report and monitor all enrolments and confirmations.

The Policy and Planning Group, together with the Financial Services Group, is responsible for tracking performance against targets. Weekly program profile performance reports are circulated to managers. Monthly Portfolio Management Reports are used to monitor budget performance against targets for each school, including foundation studies programs and the recently introduced associate degrees that are taught by TAFE. The Director TAFE and the Director of the Financial Services Group are able to produce and view reports which monitor trends against targets on a weekly basis. This constant tracking of performance means that both director and the financial services group are able to pinpoint areas where there is under-delivery or over-performance and implement early intervention if and when it is required.

Each school is responsible for monitoring its own profile and budget performance. When (and if) schools find that they are likely to exceed or under-deliver against their profile targets due to demand shifts, they are able to negotiate a transfer of profile and budget between schools through a formal review of profile that takes place in April and June of each year. In 2008, a number heads of schools have over-enrolled against 'P' and 'L' programs in response to strong demand. One drawback with putting on extra classes is that facilities, equipment and teaching resources become overstretched. To address this issue, the typical response is to arrange for additional casual teachers and call for existing staff to work overtime.

A series of Strategic Projects managed through the Office of Director TAFE aim to focus attention on particular strategic operational and quality priorities. For example, currently, RMIT is undertaking a Module Load Completion Rate benchmarking study in partnership with Swinburne and Victoria universities, and a project aimed at strengthening the provision of Koori programs.

Increased contestability for government funding will increase RMIT's focus on effectiveness and efficiency, and, according to the Director TAFE, 'It will drive us to be more sophisticated about how we operate in a market'. Another senior manager commented that, 'It will focus (our attention) on what we are good or not good at' (Senior Manager, College of Engineering, Science and Technology). 'The challenge for Skills Victoria will be on finding the balance between running an effective contestable market and fulfilling State priorities' (Director TAFE).

Meeting industry needs

RMIT has implemented a range of formal industry engagement and program advisory mechanisms to ensure that the institution stays abreast of current industry developments and demand for training, and obtains feedback on the relevance and quality of its training. Indicators of effectiveness for government programs include employment in skill shortage industries.

Regular interaction with employers of apprentices and trainees, engagement of sessional staff (employed in industry), and close contact with professional bodies are proven mechanisms for understanding training needs and are useful for obtaining feedback on performance. These relationships help the institution develop promotional statements that focus on RMIT strengths and help to attract further industry involvement.

⁸ Government funding for TAFE is organised around funding codes for general profile programs: 'P' – apprenticeships and traineeships; 'L' – pre-apprenticeships and advanced trades; 'Q' and special projects – 'LQ'.

Industry stakeholders are invited to attend forums (annual lunchtime events) hosted by the Vice-Chancellor to discuss 'challenges and opportunities and their relationship to education and research'.⁹ Industry engagement for RMIT as a whole, and for some individual schools, is supported by dedicated officers who ensure that RMIT is active in significant industry networks and meets regularly with industry skills councils and industry stakeholders.

Collaborations with industry which help identify needs and deliver key targets are especially important in pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship and traineeship programs. Also important is membership and participation of various national peak bodies. The manager of apprenticeship and traineeship programs has responsibility for monitoring the status of performance against 'L', 'Q' and 'LQ' targets and for managing external industry and employer relationships. RMIT is also a member of various national peak bodies, like the Electrical Senate, which comprises training organisations, unions, employers and regulators.

A key performance measure of effectiveness is the number of apprentices and trainees that apply to RMIT TAFE. In the past, RMIT TAFE struggled to make the target for 600 000 annual hours for apprenticeships and traineeships. However, in 2008, this business has grown significantly and the target for 750 000 annual hours will be surpassed by 250 000. This over-performance against apprenticeship and traineeship targets has been encouraged by senior management, who have aimed to 'keep the doors open to apprenticeships'. Nevertheless, there is a concern that exceeding 'L' targets will prove costly for RMIT, and it has decided to request that Skills Victoria increases the number of 'L' hours it is prepared to fund.¹⁰

RMIT has one of the largest pre-apprenticeship programs in Victoria, with substantial groups of students in electrical, plumbing, air conditioning and refrigeration, printing and furniture making. RMIT collaborates with 'Employment Focus'¹¹ to build employment skills and assist in the placements of students in pre-apprenticeship programs with employers for apprenticeships. A measure of success in these programs is the number of students who take up an apprenticeship. In 2007 about 80% of students were successful in gaining an apprenticeship. In the Plumbing program about 80% of pre-apprentices returned to TAFE to complete their trade programs.

RMIT also uses commercial income derived from industry training for existing workers as a measure of the extent to which it is providing industry with relevant training. Recently this business has increased substantially and schools are using Accounts Managers to look after the business of different enterprises. Already such an approach is applied to offshore accounts.

RMIT has government contracts for delivering the Australian Migrant English Program (AMEP), and the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programs. These programs are rigorously managed, with specific key performance indicators used to monitor and track success.

Information on how well RMIT is preparing TAFE students for the workplace is gathered from teacher involvement in workplace training, discussions with subject experts and information from teachers in portfolios.

Meeting student needs

RMIT evaluates its ability to meet student needs by using key measures like course completions, attrition rates, good grades, movement into employment, transition to further training of choice, and student satisfaction rates. Data on the proportion of offers that are converted to enrolments

⁹ <<http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse/Our%20Organisation%2FInternational%20and%20Development%2FGlobal%20Business%20Development%20Unit%2FIndustry%20partnerships/>>, viewed 23 September 2008.

¹⁰ 'L' is the classification for User Choice programs.

¹¹ A company specialising in recruitment, training and employment services.

are also used as indirect measures of success. The extent to which students remain engaged in study is a key indicator of success in ACCESS programs.

Student feedback on their training experience is sought through course and student experience surveys. Students in all programs and courses complete the institute-wide Course Experience Survey (CES). Results enable directors to identify patterns and trends in student satisfaction with various aspects of teaching and learning, and areas for improvement. Formal complaints processes also help the institute to identify areas for improvement. Twice a year, students from 54 VET programs are selected to complete the Student Experience Survey (SES). This survey replicates about 20 items from the NCVER Student Outcome Survey and solicits feedback on resources, people and facilities. Results from the SES, the SOS and the CES are then triangulated to produce reports that can be used for planning and evaluation. At RMIT Business TAFE School, the Course Experience Survey is administered to full-time and part-time students towards the end of the semester. This allows administrators to identify underperforming programs as well as those that do well. It also allows them to understand the aspects of teaching and learning that need improvement.

Student feedback is also obtained from Staff Student Consultative Committees based in each school. These committees meet once a term, with some committees being more active than others. Student engagement in these committees varies. They discuss issues of pastoral care, contact with administrative staff, adequacy of facilities and equipment, problems with teachers, and training and assessment issues (for example, scheduling of assignments at the same time). Some of the issues raised can be solved at the school level.

RMIT conducts exit surveys to try to understand what happens to students after their training has been completed or they leave the institute for other reasons. Certificate of General Education for Adults students are interviewed for the mid-program review. Students undertaking the Diploma of Further Education have one-on-one discussions throughout their programs. In 2006 the School of Design and Social Context conducted an 'exit study', in which former students were asked why they had decided to drop out from the program. The findings of this study indicated that students generally dropped out for personal rather than systemic issues. The program manager of the Dental Assisting Traineeship has also arranged for exit interviews to be conducted with trainees. Issues that are raised in these interviews are considered in the Program's Annual Report.

Staff at RMIT are also supportive of students who have successfully completed their courses, and senior managers attend graduation ceremonies and awards nights.

RMIT has large numbers of international students and must abide by the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) standards, which require students to be provided with sufficient pastoral care support. Under these standards providers must also identify students who are not making sufficient progress in their studies. There are no surveys of students in RMIT off-shore programs.

Understanding relevant markets

RMIT has placed a lot of effort into understanding the international market, but it has tended to rely on its historical reputation rather than market research activities to understand and attract domestic students. The Global Business Development Unit develops and maintains offshore industry networks, including relationships with recruitment agencies. The unit runs ongoing environment scanning about the industries and regions providing employment, and also in relation to investing in education. It is vigilant about any changes to policy, regulations and political risks associated with new or existing markets. RMIT sees itself as a well-known Victorian institution and therefore has not heavily engaged with local market research. However, it is important for the TAFE to have a good understanding of customer requirements, key issues affecting different industry sectors, and what competitors are delivering. At RMIT each school has a small budget for marketing. The Marketing Department helps schools plan larger advertising campaigns, trade taster

programs, and workshop tours. Skills Victoria has undertaken a number of statistical modelling activities to obtain a picture of demand and to develop priorities for funding.

A shop-front customer service centre, 'Info Corner', has been established in the Melbourne City Centre to provide information to prospective students and to answer queries. The aim is to give people a 'brand' experience, treat them like customers and to provide them with initial information they need for making decisions about courses and programs. The number of phone queries, walk-ins, and email queries are monitored regularly to identify trends and patterns, and recent figures indicate that the centre is receiving between 12 000 and 15 000 enquiries a month.

Managing people

A major efficiency measure is 'core productivity hours' (in 2003 the target was 14 400 annual student hours per teacher). Prior to 2004 the institute had suffered declines in annual student hours; since that time there has been a gradual increase.

Today RMIT has developed a system which enables automatic calculation of taught load for all programs, for individual schools and programs within these schools. This program assigns annual student hours, based on class size, FTE and direct program support FTE, for each of the income streams (L and P, Q, Associate Degrees, Foundation Studies, and International. This means that the institute is able to calculate the total FTE-funded positions versus the number of 'actual' required staff, and identify those schools that are over- or understaffed. This calculation enables the institute to move staff from overstaffed schools to understaffed schools, reduce the number of casual staff, and transfer resources to areas of demand.

A 'Transition Fund' has been created to fund programs dealing with excess staff. These initiatives include a three-month subsidy for enabling schools and excess staff to run full-fee-paying programs. If this strategy is not viable, then staff are provided with offers for retraining in another area of demand. Once all these options are exhausted or the position is no longer viable, staff are then offered voluntary departure packages comprising leave and redundancy entitlements, and outplacement programs to provide them with counselling and prepare them for transitioning out of the RMIT workforce. Managers must at all times ensure that teaching plans reflect the conditions of the Enterprise Based Agreement.¹²

Nevertheless, there is a view that it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers using rates of student retention and satisfaction with training. The Head of Business TAFE School observed that teachers who score high on student outcomes, retention and satisfaction may also be those who are continually making adjustments to their practice and who pay attention to building good relationships with students. He said that he had found that technically good teachers may fail to get high scores on retention or student engagement. These observations tend to raise questions about the relationship between feedback given by students and teaching quality.

'Your voice at RMIT' is the staff survey used to understand staffing issues for the university as a whole and for individual sections. Results of this internal survey are benchmarked against survey findings of 19 other universities and 100 enterprises.

A series of leadership and management workshops aim to develop the leadership and management skills and knowledge of individuals who aspire to or are already in managerial or supervisory positions. A Master Class program provides professional development for about 100 senior managers (including the Vice Chancellor's executive, heads of schools and executive directors) who have been invited to participate. Sessions provide time for managers to discuss issues that centre on

¹² Staffing conditions need to take into account the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement for TAFE teachers, that is, 800 hours face-to-face teaching, 400 hours for preparation and correction, 152 hours annual level, 76 hours sick pay and 160 hours public holidays.

communication, performance feedback, leading organisational change and transition, coaching and managing difficult workplace behaviours.

Maintaining quality assurance processes

Performance in quality assurance audits is another indicator of effectiveness and efficiency of programs and practices. Preparation for these audits ensures that program teams have in place systematic assessment moderation and validation practices and adequate industry engagement mechanisms. The key approach to preparing for AQTF 2007 audits at RMIT is to have program teams complete a self-review tool and to employ two external consultants to work with program teams to validate results. This enables the identification of any systemic issues that need to be addressed and good practice that can be replicated by others. The key approach to preparing for Australian Universities Quality Agency audits (which take place every seven years) is to run a mini AUQA panel (comprising external academic and professional experts) with individual schools. The panel conducts interviews with staff, students and stakeholders to determine the extent to which processes and policies are understood and the school has met its objectives. A report complete with recommendations and an action plan is prepared. These plans are monitored on a six-monthly basis. In 2009 the university will undergo both AQTF and AUQA audits.

As well as national quality assurance standards, RMIT must satisfy legislative requirements and standards of industry course accreditation bodies. It does this via program-by-program reviews on compliance. RMIT must also meet Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) requirements. These are the key standards for managing participation, attendance and performance of international students and ensuring their quality of provision. The progress of students (especially those who may be at risk of failing) is a key element of these standards. The institute has found that the provision of social support and pastoral care to international students has been especially important in Foundation Studies programs as well as for programs for airline pilots.

Strategic Projects are projects that are developed to introduce new initiatives and identify improvements.

Learning from the successful practice of others

Engagement with external and internal support networks, curriculum maintenance groups, and external moderation and validation processes are key vehicles for learning about the successful practice of others. Some networks are stronger and more productive than others.

Internal networks of educators and researchers¹³ have been established to share information on industry linkages, capability and future developments. For example, the Media and Communications network spans professions and includes schools of Business TAFE, Art and Design and Applied Science and Information Technology. The networks meet four times a year to share contacts, collaborate on tenders, and exchange information on specific issues.

VET-specific sessions are also used. The School of Engineering Technology (SET) has implemented a session which specifically deals with VET. This provides time for managers to disseminate and update information and for staff to share interesting things that are happening in their sections. The VET Link program is held twice a month for members of the TAFE Executive

¹³ Internal networks are made up of educators and researchers from a variety of portfolios which operate across five key industries identified for strategic partnerships (Aerospace and Aviation, Automotive, Built Environment, Construction and Infrastructure, Health and Community Services, and Media and Communications). 'L' is the classification for User Choice programs.

network and key program managers and coordinators to share and discuss pertinent information and issues. Reports on Strategic Projects are also presented to this group.

The RMIT TAFE Manager of Apprenticeship and Traineeship programs belongs to the Apprenticeship and Traineeship Training Network (ATTN). All TAFEs in Victoria are represented on the ATTN, as are representatives from government (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Skills Victoria) and the Victorian TAFE Association. The ATTN, generally comprised of senior managers, discusses the important and pertinent issues affecting TAFE, including the federal government's Productivity Places Program, skills reform, project issues, and competency-based completions (CBC). The issue of CBC based on phases of program completion is already available to engineering apprentices. Today, it is being discussed by Skills Victoria as a concept to be adopted by other apprenticeship programs.

The Business Development team provides schools with advice and support in contract development and negotiations with enterprises. Staff also learn about new developments through the VISTA Association of VET Professionals.

RMIT has traditionally been focused on its own programs and services. Increasingly, it is working with external agencies (including curriculum maintenance groups) and institutions to acquire and share information. The SET school is currently being requested to deal with increased demand from interstate for dental technician training.

Suggesting areas for improvement

It is not easy for RMIT to get reliable data from VET national student outcomes surveys and graduate destination surveys because of the low response rates and low sample sizes. In addition, these surveys are also inadequate for small program areas. Such surveys are designed for graduates and are perceived to not reflect the experience of trainees and apprentices.

There are also issues with some of the institute surveys. The institute's Course Experience Survey (CES), based on the annual sampling of every TAFE course, has the potential to provide better information about student experience but it has been an effort to ensure that students and staff see value in completing the survey. Although change of sampling procedure has improved participation in some schools, there is still a concern with low response rates.

There is concern about the limited resources for schools to track the destinations of graduates from TAFE programs and associate degree programs (which have a high number of international students). In addition, there are no systematic institute-wide approaches to capturing feedback from off-campus students, and existing workers undertaking workplace training.

Student satisfaction rates, although improving steadily in recent times, have not met state averages and there is a need to be more systematic about benchmarking against the practice of others. RMIT is seeking to increase external benchmarking through projects such as the Module Load Completion Rate study.

ACCESS programs service the needs of the university as a whole. This means that program managers need to cultivate relationships with many schools and that for some programs data on student outcomes are less tangible and easy to come by. There are few follow-up mechanisms for understanding what happens to students in the majority of programs (including ESL students who are often involved in other programs, CGEA students who tend not to continue, and students at risk).

A common issue relates to the inadequacy of profile funding rates to meet the cost of students requiring extra teaching and learning support.

Sunraysia Institute of TAFE

Sunraysia Institute of TAFE (known as SuniTAFE) was established in 1979 and caters to some 8000 students a year. It comprises four campuses across North West Victoria: Mildura, Swan Hill, Robinvale and Ouyen. The campuses offer a range of courses delivered in traditional and or flexible delivery modes (including classroom-based instruction, distance education, flexible learning, outreach programs, online learning and text-based correspondence studies).

SuniTAFE is the largest provider of vocational education and training services in north-west Victoria. Service provision extends over a geographic area generally bounded by Pooncarie in NSW (150 km to the north); Balranald in NSW (200 km to the east); the Riverland region in SA (150 km to the west); Murrayville in Victoria (230 km to the south-west on the SA border), and in a region 375 km south and south-east of Mildura, including the communities of Ouyen, Robinvale, Sea Lake, Swan Hill, Ultima and Kerang.

Main program areas

SuniTAFE is dedicated to providing programs that are especially important for rural and agricultural communities. It offers courses in a variety of areas including: automotive, engineering and electrical, building studies, health and community, visual media, horticultural and irrigation, hospitality, tourism and service industries. It runs the National Centre for Sustainability (NCS) from its Swan Hill and Mildura campuses. (The NCS is a collaboration between the University of Ballarat, Swinburne Institute of Technology, Challenger TAFE WA, and South West Institute of TAFE.

Identifying goals and values

The goals of SuniTAFE reflect the responsibilities of a rural institute to engage and collaborate with local industry, government and community for the benefit of the region. Its key values centre on innovation, learning, excellence, integrity and customer focus.

Its major aims are to:

- ✧ work with industry to contribute to the social and economic development of the region by providing vocational education, training, and related services in required skill areas
- ✧ deliver government contractual obligations for training, education and employment services to an exceptional standard and to seek opportunities to provide additional programs in high-priority areas
- ✧ grow the business of Sunraysia Institute through local, national and international projects and partnerships
- ✧ contribute to creating an empowered community by providing training, education and employment opportunities to members of the community who are disengaged, seeking career options, up-skilling or looking for new challenges
- ✧ influence industry and the community in the development of sustainable solution, education and training opportunities.

Every year around August or September, members of the Institute Board and senior managers of teaching and non-teaching units participate in a planning day to review performance and make projections for the following year. In 2006, the strategic planning process for the next three years was also begun. Planning day participants heard from experts in economic, industry and social developments in the region. Following the planning day the Institute Director undertook a formal environmental scan, which took into account the results of a survey conducted by the Victorian Department of Skills, Education Services and Employment, and their recommendations for training for each of its campus catchment areas. State and federal government policy initiatives, international developments, and Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) reports and statistical publications were also considered.

The strategic plan 2007–09 identifies the key objectives and key performance indicators. Each Centre will take the key goals and objectives of the strategic plan and apply it to their operations.

Achieving budgets and targets

The budgeting process for the following year also commences at the planning day. Centre Managers provide an overall estimate of the number of scheduled hours they can deliver for the following year. This includes an estimate for what they will deliver under the purchase agreement and as fee-for-service courses. These managers also need to identify whether they can put on the same number of classes in a certain subject area or whether there is a need to increase or decrease provision. Typically these projections are based on historical data, federal and state government initiatives, local developments and strategic priorities with implications for training. Costs for wages, delivery hours and staffing are felt to be easy to account for, while information that relates to students is felt to be more variable.

Budgets and targets (using a specific weighting formula) are set for recurrent or direct grants from Skills Victoria (which represents about 75% of all funding). Budgets are also established for fee-for-service programs and commercial enterprises, including the canteen, bookshop and the Cardross Farm (run by the institute as a commercial venture).

The institute generally aims to increase targets for commercial ventures. Budgeting for programs that are supported by income from government tenders is less straightforward. If all tenders submitted are funded, then it may be difficult to get the resources to fulfil them; if only one tender is funded, then there will not be enough funds to run the program. The National Centre for Sustainability is one such program. The centre is receiving many requests for commercial work but it cannot respond to all offers because it may take business away from commercial businesses in the area. This is especially the case for biodiversity monitoring.

SuniTAFE also aims to decrease its energy usage and monitors this usage by incorporating statistics and trends on power, water, and gas and fuel usage into monthly performance reports. The institute favours the tracking of financial and non-financial performance against targets using tried and true measures for financial management and evaluation. In-vogue concepts like ‘triple bottom line’ are generally considered to be too ambiguous.

Heads of Centres establish budgets and targets taking into account information provided by educational managers. Progress towards these targets is tracked by Heads of Centres in consultation with educational managers every two weeks. Budgets are reviewed monthly by the financial manager to see whether performance is on track to meet end-of-year targets. Discussions include consumables, staffing (permanent and sessional), income, and expenditure. When the institute moves to a model based on business units, each business unit will be responsible for its own budget. There has been a great deal of professional development around this issue.

The institute has not adopted the concept of a 'facilities utilisation rate' and is sceptical of its accuracy, especially for benchmarking cost-efficiency against other institutes. It is currently investigating the concept of data warehousing. International programs are still in their infancy and processes for tracking student financial deposits and eventual enrolments are underway.

The institute has its own board, which is responsible for running the organisation. Nevertheless, the Victorian Treasury department is keen to keep a watchful eye on financial operations, and the institute, like other Victorian institutes, is regularly monitored and audited.

Understanding relevant markets

Environmental scanning of local, state, national and international reports and statistics, and attendance of open forums with other registered training organisations and industry are used by the institute to understand its local market and the wider environment. Statistical information which will affect the nature, scope and commercial viability of provision is taken into account. This includes any information on local economics produced by the Economic Development Board, industry bodies, state agencies, ABS, and community organisations (including Mallee Family Care).

Up-to-date information on new and emerging industries which may drive demand for training is brought to the attention of the institute by teachers and managers (who commonly have strong networks in industry), representatives of industry on the Institute Board, and through the monitoring of 'trend watching websites'. Managers and teachers are aware of new industry areas because of their close contacts and regular visits with employers and industry, while senior members from industry give up-to-date information to the Institute Board. Also consulted are websites which provide up-to-date statistics on environmental developments like river flows or increased allocations of water, which will also affect the timing of training, as well as planning for the commercial farm.

SuniTAFE acquires knowledge about what other providers are delivering in the region by monitoring local newspapers for course advertisements, speaking to apprentices and employers who have had to make decisions about where to spend their training dollar, and clients who are applying for RPL at the local Skill Store.

The new organisational structure will move the institute towards a business unit structure under four directorates. This means that educational managers will be called educational business managers and will perform fewer hours teaching and spend time in industry bringing back information on industry trends.

Achieving cost-efficient provision

The institute must deliver programs and services which meet industry and local community needs. This is done through the careful monitoring of ventures and projects. The institute also receives a per-hour loading for being a regional institute.

There is a focus on the bottom line and every program and project needs to break even or return a surplus. At times there needs to be cross-subsidisation of programs. Today a streamlined and centralised approach to project management enables the institute to have up-to-date knowledge of the types of projects being implemented across campuses and programs and to ensure that resources are distributed wisely to achieve a successful outcome. All project initiators forward submissions for projects to the Executive for approval.

The plan is for all commercial ventures to return a surplus. When this cannot be done, there is cross-subsidisation by other programs. For example, the Child Care Centre is a business venture but it rarely returns a profit. There is no intention to close it as it provides a public good, for both the staff and the community. The commercial Cardross Farm must also be run in cost-efficient

manner but it is especially affected by the state of the wider economy and climate conditions. For example, the 2006 downturn in the wine industry meant that there was not a market for grapes. The institute focused on modernising the property by combining funding from internal sources and grants from the Mallee Catchment Authority. By 2008 the farm was in full production again. The rains destroyed 20% of the crop and the institute had to subsidise these losses from profits from teaching areas.

The institute has now moved into the market for international students and already has a small group of students enrolled. It is aiming for the international programs to return a surplus within three years.

Meeting industry needs

The institute has a wide range of formal industry engagement and advisory mechanisms to help it keep abreast of industry and community needs. These include industry forums and advisory groups, close interaction with employers in apprenticeship and traineeships provision, workplace training, and widespread staff membership on industry and community key bodies and associations.¹⁴ These activities are supplemented by regular environmental scanning of research reports and statistics (including those published by state agencies, local development boards, NCVER and ABS). Business leaders are represented on the Institute Board, while the Institute Director is president of the Tourism Association for the region. Personal staff networks with businesses, local government and the hospital means that engineers, business administrators and nurses have been approached to do some part-time teaching. Surveys of employers and industry-specific focus groups are also used.

Close and regular contact between teachers and employers in developing and implementing apprenticeship and traineeship training plans and undertaking workplace assessments is an essential method for ensuring that institutes keep current with employer needs, and that programs are providing the type of skills employers want.

The institute is keen to adopt innovative work placement programs. For example, the nursing program has implemented a mentorship program, where students on hospital work placements will be placed with a mentor (also known in the industry as a preceptor). These mentors provide feedback to the program on how well the student has been prepared for undertaking workplace tasks. Clinical teachers from the institute visit students in workplaces to speak with mentors and workplace supervisors.

Engagement in fee-for-service ventures enables the institute to understand the issues that are being experienced in particular industries and specific workplaces and to address these issues through training. An example of this is the development of a training program to address the needs of new and large agribusinesses, sometimes made out of the amalgamation of smaller farms. Sometimes owners of these businesses may know little about farming and need advice. In one training program federal government funding through the 'Farmbiz' program enabled the institute to run seminars about minimum tool farming and innovative farming techniques.

The institute has engaged a consultant to help it establish its own Customer Relationship Management system. This enables managers to track the nature and timing of contacts with employers, students, government and community stakeholders. This means that the institute has an online system for recording events associated with the launching, implementation and completion of tasks and activities (including those relating to marketing campaigns, enquiry management and opportunity management).

¹⁴ Including LLENS, secondary college boards, local community partnerships, Koori Employment and Training Taskforce, Murray Wine Industry Education Committee, Mildura Transport and Logistics Cluster, Health Monitoring and Delivery Committee, local district councils.

Meeting student needs

Completion and retention rates are key indicators used to understand whether the institute is doing a good job. Regular monitoring of student and financial databases helps programs to identify when there may be a problem in meeting financial and student contact hour targets so that remedial action can be implemented.

Internal surveys (also done online by some centres) are used to canvas student opinion about satisfaction with training provision, enrolment processes and facilities. They also enable students to make suggestions for improvement. These surveys are undertaken for courses and units of competency. Some programs use twice-yearly one-on-one feedback sessions with students to give them an opportunity to provide feedback and make suggestions. Class forums are used in other programs where trainers who have had practice in ‘restorative practice’ techniques lead the group discussion to analyse expectations and clarify roles. Exit interviews with students undertaken in other programs provide practical feedback on what went well and what needs further improvement. Recently there has been an attempt to personalise the canvassing of opinion, both from employers and students. Interviews with random samples of ten or 15 students help section heads to drill down to all aspects of the course.

Student suggestions placed in suggestion boxes located in the administration hub are collected by the Quality Unit and logged into the system, which records the date, issues raised and the action that has been taken. Reports of these suggestions will be presented at a meeting of operations, which meets every six weeks. The Quality Unit takes responsibility for informing students about what has happened as a result of their suggestion.

International students are integrated into normal programs. They pay their fees in two instalments and their results will be sent to the PRISMS¹⁵ database held by Australian Education International (AEI). International students generally require more pastoral care and support to help them adjust to the new culture and to help teachers keep track of attendance and progress. Teachers who work with international students are provided with some cultural-awareness training. They are reminded of the specific problems that are faced by international students in a new country, including the difficulties they may have if teachers do not speak clearly and slowly. A separate unit for international students means that it is quite easy to get information on how they are progressing through their studies.

The institute newsletter also carries good news stories about successes and achievements. A newsletter for trainees is used to help trainees have a sense of belonging to the student body. This newsletter will identify employers who take on a trainee and trainees of the month.

Information from the NCVER Student Outcomes Survey enables the institute to get an understanding of performance.

Maintaining quality assurance processes

A key aspect of quality provision is the validation and moderation of assessment tasks. These are done at the section level, where teachers (including sessional staff) come together to conduct such validation exercises. For some programs statewide moderation groups are key vehicles for finding out about current educational issues and what other institutes are doing; these are felt to be very useful.

Not all programs have statewide mechanisms for providing advice. For example, as there is no statewide advisory group for aged care, the institute has established one for its own programs.

¹⁵ Provider Registration and International Students Management System

The nursing program must satisfy the accreditation requirements of the state nursing board. It is subject to regular auditing from the board and must make sure that there are adequate facilities and support for training, programming, and staffing. Every three years the department are asked to make a submission to the review of the training package.

Managing people

The institute operates in a thin labour market for teachers and for administrative staff. This is why it favours a philosophy which aims to retain staff by providing them with services which will encourage them to stay. The director responsible for human resources has implemented a system where the Executive is rostered to spend two days a week at the Swan Hill campus. This physical presence has helped staff in the campus feel connected with the institute and its wider business. It has also built a sense of trust. 'I want to make this organisation a better place. If people stay I don't have to recruit. I want to keep the good people for us. This applies to part-time teachers as well (Director, Human Resources).

The State Services Authority produces comparative data on institute performance on a range of human resources indicators (including staffing demographics, turnover, leave, absenteeism, satisfaction.). SuniTAFE has posted high satisfaction ratings but the overall survey response rate is generally low.

The use of sessional and part-time teachers is often required, especially in outlying campuses. This is because it is difficult to know when the institute will require extra resources. The problem with this approach is that good teachers will want a full-time position and will move away to other towns or industries.

Staff members are able to submit complaints through a complaints procedure. Complaints that are made about teachers and student services in general can be gleaned from student surveys.

The institute conducts exit interviews with staff to find out why they are leaving, where they are going and for any suggestions they have for how the institute can improve the experience for staff. They are also asked about their relationships with peers and their managers.

Learning from the successful practice of others

Attendance at conferences and seminars and statewide specific-function networks and groups are key strategies for staff to learn from the successful practice of others. Visits are made to other institutes to learn about how other institutes of a similar size are dealing with similar problems. Staff will also attend training provided by other institutes. Managers attend statewide curriculum maintenance groups. The acting director of the Health and Community Centre attends the Monitoring Delivery Committee, which meets once a month in Melbourne. This committee has representation from unions and the industry sector and looks at the curriculum as a whole to see if there are any changes. It advises government and unions of feedback re workforce issues in health.

Managers (including the Institute Director) contact their own personal networks to get help with certain processes and issues. In turn they share their information with others.

Suggesting areas for improvement

There is a continuing concern with the lack of information about the number of potential business clients in the area and the extent of their financial business, and the lack of resources to analyse the substantial amount of data that is produced by national and state bodies.

The national Student Outcomes Survey is used at a general level but there is a concern that it is difficult to interpret what it means for certain occupations. This is because it is difficult to draw out information on specific occupations especially important in the current environment in regional Australia. ABS statistics about the local labour market are already a year old when they are published and this makes them less meaningful for understanding current labour market trends.

There is agreement that good processes for tracking the destinations of students when they have left the institute are required. This includes gathering information on what they are doing and their progress through employment or training. It also includes finding out whether students completing programs with articulation pathways (for example, enrolled nursing) have moved onto a registered nurse program. Such information would be essential for promoting the value of undertaking TAFE programs.

More information on apprenticeship completion and reasons for non-completion of courses is required. There is an acknowledgement that institutes do not know why students come to TAFE and how the qualifications they do obtain are used once they leave.

There is a genuine thirst for information about all areas, especially niche areas that help expand the business and reputation of the institute. The institute is especially keen to keep an eye on emerging trends in the renewable energy industry. It is investigating the potential for the institute to be involved in training delivery as well as in providing services, including auditing and actual installation of solar, wind or geothermal applications. The institute is very keen to understand alternative fuels. 'We try to look at what is happening in the future and how it will affect us at TAFE' (Institute Director).

Projects need to break even or return a surplus and it is important for the institute to have adequate forewarning if projects will not be able to deliver targets. That is why accurate and up-to-date analysis of financial information is required. There is also a request for training in how to use financial systems like 'QL', and for institutes to have access to the same validation software to enable the institute to clean up AVETMISS data so that it can be sent on error-free right from the start. It is felt that an inability to adjust budget targets (often based on historical provision with some margins for future growth) will have implications in the future, especially when institutes will be expected to tender for increasing levels of contestable funds.

There is an inability for TAFE to provide courses for the IT industry in the region due to the lack of adequate equipment and resources and technical expertise. Concerns were voiced about the lack of resources to support the introduction of new training packages.

Institutes in South Australia

TAFE South Australia (TAFE SA) is a government-owned and operated vocational and technical training organisation based in Adelaide, South Australia, and hosts more than 1550 international students and delivers programs to more than 80 000 domestic students each year and has an annual budget of more than \$400 million. TAFE SA is divided into three separate institute sections, TAFE SA Adelaide North, TAFE SA Adelaide South and TAFE SA Regional. TAFE SA has more than 50 campuses across South Australia. These campuses stretch from the Adelaide CBD throughout the suburbs and out to the north, south-east and west of rural and regional South Australia and cover the coast and the Riverland and industrial and farming communities. TAFE SA courses are arranged into the following industry groups: Arts, Design, Fashion and Multimedia; Building and Furnishing Trades and Furniture Design; Business Management, Finance and Property Services; Computing and Information Technology; Engineering, Electro-technology, and Mining; Community Services, Health and Education; Hair and Beauty; Food and Meat Processing and Wine; Hospitality, Tourism, Events and Languages; Primary and Allied Industries; Recreation and Sport; Transport Engineering; and TAFEstart (ACCESS Course).

The South Australia Strategic Plan (SASP) ‘Creating Opportunities’ identifies six major goals for the state. These are:

- ✧ growing prosperity
- ✧ improving wellbeing
- ✧ attaining sustainability
- ✧ fostering creativity
- ✧ building communities and expanding opportunities.

Each of these goals is translated into 79 measurable targets. The Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Training (DFEEST) has taken the SASP overarching goals and 11 of the targets for which it has lead delivery and developed the DFEEST Strategic Plan 2007–10.¹⁶

Key goals and objectives for individual institutions emanate from the SASP and cascade into the DFEEST 2007–10 Strategic Plan, which in turn are reflected in the Strategic Plans developed by the three institutions. Within institute goals, objectives and targets are then translated into departmental work plans.

All institutes have available data captured by student management systems which enable them to monitor their performance against ACH (annual curriculum hours) targets for all students (including those for students from different groups). These data include: total enrolments, actual curriculum hours, and trends; withdrawals and dropouts (and the stage of course at which they occur); and total output, and completion rates.

¹⁶ The DFEEST report for 2008 <[http://www.dfeest.sa.gov.au/Portals/2/downloads/dfeestannualreport 2007full.pdf](http://www.dfeest.sa.gov.au/Portals/2/downloads/dfeestannualreport%202007full.pdf)> details the strategic objectives and initiatives that link to SASP targets, and evaluations of performance.

TAFE SA Adelaide North

TAFE SA North's Strategic Plan 2005–07 outlines the institute's key goals, which are shaped around vision, mission, learning for life and values.¹⁷ The institute also has a number of 'key result areas' around: innovation in teaching and learning; developing business and strategic partnerships and relationships; focusing on student, customer and stakeholder needs; 'our people'; flexible, responsive business systems; processes and practices; and environmental sustainability.

Identifying goals and values

The institute aims to:

- ✧ ensure TAFE SA Adelaide North develops and delivers socially inclusive, innovative educational programs
- ✧ develop a professional development framework which will ensure the institute responds to clients in a responsive and innovative way in order to meet the strategic objectives
- ✧ achieve a significant increase in business outcomes in programs/workgroups¹⁸
- ✧ ensure business partnerships entered into support the mission and diversify the funding base by the strategic use of FSI 500 funding
- ✧ provide flexible learning and development solutions to meet educational needs of a range of sectors
- ✧ define and articulate the institute's community service obligations
- ✧ meet institute commitment to social inclusion by ensuring access and equity for disadvantaged groups
- ✧ develop, implement and review strategies to a) build and retain the workforce capacity b) facilitate a learning and development culture
- ✧ encourage and enhance employee wellbeing, performance improvement and safety.

Each of the objectives has an identified measure and an outcome. TAFE SA Adelaide North has a set of DFEEST defined targets to meet by 2012.

Achieving budgets and targets

At TAFE SA Adelaide North the budget is used to guide and monitor performance against targets. Financial targets are about revenues and expenditures, non-financial targets are those related to student hours (ACH) and outcomes. Each of three faculty clusters develops its own budget targets, with performance evaluated against these targets for different business lines (associated with State Profile funding, fee-for-service activities, international programs and User Choice). Each cluster is made up of a number of work groups responsible for developing its own work plan and key performance indicators related to ACH, and financials (that is, student hours and costs and revenues).

The monitoring of budgets takes place in various groups and venues. The main process for monitoring faculty cluster budgets is the budget meeting. Here educational managers will meet with their faculty directors to discuss 'actuals' (that is, achievement) versus original financial and non-financial targets. A business analyst from the financial services team helps educational managers and

¹⁷ Vision: on valuing, developing and empowering our staff will enhance our capacity to provide relevant, high-quality vocational education and training; Mission: to offer excellence in vocational education and training locally, across the state and globally; Learning for life: developing life-long learners, planning for diversity, collaborating with community, industry and government; Values: committed to continuous learning and quality, driven by customer service and embrace change.

¹⁸ TAFE SA is targeting a 20% increase

faculty directors with higher-level finance issues. At the work group level educational managers will also meet with their groups to discuss how they are progressing against targets.

The institute has established a Resources and Budget Committee. This Committee comprises the Institute Executive Director, Directors of Educational Programs and Services and Corporate Services, the three General Managers of the faculty clusters, the Manager of Business Planning and Finance, and a business analyst team leader. The aim of this committee is to undertake financial reviews which are targeted at individual work groups. The new model will be implemented for 2009.

Effectiveness of performance against financial targets is measured by: achievement or exceeding of budget targets; cost ratio of teaching delivery to administration and support; costs of overheads; and calculation of 'cost, volume, and price' model, including chargeable hour costs. Effectiveness of performance against non-financial targets is measured by productivity targets for: student hours, enrolments, completion rates, ACH per FTE,¹⁹ and number of students in programs.

The institute uses the cost, volume, pricing model to identify whether courses are being over- or underpriced, and in the case of fee-for-service programs to understand whether programs are running at a profit. The model also allows the institute to benchmark itself against state averages. There is also a move to have business units develop a two-year budget and then a four-year budget.

Meeting industry needs

Course advisory groups or panels, industry engagement sessions, and employer surveys are mechanisms used by TAFE SA North to collect feedback and advice from employers. Advisory groups like the Aviation Industry Reference Group and the Plumbing Education and Training Advisory Group are used both to identify industry needs and as sounding boards for evaluating progress against these needs.

Staff membership of boards and networks is also an important source of information. TAFE SA Adelaide North's General Manager in charge of Hospitality and Tourism, Hairdressing and Sport and Recreation cluster represents TAFE on the Trade Recognition Australia state panel which deals with skills recognition for cooks. The institute's Hospitality teaching staff are involved in a range of associations, including licensed clubs, the Australian Hospitality Association, the Restaurateurs' Association, the liquor trades union and local and national industry skills councils.

Understanding how well the institute is faring in meeting industry needs is far easier for apprenticeship and traineeship programs (especially as 98% of students in the commercial cookery and hospitality programs are in employment) and enterprise-based fee-for-service training. This is because such programs require a high level of interaction with employers to develop customised training plans. Industry-specific employer surveys are used by TAFE SA Adelaide North to gather information on the extent to which the institute is meeting the needs of industry in a particular area. Also informative are the findings of specific research studies and employer surveys published or disseminated by the Industry Skills Commission and NCVER (including the Survey of Employer Use and Views). The findings of reviews of different industries (including Engineering, Community Services and Health sectors) have also provided the institute with information on industry needs and what has to be done in meeting the needs of these particular industries.

The case management concept of servicing enterprise clients (including apprentices, trainees and their employers) is also used at TAFE SA Adelaide North. Meeting with employers on a regular basis, these lecturers are in a position to ask how the institute can help improve employers' bottom line and on-sell other training products, including for existing workers. The extent to which

¹⁹ Looking at ACH per FTE can help managers evaluate whether a program is being over-resourced in terms of staffing. Say a cluster is planning to provide 100 000 AHCs in a specific program for a forthcoming year and typically the number of hours that are provided by a full-time lecturer are 12 000 per year, then the program should require about eight full-time lecturers (FTE). This approach can also be used to establish parameters for teaching resources required to deliver future programs, as well as staffing for administration and management support.

enterprises take advantage of such programs is a key indicator of institute effectiveness in meeting industry needs. A related process for servicing employers is the account management process. Here, one staff member is allocated to look after the services that are being delivered to an employer (generally a large employer who may have a number of training programs and ventures being delivered by the same institute). In having to deal with only one person means that there is a much better relationship built up. In addition, administrative processes can also be streamlined by having only one account or invoice which captures the diversity of delivery and associated costs are also considered to be beneficial. As work-based delivery of training becomes a much more common vehicle for meeting the workforce development goals of all governments, the development of a personalised arrangement with employers and industry is a key to meeting industry needs.

Engagement with industry and building and maintaining personal relationships with industry contacts is important to TAFE SA Adelaide North. Many industry groups are invited to participate in orientation week, allowing the new student cohort to engage with potential future employers. The institute holds an annual 'Building and Construction Industry Christmas Breakfast' at the beginning of December, enabling the TAFE staff to meet with industry groups to discuss what has happened during the year. The event is also used to showcase students' work.

TAFE SA Adelaide North also encourages industry groups to offer feedback and ask questions of program directors and individual lecturers regarding the respective courses by making use of the 'Close the gap' policy. This ensures that industry groups feel as if they are included and their views respected in program delivery.

The institute also gathers information from a range of informal sources, including complaints from students and conversations with employers and sponsors. Institute events like graduation ceremonies are other means for Institute Directors to gather information about how they are meeting industry needs. TAFE SA Adelaide North invites industry and enterprise sponsors to such events and these provide ideal environments for Directors to learn directly from business leaders what it is that the institute is doing well and not so well.

Meeting student needs

There are a range of formal mechanisms in place at TAFE SA Adelaide North to enable an understanding of how programs are meeting student needs. The Student Services Group conducts focus groups with students where any forthcoming changes or complaints are discussed. Students are also involved in the institute's governing council. Internal and external surveys on client satisfaction are also run by the program units themselves. At TAFE SA Adelaide North, the Quality Unit runs three types of surveys dealing with administrative processes and quality of teaching and learning. They include:

- ✧ beginning student surveys, which cover the adequacy and effectiveness of enrolment processes and pre-course information
- ✧ during-course surveys, which deal with teaching and learning quality, adequacy of facilities, and access to resources
- ✧ post-course surveys, which canvas the course evaluations of employers and students.

The Quality Unit will run a series of surveys per year. It will also focus on those program areas that suffer from the risk of a high drop-out rate of students and attempt to follow up with students to determine their reasons for withdrawing from the course and, if possible, to help them stay in tertiary education.

Managers may request that the Quality Unit runs focus groups for specific programs. For example, when the dual qualifications programs were being established for Hospitality Management, the Quality Unit conducted focus groups of Australian and international students and industry. When these qualifications were launched there was a doubling of enrolments.

The retention of qualified personnel (an issue that has plagued the hospitality industry for years) has also been used as a key performance measure. At TAFE SA Adelaide North a new program based on the concept of case management has been implemented to assist in the retention of recently trained chefs in the industry. The 'appetite for success' is a three-year Commercial Cookery program for about 20 young cooks, bakers, waiters and bartenders who are matched to an appropriate industry mentor. In this program the mentor is expected to hold six one-hour meetings a year with the mentee and always be contactable to answer questions and provide advice. It was set up to provide a safety net for young people as they progress through the first ten years of their occupational life. It aims to counteract the effects of early responsibility and quick promotion after graduation, which can often push graduates into roles they are not yet prepared for. This can lead to frustration and eventual attrition. Although the program is not qualification-driven, participants can gain recognition for the skills they develop. The eventual aim is to develop graduates of the program into mentors for future participants. The program has experienced success and is being copied in other states and expanded to other occupational areas.

The institute is also establishing a Customer Relationship Management System to track the contact that program areas have with employers, stakeholders and students. This system records the type of contact made and the action taken. Its usefulness is in providing a stream of qualitative information about the interaction the institute has with clients in different program areas.

Managing people

The Innovation in Teaching, Learning and Innovation Unit of TAFE SA Adelaide North conducts the professional development for staff at the institute. The enterprise agreement states that 1% of salaries of staff employed under the *TAFE Act* are to be spent on professional development. This is a key performance indicator, which is used to ensure compliance.

The unit measures its effectiveness in professional development provision by examining: the uptake of training by teaching and administration staff; the nature of program delivered; client satisfaction with programs; and average hourly costs of delivering programs. Information is collected via workshop evaluations completed by participants, focus group discussions and professional conversations. Student focus groups are used to discuss teaching and learning issues. These discussions then provide guidance for the types of professional development programs that the unit can provide.

The cost-effectiveness of programs is evaluated by taking information on FTE and comparing this with the number of student hours that have been completed. This gives an indication of whether staff at the institute are being used efficiently. Although this may help in rationalising the number of casual staff, there is not much that can be done if a program is found to have too many permanent staff.

Maintaining quality assurance processes

The main aim of the Quality Unit is to ensure that the institute remains AQTF 2007-compliant and that staff are aware of their quality assurance responsibilities. Another focus is to help staff understand that the principles of quality assurance should be integrated into their daily operations. To do this, the unit runs meetings and training programs to address specific issues and works with managers to smooth out problems. Meetings on a chosen topic (for example, risk management, documentation, and survey completion) are run on a regular basis. Educational Managers invite members of the Quality Unit to portfolio or cluster meetings. Training programs are aimed at ensuring that individual programs are competent in undertaking self-audits.

The Quality Unit is responsible for the internal audit. It has developed a number of templates (mapped against the requirements of AQTF 2007) to assist in the quality process and to ensure that requirements are addressed as thoroughly as possible. Nonetheless, the Quality Unit is aware that the templates are only useful if the staff complete them satisfactorily.

A formal complaints process administered by the Quality Unit enables students and staff to lodge grievances for attention. These complaints are analysed by the unit and if necessary forwarded on to the relevant program area for information and action. The Quality Unit encourages teaching staff to respond to student questions or complaints that have been lodged through these formal avenues and will undertake follow-up action to see that these have been addressed. It has mounted a campaign to encourage increased responses to their surveys from staff and students alike. Potential problem areas can also be identified by using ‘answer omission’ indicators (that is, questions in surveys that do not attract an answer from a considerable number of respondents).

The results of quality audits and NCVER ‘activity audits’ provide direct advice on the processes that need to be improved to meet the requirements of the AQTF 2007.

Learning from the successful practice of others

Strong networks, both nationally and across the state, are especially important for TAFE SA North. Teaching and other staff have also visited colleges in Queensland, Melbourne, Tasmania, ACT and New South Wales. Similarly staff members from other colleges have visited TAFE SA North. The CEO has gone overseas to make presentations in the United States and Canada and also to attend benchmarking workshops.

The Teaching, Learning and Innovation Unit will invite teachers who have been successful in the provision of certain programs (for example, distance learning) to come to workshops and to address workshop participants.

Understanding relevant markets

Information about the markets in which TAFE SA North operates is distilled from information on workforce development provided to it by DFEEST. Information provided by industry skills councils about workforce statistics and projections are also consulted. Local industry knowledge about vacancies and economic development are used in conjunction with these national statistics.

Suggesting areas for improvement

The lack of mechanisms for tracking student destinations (domestic and international) both in the short and long term is felt to limit the ability of TAFEs in general to understand the effectiveness of their operations, especially in producing employment outcomes for students. What is felt to be required are longitudinal surveys and better qualitative information on how graduates are faring in their places of work.

External financial reporting indicators (including cost per unit hour) also known as lag indicators, are being used to measure TAFE performance. It is felt that this type of measurement does not give an accurate evaluation of TAFE performance in producing employment outcomes in terms of numbers of jobs, sustainable jobs, and progression through jobs. For this reason, there is a case for finding out the value that TAFE graduates and TAFE students have added to enterprises because of the skills that they have been able to develop in TAFE.

If TAFEs are to benchmark their costs with the costs of other providers, it is felt important to use comparative information which measured outcomes according to the same inputs. This should be used for all business units (including Human Resources and Finance).

National surveys of student outcomes or employer views, although informative in a general sense, are not very helpful at the program area level. (This is the case even when the TAFE pays a top-up fee to have its sample increased.) It is at this level that TAFE will be able to get a better idea of how students and employers evaluate their training. What is required is good qualitative information about the real outcomes for students in workplaces in terms of whether they are maintaining jobs or creating better futures for themselves. A mismatch between what employers say they need and what registered training organisations are able to deliver can also be problematic.

The case management approach enables the institute to have the best possible conversations with industry about needs and about outcomes for students. It is dependent, however, on having managers and professionals in the industry with the skills for managing their staff. This means that TAFE must work with employers as a long-term partner so that employers and their workers are able to provide the leadership and support to enable students to succeed.

There is a need to investigate the real root causes of problems and not to automatically identify all problems as a training issue. This means that there needs to be more focus on accurate contextualisation of demographic, economic and industry factors that might impact on employment outcomes. There is also a questioning of the accuracy of workforce statistics, especially as they do not recognise the impact of turnover in specific industries. Reliable statistics on industry sectors and needs accessible in one location would be especially helpful.

The lack of a students' association is considered to limit the ability of the institute to provide representation of the student voice in institute governance.

Another issue is associated with increased competition from providers who are prepared to deliver the more inexpensive units of training, especially in User Choice programs.

Keeping in mind that employee costs account for 80% of all costs, the institute is also keen to understand how the mix of part-time and full-time staff contributes to added efficiencies.

TAFE SA Regional

TAFE SA Regional services the training needs of country South Australia and has the largest footprint of the TAFE SA institutions. It develops its own Strategic Plan 2008–11, which as stated previously, is filtered down from the Strategic Plan from the state department, DFEEST.

Identifying goals and values

TAFE SA Regional aims to create a vibrant, adaptable, highly skilled workforce that meets community needs in regional South Australia. Its core values are integrity, responsiveness, and transparency in decision-making, excellence and courage.

Its strategic priorities are organised around four guiding themes: skill development, customer focus, institute performance, and leadership. More specifically the stated priorities are aimed at:

- ✧ developing higher level skills, improving access and equity, and increasing pathways
- ✧ building client knowledge, creating responsive learning systems and expanding capacity through collaboration
- ✧ working with and for clients, building a dynamic and responsive TAFE workforce and creating and maintaining quality systems, processes and practices
- ✧ expanding the regional skill base, pursuing sustainable economic development and collaborating for creativity and innovation.

Each of the priorities has an outcome and a measure, and TAFE SA Regional has defined targets to be achieved by 2011, including an overall increase in qualifications completed, client retention and increased enrolments, and a smaller ecological footprint.

Achieving budgets and targets

The budget is a key driver of planned activity and evaluation and is based on the numbers of students, annual student hours²⁰ and fee-for-service (FFS)/contestable revenue (including from SA Works projects, commercial on-site delivery and VET in Schools), and expenditures that the institute has forecast for each teaching and business unit. Each month senior managers receive monthly reports that monitor performance against targets for each budget manager (52 in the institute). As required and on an exception basis, senior managers with control over large budgets (who also make up the Executive team) are involved in a review of operations (Business Reviews). These include presentations and discussions about how the institute is travelling towards meeting financial and non-financial targets. Financial targets concern expenditures and revenues (for example, from fee-for-service and User Choice activities). Non-financial targets are concerned with annual student hours, budgeted FTE, and recognition of prior learning. Expenditures are reviewed and managers must justify any under- or overspending against expenditure targets.

At the teaching section level educational managers prepare a productivity report, which tells them whether they are over or under their targets. A business analyst also helps them to analyse their productivity. At these business review meetings targets may be adjusted. For example, an industry may have collapsed or increased production in a particular regional area. If this has happened then financial targets are adjusted.

Key ‘own source’ revenues are fee-for-service and User Choice programs. Fee-for-service targets are based purely on the revenue that they bring in, while User Choice targets are based on both annual hours and revenue. A business analyst works with the budget manager to determine the costing for fee-for-service courses, factoring in costs for teaching staff, teaching resources and other inputs, and therefore the price to be charged the customer. This costing also allows the calculation of a minimum class size for cost-recovery purposes. When enterprises pay a fixed price for fee-for-service programs, then these minimum class sizes can be more flexible.

Evaluating the cost-effectiveness

The introduction by DFEST of the ‘cost, volume, pricing model’ helps institutes including Regional to work out the cost per chargeable hour, based on the cost for teaching, management and other administrative staff, and goods and services for educational programs. Having a unit of volume like ‘chargeable hour’ can help institutes work out whether programs are covering all of their costs in FFS pricing arrangements. These are the main strategies for evaluating the cost-effectiveness of programs. However, there are always some components of courses that are not profitable (particularly User Choice). In these cases educational managers and their teaching staff need to think of ways to make learning more efficient by applying different delivery strategies and exploring ways to build up class sizes. This includes applying e-learning platforms for off-the-job training. Such delivery, which requires less time away from the workplace, means that students can undertake learning at work and at home and, furthermore, that the costs of printing resources can be reduced. ‘We trust that the hourly costs worked out by our business analyst are right and provide the program that will work within the targets’ (Faculty Manager).

Information on the use of facilities enables institutes to calculate macro- and micro-level productivity and usage. A ‘facilities utilisation rate’ is calculated by Regional to better understand whether it is recovering the full dollar cost of having a physical presence in a certain location. The main way that the institute aims to recoup investment (in terms of an identified dollar amount per square metre per annum) is to provide access to its facilities to third parties, including other training or education institutions (including universities), or community groups. This means that third parties can help the institute to meet its burgeoning facilities costs.

²⁰ In South Australia the term Annual Hours Curriculum (AHC) is used.

Although there is some use of the financial statistics (league tables) calculated by NCVER, Institute Directors and senior managers are generally of the view that they do not give an accurate benchmark against which decisions could be made. In addition, such statistics are used by central agencies in SA to put pressure on TAFE SA as being the second most costly in the nation. The Regional Institute is currently benchmarking itself against TAFEs in NSW and Western Australia to better understand its unit costs. The problem with expecting TAFE SA Regional to get its unit costs per hour down to \$16.74 is that the cost of delivering training in remote areas like the APY (Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara) lands may well amount to between \$50 and \$60 per hour. It is important that TAFE obligations for providing a community service in remote areas be taken into account in any future purchase agreements.

A perception for educational managers is that they do not have very much input in deciding how to spend the money they have obtained from fee-for-service courses. If a forklift course is offered at \$1450.00 a day, then the teaching section that delivers the program won't see the money, as the bulk may go to meet overhead costs. In reality the overhead or indirect costs of the institute are currently running at 40% and managers have total control over the remaining 60%. Consideration is being given to a costing model for FFS activity that will require a full contribution to variable overhead costs only, with the fixed overhead element being reduced, albeit within the requirement of cost-reflective pricing under national competition policy.

Meeting industry needs

TAFE SA Regional has a variety of formal and informal ways for understanding the extent to which it is meeting industry needs. The Executive Director of TAFE SA Regional makes appointments with leading employers on her rotational visits to different campuses. These visits allow the Executive Director to 'touch base' with regional industry stakeholders as well as to discuss any issues that might arise. It is not uncommon for the Executive Director to make telephone calls or visit major employers to get a greater understanding of how things are going. The Institute Council meets at regional campuses on a rotational basis. It uses these opportunities to obtain feedback from various client groups, industry and the community generally about how well TAFE is travelling.

TAFE SA Regional has just employed four Business Development Managers, whose role is to generate revenue and canvas the views and expectations of industry and the community in their allocated programs and regions and to feed this information back to senior program managers. The senior program managers then use this information for developing a program plan for the whole institute. Objectives for this plan then cascade into the work plans of individual educational managers in specific regions. Targets for the revenue that Business Development Managers must generate during a given period are identified by the Executive of the institute.

This close involvement with industry enables institutes to keep abreast of current needs and trends in workplace practice and industry expectations. It also helps them to customise programs to the needs of industry sectors and or enterprises and obtain feedback which helps them monitor their effectiveness. Lecturer visits to students in workplaces, consultations with employers, and assessment of workplace training are regularly used to collect information on how institutes are meeting employer expectations. Other indicators of an institute's ability to meet industry needs are retention of students within industry programs, repeat business from students and corporate clients, and the career destinations of students.

The Education Manager of the Manufacturing, Engineering, Transport and Construction Apprentices and Trainees faculty, for example, regularly consults with employers and industry bodies in the regional areas to investigate their training preferences. One question that is regularly asked of employers relates to training of apprentices and whether employers prefer apprentices to access training close to their homes or travel to the cities or bigger towns. To decide the best course of action, TAFE SA Regional consults with six regional development boards and three employers' forums (Murray Bridge, Barossa and the Riverland): 'It's about asking locals how best to use the

local TAFEs for individual industries' (Educational Manager, Manufacturing, Engineering and Transport and Construction, TAFE SA Regional)

As work-based delivery of training becomes a much more common way of meeting the workforce development goals of all governments, the development of a personalised arrangement with employers and industry becomes key to meeting industry needs. Administrative processes for these ventures can also be streamlined by using a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. TAFE SA Regional has plans in place to set up an account management system approach to dealing with the training needs of large enterprises (such as the BHP Billiton Olympic Dam Expansion, OneSteel, Carter-Holt Harvey and enterprises involved in the wine industry). Each of these enterprises will have one institute account manager.

The institute obtains information on its performance from the Student Outcomes Survey and the Survey of Employer Use and Views conducted by NCVER. The institute will run its own client satisfaction surveys in particular program areas.

Meeting student needs

Measuring student success is a complicated exercise and a variety of outcomes have to be taken into consideration, including formal analysis of student completion rates, attrition rates, retention rates, satisfaction rates, repeat business and student results. Module load completions at the program level are also considered. In programs such as the Alternative Learning Options Program aimed at engaging disengaged youth in 'learn to earn' programs, success is gauged in terms of the numbers who move into employment, return to school, or are involved in further training.

There is not an over-reliance on surveying students or employers or industry bodies because of the substantial amount of direct contact TAFE has with these client groups. However, directors and senior managers do consult NCVER surveys of student outcomes (SOS) and employer use and views (SEUV), and this type of information is often required to respond to ministerial questions in parliament.

Currently the institute has mounted an internal project which uses a case management approach to track non-completers and also investigate withdrawal rates. In keeping in contact with these non-completers, the institute will be able to suggest alternative ways (including RPL and gap training) for them to complete their qualification when they are ready or in a better position to undertake their training or require the qualifications for licensing purposes. This will do two things: it will improve completion rates and also help bring in Commonwealth payments, which are only available for course completions.

Internal student questionnaires are conducted at teaching section levels to determine the satisfaction and evaluations of students. The Manufacturing, Engineering, Transport and Construction teaching team has a standing agenda item for their meetings which refers to student feedback. This provides opportunities for teachers to discuss any negative or positive feedback received from students. Each semester these teachers are also involved in writing reports that are provided to employers. Employers ring teachers about these reports and provide feedback on apprentice views. Teachers ring employers if the apprentice is not performing well.

The educational manager in charge of this team believes that relationships between the institute and industry are solid, mainly as a consequence of regular communication with employers and the trust that employers have in TAFE's ability to respond to complaints and to provide support for both students and employers.

Understanding relevant markets

TAFE SA Regional uses results of market research commissioned by the TAFE SA Network Marketing and International Unit (including the recent study undertaken by Macgregor Tan) to understand the markets in which it operates. This includes analysis of demographic information, and analyses of products, brand, competitors and economic trends.

There is a sense that TAFE in regional areas needed to understand the local economy and the work of other training providers in the region. Where there is demand which can be met cost-effectively, TAFE provides programs. Where particular qualifications are not on the institute's scope or where TAFE cannot provide programs in a cost-effective manner it will work with other providers to ensure regional training needs are met.

The Student Management System database of student contacts is a valuable information source and is used for direct marketing to past students to promote further training. Information from NCVER's Student Outcomes Survey and the Survey of Employer Use and Views is used in promotional materials.

DFEEST provides all South Australian institutes with national workforce development and labour market statistics, which are used to assess demand for training. Problems arise when the forecasts of training demand developed by DFEEST (and often based on DEEWR predictions about occupations in demand) are at odds with the intelligence gathered by specific industry sectors themselves.

A team of marketing officers from TAFE SA Network Services works with educational managers to develop a formal marketing plan. The four questions that drive the development of this plan are:

- ✧ What training does industry and the community require?
- ✧ What courses are needed?
- ✧ Who make up the market for the courses?
- ✧ How do I get to them?

The marketing staff are able to use direct mailing systems to contact employers. They have a better range of strategies at their disposal to understand the success of their program marketing. They are able to access statistics from the STARCOM program.

TAFE SA Regional has a range of informal means for gathering information on industry expectations and institute performance. Managers speak about having strong networks with industry and communities, which enable them to gather positive or negative feedback on how they are faring. In country areas the directors, general managers, senior program managers and educational managers are much more likely to run into business leaders and employers in a range of situations, including at the football (or other sporting events or locations), out shopping or at social events. Teachers and head teachers all have their personal networks and contacts and these form important links to industry and provide much-needed information on industry needs, any new enterprises or industries in the region, and any needs that can be filled by training.

Managing people

Human resources planning for the institute is heavily influenced by the current budget and budget projections for the future and the state of the economy (including levels of unemployment and issues related to environmental factors such as drought). Also important are analyses presented in state and federal policy papers and analyses of the state-based Human Resources Survey (the Bulb Survey).

The findings of the Bulb Survey also help to provide direction for the organisation. The survey provides information on the extent to which staff are satisfied with employment arrangements and

connected to changes proposed. It also provides information on staff turnover rates (especially retirement). Such information is important for workforce planning.

Other information is also used to help in HR planning. This includes information from the NCVER SOS and SEUV surveys, quality audits and occupational health and safety audits, all of which are taken into account. Information on what is happening in other states is also important.

The implementation of a cost, volume, pricing (CVP) model, which aims to capture the total cost of provision by allocating indirect costs to educational programs can also be used to benchmark HR costs across TAFE. The implementation of this CVP model has forced service areas to describe the service they are providing in detail. The educational program is buying a service and if the cost is too high they may also want a justification. The issue is getting the cost drivers right. For example, human resources may be evaluated by looking at HR costs per full-time equivalent (FTE) numbers.

The HR department must provide a report to the Office of Public Employment about the make-up of the workforce, the number of grievances, and percentage of funding spent on professional development. There is also quarterly monitoring of sick leave and turnover rates.

Learning from the successful practice of others

Flexible delivery has been a major focus for TAFE SA Regional and it has been keen to improve its understanding by learning from the successful practice of others. Visits to other providers (including interstate TAFEs) and to industry partners have helped to identify the strategies that are the most cost-effective.

Formal benchmarking exercises, information from NCVER statistical and research reports and talking to private business organisations are also ways for TAFE SA Regional to learn from the successful practice of others.

What managers and staff learn from conferences, networks, and their own reading helps the institute to keep abreast of current developments and also to modify their own activities. This is the case for managers and staff in educational program areas as much as for those in service areas.

Maintaining quality assurance processes

At TAFE SA Regional the AQTF 2007 process is used to evaluate the effectiveness of enrolment and certification processes, to audit compliance with legislative requirements and to apply concepts of continuous improvement. Also used is the Invalid Module Enrolment (IME) rate. The audit process is also used to evaluate the effectiveness of the Student Management System (SMS) in terms of accuracy of data input, the number of roll books that are not closed off and the results that continue to be outstanding at result time. To ensure that certification processes run smoothly, the academic registrars will contact individual educational managers to discuss issues with results that have not been completed.

A Program and Campus Services (PACS) team is responsible for administration processes for enrolments and results. Although one drawback of centralising processes is that educational work groups have lost ownership of these services, a positive consequence is that the consistency of processes can be assured and administrative staff can more easily be transferred to appropriate positions.

The issue was raised about how institutes can realistically capture data and the impact of student hours when data is captured at the competency unit level and when in many cases students will only do elements of a certain competency. According to the Chief Financial Officer of TAFE SA Regional, the emphasis shouldn't be on benchmarking against other institutions but should be on continuous improvement which is 'fundamental to quality assurance'.

Suggesting areas for improvement

There were suggestions for better information on student outcomes (including the number of students who repeat unnecessary modules or courses, student destinations, and employment outcomes.) There was also a need to understand what happened to those students who withdraw from courses because they have been able to gain employment. Gathering this information requires substantial resources and often the institutes themselves are not in a position to do this. Such a role could be fulfilled by NCVER. The recent push for fast-tracking apprenticeships also needed to be evaluated from employer and student perspectives.

The issue of benchmarking continues to be a concern, especially in comparisons about unit costs. 'We want to know how our institute does against other institutes; we need more rigour and then we would get more credibility (Institute Director). It is clear that institutes require a better idea of what is included in calculations of unit costs per hour benchmarks. TAFE SA Regional figures look relatively healthy when calculations only take into account costs related to direct delivery and not indirect costs. As soon as indirect costs are included, the unit costs per hour increase substantially. This becomes especially a problem when institutes are charged for the costs of services that are not directly related to their operations. In the words of one manager, 'They can't control us and then expect us to be independent.'

A view was posited by one senior manager that it is much more fruitful for TAFE institutes to be benchmarking themselves against their own prior performance, rather than benchmarking themselves against other institutes, especially if the same elements are not in the mix of indicators for benchmarking.

Another gap is having an understanding of the number of courses that are being run by the institute, what the majority of students are doing and what can be dropped off in terms of scope. The cost of reporting against KPIs is expensive and needs also to be considered.

There were also suggestions for a formal and systematic employer survey customised to local areas. There is a view that employers may be too busy to respond to formal surveys or may not be interested in becoming involved.

The SMS is a slow system which cannot be relied on to provide the range of services required. A new Student Information System (the SIS) is currently being developed to enable the institutes to have a more effective and efficient system, which would allow much greater and more accurate information about the client base of the institutes.

Another key gap is the lack of segmentation from available data sources by regions. For example, the institute would like to examine data (say from the Student Outcomes Survey) at the regional level. There is also no specific measurement of the benefit to the community of having a TAFE presence. More qualitative as well as quantitative data are required.

The HR manager of TAFE SA Regional currently meets with the HR managers of TAFE SA South Institute, TAFE SA North Institute and DFEEST, but these meetings are limited. There is a real need to formalise a range of networks and to include private providers. The sharing of issues and strategies across whole-of-government areas is more difficult in the country.

Another issue for public regional providers concerns the services that they are required to provide to local communities even if they are uneconomical. Commonly known as community service obligations (CSOs) these need to be clearly identified and funded appropriately.

TAFE SA South

TAFE SA South (TAS) is based in the southern region of Adelaide and is part of TAFE SA. It covers 12 different local council areas (Onkaparinga to the south, Burnside to the east, Holdfast Bay to the west and Prospect to the north). In 2007 the institute had 26 479 students and 239 076

subject enrolments. The institute offers over 400 courses. The student population is overwhelmingly South Australian. Ninety-six per cent of students were from South Australia in 2007, 2% from overseas and 2% from interstate; 87% had lived in Adelaide in 2006.

Sixty-five per cent of the \$96 million budget was generated from government funds, with the rest coming from student fees and industry training. In 2007 TAS employed 955 staff, with almost two-thirds of the workforce being lecturers or hourly-paid instructors.

Identifying goals and values

The goals and values of TAS are derived from the major aims of the South Australian Skills Strategy and the DFEST Strategic Plan. These aims are to ‘create a highly-skilled workforce to increase employment participation, enhance equity, promote innovation and shape the international competitiveness of the South Australian economy.’ The institute espouses six major strategic goals which are to:

- ✧ enhance skill development and client engagement
- ✧ embrace contemporary teaching and learning
- ✧ encourage partnerships and networks
- ✧ improve systems and facilities
- ✧ increase workplace culture and capacity
- ✧ strengthen accountability and quality.

Associated with each goal is a set of performance indicators which are generally designed to increase the level of performance across the different indicators by 2010 or 2011.

Achieving budgets and targets

The budget at both institute and work group level is used to guide, monitor and evaluate financial and non-financial performance. ‘The budget is at the pulse of every nano-second’ (Faculty Director). The budget is separated into three major streams: fee-for-service activity (including User Choice, domestic and international), profile funding, and special targets. For the 2007–08 year the institute had a budget of about \$96 million dollars and was close to meeting its targets.

Performance is monitored on a regular basis to see how the institute as a whole is progressing towards achieving institute-wide targets. More specifically, the institute monitors performance in terms of the number of hours delivered and compares this with the number of hours contracted under profile funding for the institute as a whole and for individual programs. The institute has some flexibility in meeting its overall performance targets. Sub-programs can record minor variations in over- or under-delivery, but the combined total must be on track.

The generation of fee-for-service activity is also taken as an indication of how well the institute’s products fare in the marketplace.

Meeting industry needs

Measures of employer and client satisfaction with training are key indicators of the extent to which the institute is able to meet industry needs. These are provided by national surveys including the NCVET Survey of Employer Use and Views (SEUV) and various publications of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) that deal with employer satisfaction. Information is also gained from publications produced by peak industry bodies like the Australian Industry Group (AIG), the Australian Council of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Australian Council of Private Education and Training.

Other information about institute ability to meet the needs of industry is also gleaned informally from meetings with industry advisory bodies, peak industry body publications, and VET reviews from different state jurisdictions.

To ensure that the institute meets employer needs, especially for any commercial or employment-based programs (including traineeships and apprenticeships), trainers will meet with employers to tailor a program to suit their needs. For apprenticeships and traineeships this is done through employers and registered training organisations agreeing on a contract of training.

Engagement with industry is also more apparent for programs like geoscience, spatial data and land surveying and hospitality training programs (which have substantial field trip and practical training requirements). The institute regularly gets requests for graduates to move into jobs in these fields prior to the completion of their qualifications. Repeat business for workplace education programs are other indications of successful programs.

Meeting student needs

Student enrolments, hours, success rates and drop-out rates are used as indicators of the extent to which the institute is meeting the needs of students for training and achievement. This information is complemented by findings from student course evaluations and NCVER surveys of students and student outcomes, and advice from student representatives on governing bodies. Another key indicator is employer satisfaction with the competency displayed by students.

Another venue for understanding the ‘student voice’ are ‘leaders listen’ forums held in different campuses. In 2008 the Executive Director undertook tours of seven campuses. These forums are group discussions led by the three faculty directors of the institute and comprise five or six students nominated by various work groups. Such forums help the institute to understand what students believe is going well, what they believe is not going well, and what issues are being experienced by different groups of students.

Focus groups of apprentices are held by some programs (for example, automotive and electrical) to gather feedback about what is going well and suggestions for improvement. Course advisory panels (for accredited courses) also have some student representation.

Understanding the characteristics of students is also one way to ensure that the institute is able to meet student needs. For example, if more people are in full-time work, then the institute needs to know if it needs to be more flexible to adapt to their needs.

The quality of provision at TAFE SA South is assessed by the achievement of key performance indicators and targets as well as via feedback from students and employers. The institute encourages lecturers to build survey tools for their particular programs using items from a databank of 150 statements on the institute’s intranet. In this way surveys will only canvas student opinion on aspects of teaching and learning that apply to them. Programs are mostly surveyed towards the end of their courses, although there are also cases where students are also surveyed at the end of term or semester. Some lecturers may also decide to ask the Quality Unit to develop a survey on their behalf.

A ‘tell us what you think’ brochure, along with a reply-paid envelope is made available to students via the client services centre. Once these have been completed, students can send these to the Quality Unit. Most comments that are made are generally concerned with facilities and computers.

A Student Withdrawal Survey was first trialled in 2008 to collect information on reasons for students dropping out of courses. Students were asked whether they had dropped out because they: had received a university offer; had enrolled in a new course; were experiencing family pressures; had changed jobs; had changed address; could not afford the training; didn’t like the lecturers; and did not have prior knowledge of what the course was to be about. Responses to the survey were quite low.

Managing people

The recruitment and employment of staff at TAS is the responsibility of educational program and business function managers, supported in this role by the Human Resources Department. Each person employed by the institute must first undergo relevant criminal checks and, once employed, an induction program. This induction program is accessed online and includes the responsibilities of the relevant department and work group, the institute strategic plan, and facilities. The manager will identify any other training the new recruit will require. A performance management system is used for the review of performance as well as for the identification of development plans. Here the intention is to identify actions which will help the individual continue to grow so that they are able to ‘work at 100% of their capacity or potential’ (HR Manager).

The HR Business Unit will also develop a Capacity Building Plan, which aims to address any critical HR issues that have been identified for the institute (for example, issues dealing with the ageing population, workforce planning).

Each educational program area at TAFE SA South will have its own work plan, which will identify any strategic business issues. Each educational program will also have a workforce plan. This comprises a ‘data story’ which outlines the current state of affairs as well as future trends. The future trends are based on staff responses to a staff Intentions Survey, where staff will identify what they intend to do in the next two to five years. The HR Business Unit will take account of this data story and will develop plans to address workforce planning for the institute as a whole. This means taking account of the number of people who will move into retirement as well as those who would like to move into management positions. This information is then fed into the Capacity Building Plan. For example, a senior lecturer who is intending to retire in the next few years will be teamed up with a more junior staff member who has identified a wish to move into the same position or function.

The HR Department also conducted a ‘scope of services’ questionnaire survey. This survey is completed by managers who are asked to provide feedback on how well each of the corporate function units is performing. Results of this survey are then shared with the Executive Management Team and then used to develop a ‘continuous improvement plan’.

The institute uses findings from the Bulb Survey (a whole-of-government survey of staff) to understand general staff satisfaction. A ‘tell us what you think’ process at local work team level helps the institute address any issues that are felt by staff. Corporate areas have service-level agreements which will be reviewed.

The ‘tell us what you think’ process provides students and staff with a mechanism for voicing complaints and grievances as well as offering positive feedback. Twice a year the HR Department will provide a summary of the feedback received by this process. Issues identified are also dealt with by the Continuous Improvement Plan.

The alignment of the number of hours delivered and FTE (full-time equivalent) rates is another key issue for financial and workforce planning. The TAFE SA award states that lecturers must work between 18 to 24 contact hours. When there is a misalignment of number of hours delivered and FTE rate, then special arrangements need to be put in place. The Financial Management Committee will ask questions about the extent to which lecturers are working at capacity. They will also take into account reasons which can explain the shortfall (for example, staff engagement in study leave or other offline activities). If the reason for the shortfall cannot be explained, then it will become clear that the institute must find a suitable place for the staff member, first within the institute, then across TAFE SA. If there is no suitable place, then the individual is identified as excess to requirements and may be offered a Voluntary Targeted Separation Package.

Understanding relevant markets

The institute tries to understand its market via information collected and analysed by DFEEST planning and evaluation personnel. These analyses try to provide information on the market for training, including what skills are in demand and how these affect the current and future demand for training (including fee-for-service and international markets). The Marketing Unit also aims to promote the institute through the development of promotional materials for domestic and international programs. In setting up relations and off-shore delivery programs with India and Vietnam, the institute has depended on assistance from the Transnational Unit and intelligence gathered by individual educators. In understanding its fee-for-service market it has looked at tendering opportunities. TAFE SA has been the most successful jurisdiction in the country to attract funding from the federal government's 'skills vouchers' program. The institute also depends on educational managers themselves to keep abreast of opportunities for training through their contacts with employers. In addition, labour market analysis provided by ABS, Deakin University, the National Institute of Labour Studies, and peak body associations are also consulted.

Implementing quality assurance processes

Quality assurance for TAFE SA Adelaide South is driven by the requirements of the Australian Quality Training Framework. In the past, the institute also focused on implementing the Business Excellence Framework.

Regular audits are conducted in the institute for an extension to its scope of registration within TAFE SA's Delegated Powers. Audits are conducted by Quality Unit staff, using a consistent audit checklist. Audits cover all aspects of the course, starting from the time students enquire about the course until they graduate. This includes development of teaching materials and guides, assessments, physical facilities, processes in place to address disability issues and individual learning needs, RPL, management of apprentices in the workplace, and examples of mechanisms that are in place for obtaining student feedback. The audit usually takes about 1.5 to 2 hours. An audit report is prepared and provided to the office of the delegate. Moderation processes are in place to monitor the consistency of audit processes and audit reporting. TAFE SA has a Quality Network, at which auditors can discuss audit judgments, reporting and recognition and reporting of non-compliance.

As part of the extension to the scope of registration process different program areas are expected to establish delivery and assessment strategies. At TAFE SA level, this is undertaken by the relevant Quality Assurance Group (QAG), a representative group generally made up of principal lecturers and advanced skills lecturers. The role of the QAG is to maintain standards, establish minimum entry requirements for qualifications, and undertake assessment moderation activities, which also involve industry stakeholders. QAG members are responsible for ensuring two-way communication processes between QAG and the wider lecturing body, tabling issues for discussion at QAG on behalf of peers, and relaying discussion outcomes back.

As part of AQTF 2007 the Quality Unit will also be responsible for implementing the learner satisfaction and employer satisfaction Quality Indicator survey tools developed by the National Quality Council and the Australian Council for Educational Research. This information will enable employer and student satisfaction to be benchmarked across the three institutes of TAFE SA. The Quality Unit also helps program areas to develop surveys to canvass student opinion and satisfaction with training and maintains a database of questions/statements from which programs can draw on to develop their own student surveys. Education managers are asked to provide evidence of what improvements they have implemented in response to feedback from students.

Learning from the successful practice of others

Conferences are important avenues for informing practitioners, managers, trainers and support staff about innovative ways for doing things. For example, the 'e-dayz' conference provides opportunities for participants to learn about and discuss a range of e-learning initiatives,

technologies, examples and case studies. Here participants will hear from keynote speakers, engage in small discussion groups, attend hands-on computer workshops, and view or present showcases and displays. Conferences also provide a great opportunity for participants to establish networks with other practitioners across the state and nationally.

Quality networks throughout South Australia meet through QAGs, where they share resources, good practice stories, and discuss risks and where are given any advanced warnings of changes which will affect program areas. For example, the automotive QAG arranged for lecturers to go offline to develop student learning guides and assessment tools. Each lecturer concentrated on one or two units, with all completed resources pooled and shared across TAFE SA.

Suggesting areas for improvement

Information on performance against budgets is calculated by DFEEST and provided back to institutes. The problem here is that the figures may change from month to month as records on enrolments and results are updated. There is also a view that the Student Management System is archaic and inefficient.

Government intentions to increase the amount of contestable funding to about 50% in the future will require the institute to get a clearer grasp on how it is performing in attracting government funds.

Hard data on the extent to which the institute is meeting industry needs is felt to be lacking in one important aspect. It is often difficult to obtain a good understanding of what it is that industry requires, first, because industry needs vary across and within sectors, and also because of great variability across employers. What is required is formal and consistent advice that enables providers to go about planning meaningful and relevant programs. This could be provided by national industry skills councils (ISCs) and local industry advisory bodies (ITABs). Having all this information as well as analyses of labour market demand in one source document would help providers to access the information they require for strategic planning readily and easily. There is also a perceived need to understand how well the system is addressing various cultural issues, now that the demographic landscape is changing through skilled migration programs.

There is also a dearth of information about student destinations (including employment and further training destinations) and on the reasons for students exiting programs. Such information is felt to be particularly relevant in view of government intentions to introduce outcomes-based funding. The institute is also keen to know whether it is delivering skills that are important to employers.

Another gap in information relates to students who ultimately do not enrol in programs in which they have shown an interest. 'We want to know why people who want to study do not end up going through with it' (Institute Director). This information can also help the institute to adjust delivery to address the needs of students, including their economic and social issues. For example, having more full-time workers as part of the institute's client groups may signal a need to increase flexibility in how and when programs are provided. The institute does not have enough information on the level of support these students get and on their interaction with enrolment processes.

There is also a need for clear benchmarking data of what services could be provided in terms of 'What's best practice. What's good practice?'

There is also a need to better understand how institutes could measure and monitor the work output of lecturing staff. The problem with using current indicators of performance (based on number of contact hours) is that it does not take into account the various methodologies and technologies that are used in the current teaching and learning environment.

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