
The Learning Powerhouse: Switched on to Work
Suggested Speaking Points for the Key Address

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TAFE NSW: The Challenges Ahead!

Acknowledgements

- Ms Dianne Murray– MC
- Ms Megan Lilly, National General Manager, Education and Training, Australian Industry Group
- Ms Anne De Salis, member of the NSW TAFE Commission Board
- Distinguished guests, colleagues

I would like to acknowledge the *Gadigal people* of the *Eora Nation* who are the traditional custodians of this land. I would also like to pay respect to the Elders, past and present, and extend that respect to Aboriginals present.

I am delighted to be part of this teaching and learning conference – The Learning Powerhouse, and to be speaking about issues that impact on you today. In particular, I will be speaking about (1) the importance of aligning teaching and assessing practices to the needs of industry, as highlighted in the vox pop you have just seen, and (2) the future directions for TAFE NSW. How does TAFE NSW respond to these shifting needs of industry in a responsive and flexible way and what are the implications for our vocational education and training system?

Switched on to Work

TAFE NSW is entering a new era - where complexity, uncertainty, diversity *and* opportunity are visible constructs of our work.

The VET sector is being challenged by an increasing number of external drivers: intensification of global competition, a skills shortage accompanying an aging population with fewer Australians of a working age, ongoing economic and social reforms that significantly impact on industrial relations, work structures, and our traditional sources of labour.

We are well placed to meet these challenges. As VET professionals, your wealth of knowledge, skills, experiences, qualifications and high standards of practice has established the Australian vocational education and training system as a world leader. And it is critical to the survival and growth of TAFE NSW that you continue to build your inventory of knowledge and skills mastery through continuous professional development. The world has changed and complacency is not an option! The Commonwealth can and will withhold \$ in future years if performance targets are not reached. It is vital that we all work together to reshape the vocational training system to be more flexible, adaptable and responsive. You have a critical role to play – you must take an active part in creating solutions to the challenges confronting our VET system!

The pressures and challenges upon us are very complex: We are faced with:

- Critical skills shortages in some sectors, accompanying a fall in demand in other sectors. As you heard in the video, Kevin Spiteri from Broen's Industry said, 'industry can't wait', we need a highly skilled workforce now. There is a need for rapid learning and flexible skills sets. Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reported that a more responsive and flexible national apprenticeship, vocational education and training and skills recognition system is vital to meeting both current and future skills needs.
- An aging workforce that is not being replenished by young people entering the workforce. Older workers will be needed in the workplace and as vocational educators, you will need to re-engage these people in continuous and lifelong learning. Australia must increase the proportion of Australians who have skills and qualifications.
- Changing workforce demographics and the need for re-skilling, learner preparedness and motivation, as well as learner confidence with ICT.
- Sustaining a vocational education and training system responsive to the cutting edge of technology and innovation. As Barry Wong from the Australian Computer Society said in the video, it is critical that we are up to date with skills training.
- Changes to the way we work - new training packages, unit based enrolment, assessment validation and AQTF audits, to name a few!
- A greater demand for professional currency. As pointed out in the video, industry relies on our professional judgement and on our ability to link training to current workplace practice. We must ensure that our quality training and assessing processes are best practice and provide educational leadership in the regulatory framework within which we work. In the video, you heard teachers speak about checklists and benchmarks; more than ever we must have quality processes in place to ensure consistency in national standards. A new outcomes

based auditing model for all RTOs has been developed to support the recent revision to AQTF standards.

Without doubt, TAFE NSW's commitment to quality vocational education remains unshakeable. What we need is new perspectives and practices that will sustain this commitment.

We must dramatically increase the quantity of workplace delivery TAFE NSW provides. Our future is in providing quality workplace delivery – this is no longer an option, but part of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agenda. Training needs articulated by industry must be translated into quality, client-focussed training and assessment delivered where and when industry requests it.

We have a paradoxical situation where we are training and educating more people than ever before, but we still have a massive shortage of skilled workers. I don't need to tell you that vocational education and training resources are tight and will remain tight, and there is much pressure for a market funding mechanism. Any solution to addressing skills demands cannot be based on a simplistic formula for increasing the number of training services.

A key issue is the mix of training, which needs to be clearly distinguished from perceptions that there is insufficient training. There are many TAFE-trained people who have never used the skills they acquired in their training.

We need to take on a different way of looking at skills – at our definition of skill, development of skills and deployment of skills.

Never before has our capability to nurture productive partnerships with enterprises and industries, and to build new knowledge with them, been more crucial. This capability is essential for our organisational wellbeing and for the wellbeing of Australia.

Strengthen our links with industry –New perspectives on teaching and assessing

When I am faced with comments from researchers and the media, such as “**To understand and respond to training needs, it is essential that each one of us builds and strengthens our links with industry**”, I wonder what we have been doing for the past twenty years!

My immediate response to them is “spend a little time inside TAFE NSW and you will see how industry and our learners are at the centre of our world; our passion”.

This is however, muted by the realities of the *Skilling Australia's Workforce, 2005-2008 Commonwealth/State Agreement*, which sets out ongoing and new challenges for us to master over the next four years including:

- responsiveness to the skill needs of industry, especially in areas of skills shortage
- equipping the workforce with more flexible and adaptable skills
- responding flexibly to how and when clients want training as employment and work patterns change
- improving training outcomes for priority clients to help them realise their full potential and acquire skills for jobs relevant to the labour market, and
- sustaining training quality and national consistency, so that clients can continue to have confidence in the training and qualifications received.

Central to this agreement and to the future directions for TAFE NSW is closer partnerships with industry.

From a corporate perspective, the establishment of the TAFE NSW National Business Office this year is an important example of how we are developing our relationships and partnerships with industry, particularly large clients.

The National Business Office complements our substantial work in building mutually productive relationships and partnerships with small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

The National Business Office, in conjunction with TAFE NSW Institutes, is gathering business intelligence, will encourage new perspectives and will enrich our knowledge of how we can better work with large clients.

Established in May, in the brief period the National Business Office has been operating we already are able to see clear examples of how new understandings are being forged between large enterprises and TAFE NSW on what is possible, and what will be possible, in providing skills development within workplaces.

We must seek new perspectives on our industry relationships, challenge our current knowledge and grapple with how as educators we will sustain continuous improvement. Your challenge is to:

- provide innovative, flexible and inclusive teaching and assessment practices, which meets the expectations of your students, industry and community.
- establish and promote alternative pathways, particularly for people with existing skills and experiences or people in targeted groups.

Recognition of prior learning is not yet well used as a pathway to a qualification and further training. An improved process to recognise the existing skills of all people entering training will be introduced by January 2007, so that workers do not have to repeat or undertake training for skills they have already acquired through work.

Workplaces now require more emphasis on employability skills as they seek adaptable, responsible, ethical workers with high-level interpersonal skills. Workers need the communication skills necessary to form and use productive networks. In the video, industry spoke of the need for communication skills in addition to the technical skills. Workers must be able to communicate effectively with others to access employment opportunities.

As you well realise, our students will be competing for employment in an increasingly casualised job market. Not only will our learners need the update or acquire new technical skills to perform the work, they will also need the ability to transfer skills to future job roles. Skills portability and recognition of skills and training will be a major focus of the vocational education and training system.

The number of people participating in vocational and technical education through TAFE NSW continues to increase. More than 10 percent of the Australian adult population is participating in some form of vocational or technical education. Mature age students are now one of our fastest-growing client groups. We now have the highest level of apprenticeship approvals since the late 1980s. Maintaining this level of participation will be crucial in sustaining the number of apprentices and trainees required to reduce skills shortages in trade occupations. There will be a shortening of the duration of an apprenticeship where competencies are demonstrated and allowing for school-base apprenticeships. Additional nationally portable qualifications will enable apprentices to have skills recognised at or below the full trade qualifications, with an increase in qualification exit and entry points.

TAFE NSW is committed to providing Indigenous Australians with skills development for viable jobs and sharing their learning culture. Enrolments by aboriginal students in TAFE NSW have risen by 26.5% over the period 2000 - 2004. At the same time enrolments by people with disabilities grew by 66.8% and enrolments by people from rural and isolated areas increased by 9%. Despite these improvements, employment outcomes for some equity groups remain below those of the general population and more needs to be done. Education must be inclusive, with a range of teaching and assessment tools that assess the competencies of the individual learner.

The Way Forward - New knowledge, new role

I don't need to tell you that your role has changed dramatically, from the traditional focus on curriculum and class-room delivery to one where the focus is on business needs and client relationships. You will need to:

- partner with students as lifelong learners
- learn new ways of working, grounding your professional judgement in current practice
- access colleagues with specialist skills and business knowledge
- research new learning theories and practice, and
- develop new networks to sustain your professional practice.

The video reminded us that we have a world class vocational and technical education system to be extremely proud of: dedicated teachers partnering with industry; teachers informing their practice through real-world experiences; teachers ensuring quality training and assessing outcomes for students, as well as responding to the ever changing needs of industry and students.

To meet the challenges of tomorrow with confidence and renewed energy, more than ever, you will draw upon professional development to support you in responding to a dynamic training environment. You must broaden your perception of professional development to that of capability development, where the focus is on the capacity of individuals and groups to engage in all aspects of their business. Seek out new models such as the Life Based Learning model that will be launched by Kim Fillingham this afternoon, which opens up new opportunities for capability development. It adopts a strength based (rather than a deficit based) orientation and takes the best of past learnings with you, and integrates it into the new. Learners need to be able to access a wider range of diverse and personalised strategies and take responsibility for their learning processes.

Use your knowledge of industry, your skills and networks to be part of the solution to building a flexible and responsive vocational training system.

Take this wonderful opportunity you have today to engage in critical conversations with other practitioners. Focus on assessment and workplace learning. Share your knowledge and build learning networks with your colleagues and industry that will ignite innovation and partnerships across TAFE NSW.

I wish you an inspiring and productive day.