



**Griffith University's Submission to:
Queensland's proposed responses to *The challenges of
skills for jobs and growth: A green paper***

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Introduction

Griffith University is pleased to submit this response to the Queensland Government's Green Paper entitled *Queensland's proposed responses to the challenges of skills for jobs and growth*. The paper is timely and offers an important opportunity to discuss issues associated with enhancing the state's capacity for skill development and Griffith University's role in that enhancement.

Griffith supports the overall direction of the paper, particularly its emphasis on the need for most people and all young people to secure tertiary qualifications that are:

- socially valued;
- personally and professionally relevant;
- meet employer needs;
- anticipate new and emerging skill needs;
- provide access to secure employment;
- responsive to community needs; and
- are linked to, and prepare them for, further learning.

As well as contributing to Queensland's economic competitiveness, Griffith also believes that these outcomes are fundamental to achieving an inclusive, tolerant, and diverse society, and an effective and resilient democracy. We return to these broader educational goals later in our response.

Griffith is particularly committed to achieving these goals through developing strong institutional partnerships with schools and TAFEs in the Brisbane Gold-Coast corridor. The university is currently considering specific proposals to develop closer relationships among Griffith, and the Gold Coast, Logan, Moreton, Southbank and Yeronga Institutes of TAFE. The key theme in these proposals is that Griffith needs to develop new types of partnerships with TAFE that can leverage the complementary focus of educational provisions and qualifications offered in both educational sectors to develop innovative, high quality programs oriented to new and emerging industries and fields of knowledge, developed in response to emerging demand, and linked to research in those areas. One instance of this is the Coomera Precinct, which is being developed through the partnership between Gold Coast TAFE, Griffith and the local industry and community. Our goals in these kinds of partnerships are to complement the aims outlined in the Green Paper, and we hope to make an important contribution to Queensland's future skill and knowledge base through this strategy that comprises strategic partnerships that are in the interest of local employers, students and communities as well as the two institutions (TAFE and Griffith).

We are also currently exploring ways in which we can deepen our partnerships with schools in our region, and have commenced work with the Gold Coast Secondary Principals Network to do so. Partnerships between TAFEs, schools and universities will be key enabling mechanisms that will help the Queensland government achieve its goals.

List of recommendations:

Griffith University makes fifteen key recommendations in response to the Green Paper. These recommendations relate to specific discussion points about the paper, and are repeated in the relevant section.

- 1 That Queensland's universities be invited to participate in developing skill formation strategies for Queensland;
- 2 That the Queensland government broker arrangements that bring together TAFE, Queensland's universities, bodies, employers and unions to develop co-ordinated and strategically focussed responses to specific skill shortages, including the development of new qualifications, pathways, and curriculum approaches that embed work-integrated learning, linked to research and development;
- 3 That the government consider providing additional funding to existing Queensland-based Collaborative Research Centres (CRC) to develop training responses, through including the relevant TAFE institute as part of the consortium;
- 4 That the government consider requiring all applied research funded or supported by the Queensland government to include in a research dissemination consortium the relevant TAFE institute designated as the centre of excellence, which would have particular responsibility to develop appropriate training responses to support the diffusion of innovation arising from that research.
- 5 That the objectives in the Green Paper be broadened to include developing individuals' capacity to participate as citizens and in developing social capital generally;
- 6 That TAFE continue to provide lower-level VET certificates and general education as the platform for the development of skills and qualifications within Queensland;
- 7 That reforms to apprenticeship training include nested awards with lower level exits that culminate in the award of tradesperson and lead to higher level specialist qualifications;
- 8 That VET qualifications prepare students for their vocation through qualifications that are not limited to the specific skills needed for work, through developing the knowledge, skills and capacities they need to undertake higher level education, and to be active and contributing members of their work-place and communities;

- 9 That the Queensland government consider funding initiatives that build social partnerships between groups of employers, unions, government, and education and training providers as a mechanism to provide nuanced information and localised advice about emerging skill needs as a basis for developing appropriate qualifications and curriculum;
- 10 That the Green Paper's priorities (on page 4) be broadened to extend partnerships with employers to include the contributions of unions and professional associations, as well as other stakeholders in the outcomes of VET, including universities, schools, and broader the community;
- 11 That the Queensland government seek to advance policy reform that achieves nationally consistent industry regulations and occupational requirements, to free TAFE to develop locally responsive curriculum and learning outcomes with employers and other key stakeholders, based on broad national learning outcomes in each industry or occupational area, and in ways not jeopardising the broader education goals required for a responsive and informed workforce;
- 12 That the proposed strategy to develop TAFE institutes as centres of excellence be balanced with the need to ensure TAFEs have the capacity to build strong partnerships with schools and universities, and to meet the needs of local communities and employers through a comprehensive range of provision;
- 13 That alternatives to the proposed merger between Yeronga and Bremer Institutes of TAFE be considered, to ensure that any merger builds on existing local and regional partnerships;
- 14 That the Queensland government consider implementing an income-contingent loans scheme for TAFE fees, or at least for TAFE fee for service programs; and,
- 15 That the Queensland government consider developing a representative advisory body to promote closer collaboration between schools, TAFEs and universities, and to facilitate closer collaboration between education providers and employers, employees, professional bodies and government.

The Green Paper's strengths

This section highlights the Green Paper's key strengths, and makes some recommendations about the way in which particular proposals contained in the Green Paper can be implemented or extended.

The effect of employer practices on skill development is considered

The Green Paper recognises that economic competitiveness and innovation is not *simply* a supply-side issue reducible to the putative deficiencies in VET. The analysis and discussion concerning demand-side issues identifies fundamental factors, often overlooked in superficial analyses of skill shortages. These include: long-term structural changes in the labour market and demographic profile, the changing nature of skill in light of ongoing and rapid change in technology, and particularly important, the employment practices of employers which are not always conducive in attracting, retaining and supporting skilled workers or in providing incentives for employees to develop high-level, industry focussed skills. The emphasis on the need for work-place reform is very welcome, and goes some way to redress simplistic analyses which blame education and training providers for not being sufficiently responsive to employer demands. We believe this analysis can be extended and offer some suggestions about how to do so in the next section which outlines ways in which the Green Paper can be strengthened.

Lifelong learning and pathways between sectors of post-compulsory education and training is prominent

The Green Paper stresses the importance of lifelong learning and particularly the links between different sectors of post-compulsory education and training, and in providing coherent learning pathways for students of all ages and prior educational attainment. This will provide an important basis for policy at the state level, and also for driving institutional partnerships between providers in different sectors. In contrast to institutional drivers for collaboration that focus on internal institutional imperatives, the Green Paper will help education institutions to consider learning and qualification pathways by framing them as staged learning opportunities mapped to different and increasingly skilled stages over a career. Consequently, it may be useful to engage Queensland's universities more centrally in developing the skill formation strategies and their enactment as flagged by the Green Paper, and also to consider policy responses that bring together TAFE and universities, professional bodies, employers and unions in specific areas in which shortages exist.

Recommendations:

- 1 That Queensland's universities be invited to participate in developing skill formation strategies for Queensland; and,
- 2 That the Queensland government broker arrangements that bring together TAFE, Queensland's universities, bodies, employers and unions to develop co-ordinated and strategically focussed responses to specific skill shortages, including the development of new qualifications, pathways, and curriculum approaches that embed work-integrated learning, linked to research and development.

The need for completed qualifications is emphasised

The Green Paper emphasises the importance of completing qualifications in VET, rather than limiting participation to statements of attainment. This is essential for young people who need an entry-level qualification for the workforce, and for those who have experienced long-term disadvantage in finding secure employment. Moreover, qualifications are more than the sum of their parts. The extent to which qualifications prepare people for existing and emerging skill needs depends on the way they connect, synthesise and integrate different components of their educational experiences and achievements, rather than consisting of an aggregation of discrete components.

The contribution of publicly funded qualifications to the public good extends beyond provision of specific skills needed for specific occupations in the Queensland economy. Such provision also has a fundamental role to play in contributing to the growth of social capital, and to creating a more tolerant and inclusive society. In turn, according to Florida (2005), societies that are pluralistic and inclusive have a greater capacity for innovation and creativity. Consequently, an emphasis on completed qualifications helps the Queensland government to achieve different but related goals by linking economic growth, innovation and creativity to social justice, equity and inclusion. Moreover, as individuals' work identities link their social and personal lives and buttress their sense of worth (Pusey 2003), the securing of qualifications that are valued in these ways will yield a more broadly based legacy.

Griffith believes that these broader social objectives of qualifications are not yet sufficiently recognised or incorporated as outcomes embedded within VET qualifications. We suggest that Queensland's VET qualifications explicitly recognise the dual and related objectives of preparing people for work and ensure they have the attributes, knowledge and skills they need to contribute to their communities. We return to this theme in the next section and include specific recommendations about the way in which this can be enacted.

The role of VET in contributing to innovation is recognised

The Green Paper emphasises the role of VET in innovation by outlining the importance of VET in diffusing new skills and knowledge throughout the work-force, and provides strategies to achieve these outcomes through a renewed emphasis on high level skills and extending the skills of existing trades, by providing opportunities for skilled workers to undertake higher level qualifications focussing on more complex knowledge and skills. This aspect of the paper could be strengthened by making more explicit the links between research and diffusion of its outcomes through a process that draws researchers into dialogue with those who they inquire about and for. This necessitates stronger links between universities' research functions and developing new skills through TAFE as a platform for interpreting, diffusing and appraising research outcomes.

Gibbons (2004: 97) argues that much innovation depends less on original discoveries than on "the timely take up, modification, and marketing of knowledge solutions that already exist but need to be adapted to local environments." Research and innovation must be as concerned about the context of its application as the context of its creation. This is a strong argument for collaboration between the VET and higher education sectors that goes beyond the need to develop pathways for students, to partnerships around research and innovation.

It may be useful for the government to consider the way in which skill development can be linked to research and development conducted through universities such as Griffith, particularly focussing on applied research developed in partnership between universities and employers. One strategy would be to require all collaborative research between universities and employers funded or subsidised by government to include in the research partnership a TAFE partner (particularly the TAFE institute designated as a centre of excellence in the relevant area), which would have particular responsibility for developing appropriate training responses to meet new and emerging skill requirements linked to innovation. The government may also consider providing additional funding to existing research partnerships (for example, CRCs) to develop such a role by including the relevant TAFE institute.

Recommendations

- 3 That the government consider providing additional funding to existing Queensland-based Collaborative Research Centres (CRC) to develop training responses, through including the relevant TAFE institute as part of the consortium;
- 4 That the government consider requiring all applied research funded or supported by the Queensland government to include in a research

dissemination consortium the relevant TAFE institute designated as the centre of excellence, which would have particular responsibility to develop appropriate training responses to support the diffusion of innovation arising from that research.

The limitation of markets in meeting government objectives is recognised

The Green Paper goes beyond market responses to the supply of education and training, and recognises that markets are not a panacea for meeting broader government objectives, employer needs, and the specific requirements of individuals. In flagging policies that aim to facilitate co-operation between TAFEs, the Green Paper opens the way for developing more nuanced responses to skill needs that leverage resources, expertise and capacity more effectively. It will allow providers to build to their strengths and to broker institutional partnerships more responsive to student learning needs and employer skill needs at the local level, without concerns about and the distractions of unhelpful competition across TAFE institutes.

Where more work is needed

This section discusses those aspects of the Green Paper that Griffith feels needs further work. It includes suggestions and specific recommendations for strengthening the Green Paper.

The focus of the Green Paper on skills for work is too narrow

The current emphasis in the Green Paper on skills for work is too limited because it does not include the broader social objectives that VET must help meet, including developing individuals' capacity to participate as citizens and in developing social capital generally. TAFE must not only be a leader of work-force development, it should also be a leader of community development, through seeking to build capacity in communities, regions and industries. These objectives have intrinsic merit, as the purpose of government is to provide the conditions for all citizens to flourish, including the most vulnerable, and to create an inclusive, socially just, and tolerant society and robust democracy.

The lesson from the last 30 years in Australia and overseas is that there is a strong relationship between human capital and social capital. The OECD and the World Bank recognise that human capital developed in isolation from social capital is less likely to be used to its full potential, and that societies with high unemployment and large numbers of socially excluded groups in the community are less competitive, resilient and adaptable (Maskell, 2000; OECD 2001; Woolcock, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Field, 2003).

Furthermore, broader social objectives for education that include developing social capital also make strong economic sense. Queensland needs to include *all* sections of society as active participants in the labour market, to support competitive and innovative industries. The capacity of a society's citizens underpins both its human capital and social capital, particularly societies experiencing perpetual change, and the capacity of a society's citizens depends on the quality of their education and training and in the opportunities open to them through partnerships between the different sectors of education. Also, it is the same person who makes decisions about their life outside of work as those within it. The quality of that decision-making including that associated with further education, is likely to be better when well-informed.

Strong and inclusive communities are likely to generate trust, which reduces the cost of doing business and the cost of recruitment, increases the take-up of innovation, and promotes inter-firm collaboration, all of which contributes to a high-skills economy. Queenslanders, as with all Australians, need specific skills in the knowledge economy, but they also need capacities that enable them to work with others in different cultural contexts, cope with change, solve complex problems, be literate in a variety of print-based and electronic media, manage their own learning and work careers, and be effective and contributing members of their workplace and community. These are the foundation of both human and social capital. Moreover, it is these very qualities that are increasingly evident in countries who are growing competitors and who, in many cases, are engaging their young in broad, general education as well as vocationally specific education (Dore and Sako 1989).

Recommendation

- 5 That the objectives in the Green Paper be broadened to include developing individuals' capacity to participate as citizens and in developing social capital generally.

More consideration is needed on processes of learning

The Green Paper makes the welcome statement that training packages cannot meet *all* needs, and that new types of qualifications are needed to develop higher-level skills, and meet new and emerging skills. However, the Green Paper needs to give more consideration to the relationship between processes of learning and qualification outcomes.

The Green Paper focuses on the *outcomes* of VET, but does not problematise the *inputs* needed to achieve these goals, and nor does it explore the processes

of human cognition and learning that underpin the kinds of complex performances required in contemporary work, none more so that when technology is required to be deployed. Here, the use of symbolic and representational forms of knowledge come to the fore (e.g. Martin & Scribner 1991). These are however often harder to develop and learn to use with effect. Hence, particular pedagogic practices are required. Therefore, focussing only on the outcomes and not the processes of cognition and learning ignores the very capacities and attributes that have long secured competent work performance and are likely required in particular forms given the increased reliance on technology. The Green Paper tends to reduce the process of skill development to a matter of supply and demand, through assuming that it is sufficient to identify the skills that will be needed, and resolving to supply those skills.

This leads to proposals in the Green Paper to:

- reduce apprenticeship training times and remove any requirement for minimum training times in favour of assessment of competency outcomes; and,
- move away from the provision of general education and lower level VET certificates.

The importance and role of general education in learning for work is thus under-estimated, and this is reflected in the Research Paper, which asserts (without substantiating the claim) that:

“Continuation of current patterns will see an increasing oversupply of some university qualifications, with more and more people ending up in lower skilled employment, not [using] the qualifications they have. This problem is likely to be most acute for people undertaking generalist degree programs that are not particularly vocationally oriented such as general arts degrees.” (p. 25)

The implication is that generalist education, or vocationally oriented education that includes broad developmental outcomes (as in education for the professions), detracts from developing skills for work. The only learning outcomes that are emphasised in both the Green Paper and the Research Paper besides specific skills needed for work, are ‘employability skills’.

However, restricting the role of VET to identifying and teaching only those skills needed for work will not help to increase the skill levels of the workforce, particularly in developing the open-ended capacities needed for change and to learn *new* skills. First, this assumes that qualifications are the sum of competency-outcomes, and all that it is necessary is to identify specific skills and teach them. This approach is particularly problematic when applied to apprenticeship training. Qualifications are more than the sum of their parts,

and the learning outcomes included in them reflect only part of the learning that students need to undertake (Collins, Brown & Hollum, 1991: 9). Apprentices learn far more than the specific skills they need to do a particular task. They need to learn what it means to be part of their trade, how to negotiate their way, relate to others and solve problems in unforeseen circumstances. This is *particularly* important for young people in apprenticeships, who need to develop their identity and grow up through learning their vocation, while it may be less of an issue for older people who are retraining to enter the trades. Griffith consequently does not support shortening apprenticeship training times unless there is clear evidence that learning processes and outcomes will not be compromised. The evidence to date is those with existing levels of apprenticeship training are able to make successful transitions to higher education (Searle, Billett & Behrens 2005).

Moreover, there must also be confidence in the *processes* of learning if a qualification is to be trusted. Young (2003: 208) explains, that:

“...the credibility, quality and currency of a qualification is only partly based on what it says the person qualified can do or knows; far more important is the trust that society in general and specific users in particular (those whom select, recruit or promote) have in the qualification...If one or other of these communities does not underpin a qualification, it will have a problem of credibility, however well specified its outcomes.”

In Australia we have a good example of the way trust in a qualification can collapse when the emphasis is placed on competency outcomes at the expense of processes of learning, with the collapse of trust in the Certificate IV in Work-place Assessment and Training. This was brought into such disrepute that it was eventually replaced in 2004 by the new Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, which specifies in far more detail the *inputs* of training. Emphasising competency outcomes at the expense of processes of learning runs the risk that there will be a collapse of trust in apprenticeship training by those who employ and work with apprentices.

As an alternative, Griffith suggests that apprenticeship training be restructured to create lower level exit qualifications that reach the status and standard of the tradesperson over time. This will help to meet specific skill shortages in the short-term while providing apprentices with a career structure that recognises and values the complexity and depth of their knowledge and skill. Moreover, Griffith supports the proposal in the Green Paper to create specialist education and training beyond initial training as a way of increasing skills, creating new learning pathways, enhancing career structures, and valuing the trades.

Moreover, we propose that the accreditation processes for providers of VET courses leading to qualifications be extended to go beyond accounting only for the resources (inputs), but move to apply criteria associated with the quality of learning experiences students will encounter and the purposes of the pedagogic strategies being adopted to secure both the specific and broader vocational education goals required by Queenslanders to be competent in both their working lives and those outside.

The second reason why it is necessary to consider processes of learning and not just the specific skills needed for work is that the capacity to exercise skill at work emerges from more fundamental, complex and wide-ranging knowledge, skills and abilities, and this relies on the *full* development of the individual in all parts of their life. While employers may need *specific* skills, the condition for securing these skills rests upon individuals' capacity to exercise them, and this capacity cannot be developed by limiting teaching to those skills. Moreover, the Green Paper emphasises the need for continuing education, and this presupposes students have the knowledge (including disciplinary knowledge), skills and capacities they need to undertake further education at higher levels, including higher education. Griffith believes that VET qualifications need to prepare students for work *and* for further study, and that these two objectives are interdependent rather than mutually exclusive.

Griffith also believes that it would be a mistake for TAFE to withdraw from general education and from lower level VET qualifications. This is because general education needs to be a feature of *all* VET qualifications, but also because TAFE needs to provide opportunities for people to undertake general education as part of its broader role in providing second-chance general education to the community and in building social capital. TAFE needs to provide high quality general education at levels *beyond* basic literacy and numeracy, to ensure that all Queenslanders have the opportunity to undertake education that develops their knowledge and capacities, and also to engage in pathways that lead to higher education. Indeed, it is perhaps for school leavers participating in these programs that this provision stands as another opportunity for those of whom school was not entirely engaging or successful. Without access to such programs, there is the danger of a lifetime of marginal and unsatisfactory engagement in social and economic aspects of life that build disadvantage as the demands for work roles become increasingly demanding. If nothing else, the likelihood of constant change in working life means that highly specific skill development cannot effectively prepare individuals.

TAFE also needs to provide lower-level certificates to provide a ladder of opportunity for Queenslanders to progress through to higher-level VET certificates and diplomas and to degrees. In 2003, 12.1% and 11% of Queensland's VET students were enrolled at diploma (and above) and

Certificate IV levels respectively, compared to 11% and 11.5% for Australia as a whole. Queensland has more students enrolled at Certificate III level (27.6%) compared to Australia overall (23.3%) (NCVER 2004). Queensland's progress in providing higher-level VET training is consequently comparable to Australia overall.

If Queensland TAFE were to focus on certificates 4, diplomas and advanced diplomas, while restricting delivery of certificates 3 to the trades, it would remove the capacity of TAFE institutes to meet the *range* of needs in their communities, and it would also diminish TAFE's capacity to provide pathways leading to skilled work by severing its connection with those who need to develop these skills. It is very risky to outsource lower level VET qualifications and general education to private providers, because these students are often most in need of solid support and professional educational practice. Engaging students who do not have the basic skills they need, and convincing them to undertake learning pathways that are complex and personally challenging will be a long process, requiring patience and high levels of investment to win their trust and demonstrate they have the capacities to embark on learning pathways (particularly if they have only had negative experiences of formal learning). More than anything else, TAFE will need to invest in relationship building with these students, and provide the scaffolding for their future learning. Focussing on the *student* and not the institution means that TAFE needs to be able to support them through their learning pathways. It may make administrative sense to differentiate the roles of public and private providers, but from the perspective of the student this may present another set of obstacles to be overcome.

Recommendations:

- 6 That TAFE continue to provide lower-level VET certificates and general education as the platform for the development of skills and qualifications within Queensland;
- 7 That reforms to apprenticeship training include nested awards with lower level exits that culminate in the award of tradesperson and lead to higher level specialist qualifications; and,
- 8 That VET qualifications prepare students for their vocation through qualifications that are not limited to the specific skills needed for work, through developing the knowledge, skills and capacities they need to undertake higher level education, and to be active and contributing members of their work-place and communities.

More consideration of labour market changes is needed

The Green Paper explains very clearly the uneven impact of globalisation on different sections of the work-force and the sort of changes that employers

need to make to recruit, retain and support staff and to increase their skills, and outlines strategic initiatives to help employers make these changes.

However, even though the Green Paper acknowledges that it is difficult to “predict future training and skill requirements with any precision” (p. 32), the approach it outlines is reminiscent of ‘labour force planning’ approaches, because it seeks to predict where skill shortages are likely to emerge in some detail and to direct resources as a consequence. The collapse in the IT industry and in enrolments in tertiary IT programs (and their recent resurgence) demonstrates that this is an inherently risky process because the rapid and unpredictable nature of change only makes it possible to make *general* and not *specific* projections about skill needs. Consequently, broad projections about future skill needs need to be combined with mechanisms that yield more nuanced information, and the mechanism most likely to achieve this result is social partnerships between employers, unions, government and education and training providers. In presenting this analysis we draw upon the work of:

- Richardson, from The National Institute of Labour Studies, and in particular her draft paper entitled *What is a Skill Shortage*, <http://www.ssn.flinders.edu.au/nils/SkillsShortage.pdf>
- Various authors associated with the Varieties of Capitalism literature (See Hall and Soskice, 2001: details at the end of the paper); and,
- The work of Buchanan and colleagues (2001: details at the end of the paper) for the New South Wales Board of Vocational Education and Training entitled *Beyond Flexibility: Skills and Work in the Future*.

Griffith believes that labour market policies which seek to create a ‘flexible’ and ‘mobile’ labour force contribute to skill shortages by fostering broad labour market and institutional structures that elicit the development of ‘generic’ skills at the expense of high-level industry focussed skills. Anglophone liberal market countries emphasise competitive market relationships to co-ordinate the economy and rely on high levels of labour mobility to do so. In contrast, the nations of northern Europe use co-operative non-market relationships to co-ordinate the economy by developing inter-dependent networks among employers, labour and government, rather than competitive relations. Each approach elicits a different response to skill investment. In the ‘co-ordinated’ market economies, employment is more stable and both employers and individuals invest in skill development because both can be reasonably certain of realising a return on their investment. In areas of high labour mobility it is less likely that employers and individuals will invest in developing industry-focussed high-level skills because employers fear poaching and individuals cannot be sure that they will be able to obtain sustainable work as a consequence (Hall and Soskice, 2001).

Supply and demand settings in VET do not encourage the development of close inter-dependent links between employers and education providers because the markets in which both operate are contextualised by competition based on signals of price, supply and demand. This is a very blunt approach and is not able to distinguish between different reasons for skill shortages, including: insufficient numbers of people with the necessary skills, requiring high-cost, long-term skill development; insufficient numbers with the skills, but requiring low-cost short-term skill development; sufficient numbers with the necessary skills, but who choose alternative employment; and, sufficient numbers with the technical skills who are not using them, but who lack other qualities or skills that employers require (Richardson, 2005: 8).

What is required is a combination of broad scoping that picks up shifts in employment trends (i.e. shifts to technical and professional forms of employment), those that are sensitive to demographic changes (e.g. the need for new generations of skilled workers to replace those who are retiring from the Queensland work force) and localised decision-making and sense-making to be responsive (but not too responsive to localised needs). Hence, Griffith is working to develop localised partnerships that can inform provision and qualifications in conjunction with partner TAFE institutes.

Arguably Queensland needs a balance between high-level industry-specific skills and generic attributes. The Queensland Department of State Development's industry clusters strategy is premised on building collaborative networks and clusters similar to the northern European approaches. It would be useful to link VET policy explicitly to the government's industry clusters policy. The Green Paper argues that current Commonwealth government policy for subsidising industry training is not well targeted because it over-emphasises entry-level training at the expense of high-level skills. It also foreshadows developing new arrangements for collaboration with industry in Queensland. Griffith suggests that government subsidies for training need to reinforce collaborative behaviour between employers, encourage the development of collaborative networks and clusters, and promote collaboration between employers, unions and education providers (Culpepper, 2001; Porter and Ketels, 2003). TAFE needs to be full partners with employers and unions, and this includes participating in identifying and developing learning outcomes in VET qualifications because processes of learning are intrinsically related to the outcomes that can be achieved. Moreover, employers and unions need to participate in shaping curriculum, again because curriculum has important consequences for the knowledge and skills that can be deployed at work.

Recommendations:

- 9 That the Queensland government consider funding initiatives that build social partnerships between groups of employers, unions, government, and education and training providers as a mechanism to provide nuanced information and localised advice about emerging skill needs as a basis for developing appropriate qualifications and curriculum; and,
- 10 That the Green Paper's priorities (on page 4) be broadened to extend partnerships with employers to include the contributions of unions and professional associations, as well as other stakeholders in the outcomes of VET, including universities, schools, and broader the community;

National VET policy is too prescriptive

One of the most enduring achievements of reforms to VET over the last 15 years has been the development of a truly national VET system with nationally recognised and portable qualifications. However, achieving this outcome has also exacted a cost, with VET qualifications that are too restrictive in their scope and goals. National portability of VET qualifications has been achieved by developing national training packages that specify competency outcomes required for particular industries. While there is considerable latitude in how qualifications can be implemented, arguably they are less responsive than they should be to the needs of employers, particularly small and medium enterprises, as well as the well-known difficulties that have ensued when trying to use training package qualifications as the basis for articulation to higher education qualifications.

The argument against different models of VET qualifications is that they threaten national portability. However, this problem only arises because Australia has not yet developed uniform national regulatory frameworks in many areas of the economy or social infrastructure. VET is being used to overcome this problem through insisting on the same outcomes for each occupational area at the expense of its capacity to develop responsive qualifications from the ground up through partnerships between employers and TAFEs. Rather than using VET to overcome the deficiencies of federalism, Australia should be trying to achieve genuine national regulatory and occupational frameworks. This would free VET to concentrate on education, and on developing locally crafted programs to meet the needs of *specific* employers, which would still result in nationally portable qualifications because all states would be working to the same sets of industry standards. If this were so, VET qualifications would need to consist only of *broad* learning outcomes at the national level, while detailed learning outcomes and curriculum could be developed at the local level to meet particular local and regional needs in ways that are more responsive than current models. The

institutional arrangements that the government intends to establish may help to make this localised response possible, if the proposed centres of excellence are permitted to follow the example of the German system where key content and goals are prescribed, but localised variations are acknowledged and valued. If these centres of excellence are so empowered there is the clear prospect of responsive VET provision.

Recommendation:

- 11 That the Queensland government seek to advance policy reform that achieves nationally consistent industry regulations and occupational requirements, to free TAFE to develop locally responsive curriculum and learning outcomes with employers and other key stakeholders, based on broad national learning outcomes in each industry or occupational area, and in ways not jeopardising the broader education goals required for a responsive and informed workforce.

More consideration is needed for TAFE's role in meeting local and regional needs and building local partnerships with other sectors of education

The Green Paper foreshadows developing TAFE institutes as centres of excellence that specialise in particular areas. For the reasons outlined above, the benefits that can be achieved through this strategy need to be balanced by considering the extent to which TAFEs are able to build strong, comprehensive and close partnerships with schools and universities and the extent to which TAFEs can meet the specific needs of their communities and region.

Whilst this strategy will result in some economies of scale and facilitate uniform administrative arrangements for negotiating pathways and credit-transfer through systemic and strategic arrangements, it is likely to result in less credit-transfer than could be achieved because it will not facilitate close, trusting relationships between teaching staff in different sectors. We need to consider the way in which we can develop uniform, state-wide approaches to student articulation and credit-transfer *as well as* policy that encourages individual partnerships between TAFEs and universities, as the way in which Queensland meets the *specific* education and training needs of its regions and local economies, as argued above.

Griffith wishes to develop close partnerships with the TAFE institutes in the Brisbane Gold Coast corridor because this will help to build aspirations in the community and those living there for further study, create opportunities to undertake learning pathways, and create links with schools, industries, local government, and non-government organisations in the regions we serve. These opportunities are created by investing in building relationships and

developing trust, and create possibilities for linking education and training with 'whole of government' approaches that seek to develop strategies to meet the economic, social, and cultural of regions.

Griffith also notes the proposal to amalgamate Yeronga Institute of TAFE with the Bremer Institute of TAFE into a new larger TAFE institute – Ipswich and Brisbane West TAFE (pp 26-7) but no rationale is given for including Yeronga in a westward region rather than north to Moreton or south to Logan. Bremer's Springfield campus seems closer to Logan than to Yeronga. Merging Yeronga and Bremer Institutes of TAFE would result in a huge geographical spread, and it is not clear how such an Institute could be locally responsive through creating strong local partnerships.

Recommendations:

- 12 That the proposed strategy to develop TAFE institutes as centres of excellence be balanced with the need to ensure TAFEs have the capacity to build strong partnerships with schools and universities, and to meet the needs of local communities and employers through a comprehensive range of provision;
- 13 That alternatives to the proposed merger between Yeronga and Bremer Institutes of TAFE be considered, to ensure that any merger builds on existing local and regional partnerships;

More consideration of funding policy is needed

The Green Paper makes only occasional indirect observations about financing its proposals. Neither does the Green Paper have any proposal to make TAFE fees more accessible to students. Fees for Queensland TAFE full fee-paying programs can be almost as high as higher education full fees – some TAFE full fees range from \$6,000 to \$9,500 per annum – yet there is no loans scheme generally available for TAFE full fees. The Queensland Government should discuss with the Australian Taxation Office and the Australian Government the possibility of extending fee-help to TAFE full fee programs as it has extended fee-help to Open Learning Australia. Fee-help for TAFE full fee programs would have these features:

- TAFE institutes would continue to set their fees for full fees programs as currently;
- students would continue to be able to pay fees for full fees programs up front, with concessions and with deferred payment plans as currently;
- in addition students would have the option of taking out a fee-help loan to pay all or part of their fees for their TAFE program;

- the fee-help loan for TAFE full fees programs would be the same in all essential aspects to fee-help for higher education –
 - a) students would incur a debt comprising the loan they take out for their full tuition fees plus an administration charge of 20% of the amount of their loan;
 - b) the Australian Government would pay the TAFE institute the amount of the loan the student takes out and would retain the 20% administration charge for administrative costs and interest foregone;
 - c) students would start repaying their fee-help debt once their annual taxable income exceeded \$36,185;
 - d) students would not be charged interest, but their debt would be increased by the consumer price index to maintain its real value;
 - e) students would have a lifetime fee-help loan limit of \$50,000, indexed.

Recommendation

- 14 That the Queensland government consider implementing an income-contingent loans scheme for TAFE fees, or at least for TAFE fee for service programs.

Queensland could try to develop more coherence between the sectors of education and training

The Green Paper implicitly presents a compelling argument for much stronger collaboration between schools, TAFEs and universities by focussing on the contribution each must make to Queensland's future economic prosperity and social well-being. However, the existing structures of post-compulsory education and training make it difficult to develop coherent lifelong learning policy frameworks, by developing student-centred pathways. This is particularly important in light of the Queensland government's Education and Training Reforms for the Future, which will require much closer co-operation between schools and TAFEs. Similarly, developing high level knowledge and skills will require closer co-operation between TAFEs and universities.

For example, Griffith is very interested in working with TAFE to develop degrees with a TAFE qualification embedded within them. That is, students commencing at Griffith would enrol in degrees in specific areas that include a TAFE award as part of the first year. Early certification would allow students to obtain part-time and casual work in their field, thereby enriching both their studies and their understanding of work and the skills that they need. While it is possible to develop such an arrangement now, it is relatively under-developed because it requires curriculum development in both the TAFE and

higher education award, unlike many arrangements which link a TAFE and higher education award. While the latter may include curriculum *mapping*, the embedded model requires curriculum *development* and this is expensive and time consuming for both TAFE and universities. A Queensland government advisory body could explore new and innovative models, and broker the arrangements needed to implement them.

While it is not possible to overcome existing national sectoral policy frameworks, Queensland could make progress towards developing more coherence between the sectors by establishing a representative advisory body to advise government on policy, research and initiatives that may help to facilitate student pathways, more credit-transfer, and, greater collaboration between education and training providers, employers and professional bodies.

Recommendation:

- 15 That the Queensland government consider developing a representative advisory body to promote closer collaboration between schools, TAFEs and universities, and to facilitate closer collaboration between education providers and employers, employees, professional bodies and government.

Some proposals in the Green Paper do not seem clearly articulated

There is no clear relation between the Green Paper's three proposals for concentration and specialisation: to establish a trade and technician skills institute (page 16), to establish TAFE specialist centres (page 29) and to establish centres of excellence (page 42). How will each component relate to the others?

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