

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the present article is to examine the processes of restructuring in technical and further education in Western Australia. The article builds upon earlier studies dealing with TAFE reform in Western Australia prior to restructuring having become a dominant thrust of national economic policy in the late 1980s. The conclusion drawn is that in spite of the urgency accorded current reform efforts in Western Australia, few of the issues are new. Staff resistance to change lies at the heart of failures to reorganise TAFE, a government objective since about 1978.

The Context of TAFE Restructuring

The Kangan Report on technical and further education (1974) and establishment of the Australian Technical and Further (TAFE) Commission came at the end of a period of nearly thirty years of sustained economic growth in Australia. TAFE philosophy of the period reflected high levels of social demand for education, population growth, prevailing egalitarian ideologies and full employment. Commonwealth funding assistance to the states involved up to 80 percent of new capital outlays and around 20 percent of recurrent expenditure on TAFE. The outcomes in new buildings and equipment and refurbishment of old plant have been substantial.

The confidence underpinning these reforms was rudely shaken by the oil shock of 1974 and the economic recession that followed. The economic situation became

critical in the 1980s, typified by rising international debt, trade deficits, inflation, and falling living standards. A series of Commonwealth inquiries highlighted important deficiencies in Australian industry. The Jackson (1975), Williams (1979) and Myers (1980) reports identified adjustments to the organisation and structure of Australian industry urgently needed in the context of high technology, international competition and employment trends. Youth unemployment, the worst since the Depression, became a national concern.

National (Commonwealth) policies played a vital role in shifting the focus of technical education and industry training. Governments after 1975, although unable to finance education at pre-recession levels, nevertheless continued to support TAFE because of its importance to employment and skill development. Priorities in TAFE development, however, were influenced by Commonwealth labour market interventions initiated after such reports as the Williams Report (1979), Learning and Earning (1981), and the Kirby Report (1985). Programs introduced included the Commonwealth Rebate for Full Time Apprentice Training (CRAFT), transition from school to work schemes, youth employment subsidies, the Participation and Equity program and the Australian Traineeship Scheme. Most of these schemes, and particularly the Australian Traineeship Scheme, placed new demands on TAFE to design programmes involving both on and off-the-job training, effect closer integration with industry, and introduce courses, academic schedules, and teaching strategies

matching the needs of people not previously served by conventional programmes.

Industry Restructuring & the Commonwealth Funding of TAFE.

Australia Reconstructed (1987), a landmark report by an overseas mission by the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Trade Development Council, drew the conclusion that improving Australia's economic competitiveness demanded nothing short of a radical restructuring of Australian industry. This would involve the promotion of worker productivity through enhanced education and training, the upgrading and reorientation of workforce skills, breaking down outdated work practices, fostering new approaches to management and industrial relations, and the introduction of productivity-based wage incentives.

A radical reorganisation of Commonwealth education structures was closely related to national economic priorities. In 1987 the Commonwealth established the Department of Employment, Education and Training and completely revamped policy and advisory machinery through creation of a National Board for Employment, Education and Training (Dawkins, 1988). Simultaneously, the Commonwealth took action to implement the recommendations of three inquiries dealing with the funding and organisation of post-school education: The Review of TAFE Funding (1987); The Review of Efficiency and

Effectiveness in Higher Education (1987); and A Plan for Higher Education (1988).

The Commonwealth also mounted initiatives to promote training within industry, heralded in Skills for Australia (AGPS, 1987), a report drawing heavily upon Australia Reconstructed, mentioned already. Two Ministerial policy statements were especially relevant: Improving Australia's Training Systems (1989); and Australia's Training System-Need for Change (1989). These all culminated in the passing in June 1990 of the Training Guarantee Act, which provides for the introduction of levies on industry to fund a national system of industry-based training.

Restructuring TAFE in Western Australia.

In Western Australia, as in other states, although TAFE's physical resources and staff were augmented considerably after 1975, this was achieved from within an organisation designed to serve occupational training needs of the 1960s and early 1970s. Improvements were effected within existing physical, administrative and staffing structures. Changes in the 1980s driven by Commonwealth policies, however, have made it necessary to restructure the organisation, administration and staffing of TAFE in Western Australia, as in all the Australian states.

In spite of remarkable growth in the 1970s, TAFE in Western Australia remained a hierarchical and centralised organisation, an integral part of the Education

Department and bound by public service regulations. Moreover, despite representation on the State's Industrial Training Advisory Council and industry training boards, TAFE never enjoyed unqualified support from industry. Colleges shared an identical academic calendar to departmental schools and award courses were offered on 'traditional' basis, producing a culture which militated against TAFE involvement in the growing variety of training initiatives within industry. Inflexible teaching staff conditions were aligned to industrial awards applying to school teachers and tied to public service promotion criteria.

TAFE administrative and management reform nevertheless had been contemplated from about 1975 in numerous inquiries. These included:

- 1976: The Partridge report on post-secondary education in Western Australia.
- 1977: The Western Australian Post-Secondary Education Commission report on the future administration of the Technical Education Division.
- 1978: An (internal) review group report on administration of technical education.
- 1982: A report on TAFE and the future of the Western economy, by Director of TAFE Peter Forrest.
- 1982: A review of staffing in the TAFE system, chaired by Mr. Bruce Dormer.
- 1983: A review of administrative arrangements for industrial training in Western Australia, undertaken by a State Employment Task-force.
- 1983: A review of youth employment and unemployment, also undertaken by the State Employment Task-force.

TAFE administration was further affected by policies of the Burke Labour Government, elected in 1983, to reform the state public service. Two internal and confidential inquiries were particularly significant: a Functional Review of TAFE (1985); and a Ministerial Task Force review of TAFE (1986).

The First Restructuring Ventures.

Control and administration of TAFE in ten years went through a series of changes culminating in a new structure introduced in 1986.

Between 1977 and 1983, the central issue was whether or not TAFE should be separated from the Education Department. Measures to strengthen the independence of TAFE started in 1978 when Mr. Peter Forrest was appointed Assistant Director-General of Education (Technical Education). Directorates for operations and for

resources were also created within the Technical Education Division. The government established a Technical and Further Education Advisory Council in 1978, but it went into abeyance one year later when industry representatives withdrew their support.

The Dormer Committee (1982) strongly advocated further strengthening the Technical Education Division as a sub-department within the Education Department. It preferred, however, the idea of an independent TAFE authority. The TAFE governance issue was hotly debated, being vigorously opposed by the State Education Department, college principals and TAFE teaching staff.

In this connection, the Burke Government initially supported union resistance to the Dormer proposals (White, 1989).

Management Model for TAFE Organisation.

Reorganisation of the TAFE central administration in Western Australia was intended to concentrate 'head office' roles on policy formulation, planning, monitoring and evaluation. This shift in focus, which proved to be a controversial and drawn-out process, commenced with planning, management and curriculum improvements effected in 1976 and 1977. The next step was the establishment of a Studies Directorate, in 1981, intended to shift TAFE from an organisation driven by social demand to one guided by policy, first in the area of studies and curriculum and then more generally across the board. The objective was to involve staff at all levels in TAFE policy development, rather than, as in the past, leave it solely to the central administration. Developments were taken a further stage in 1985, when a Corporate Plan for TAFE was published.

Reorienting TAFE central administration coincided with moves to devolve budget control and detailed administration to the colleges. At this level, particularly in country regions, budget control and administrative freedoms were essential to boost the independence of TAFE principals and staff, and to promote community participation in college government.

Restructuring college responsibilities,

controversial from the outset, extended over a long period. It commenced with the establishment of three community colleges - at Karratha, Port Hedland, and Kalgoorlie. In 1981 these colleges were placed outside the TAFE system as independent institutions under the Colleges Act. Governed by independent councils and managed very differently from conventional TAFE institutions, the new colleges presented a challenge to TAFE, and were vigorously opposed by TAFE administrators and staff (White, 1986).

A second step, in 1984, involved the state government transforming TAFE colleges at Albany, Bunbury and Geraldton into regional colleges - The Great Southern, the South West and Geraldton Regional Colleges. College principals were replaced by directors with greater administrative authority, and the government appointed advisory councils to each of the colleges. It was intended that, while remaining within the state-wide TAFE network, these colleges should gain some of the independence enjoyed by the community colleges. Corporate planning processes introduced into the TAFE system involved all colleges developing their own institutional plans, which required endorsement by advisory councils introduced in most TAFE colleges in 1985. Resource agreements between the central office of TAFE and the colleges were finalised on the basis of college plans and budget decisions.

Establishment of a State Department of Employment & Training.

Establishment of a Department of Employment and Training in 1985 introduced a new element into the TAFE administration issue. The new department was created following an inquiry by a State Employment Task Force in 1983 which had documented unsatisfactory levels of integration between TAFE and the broader fields of workforce planning and industry training. The Task Force had strongly recommended the rationalisation of advisory committee structures for TAFE and industrial training in Western Australia, including the formation of an overarching commission for industrial and commercial training (Review of Administrative Arrangements for Industrial and Commercial Training in Western Australia, 1983).

The State Department of Employment and Training

assumed responsibility for labour market research, employment policy, industrial training, apprenticeship and other matters, which overlapped to some extent functions of the TAFE system. This was particularly so with respect to administration of apprenticeship and employment training programmes (including the Australian Traineeship Scheme) for which TAFE was the institutional training agency. The Department of Employment and Training has been responsible for important new initiatives in apprentice training through the New Apprenticeship Training Assessment Scheme, which aims to provide for competency based training in place of

traditional forms of preparation for the trades. An international conference on vocational education and training organised by the department in 1986 attracted attention from industry and the media (Department of Employment and Training, 1987, 1988).

Speculation soon mounted concerning the possible transfer of TAFE from the Education Department to the new Department of Employment and Training. A key factor in this was resistance to restructuring in TAFE, partly because of its continued retention within the much larger state education bureaucracy, although ambitions of particular ministers in the Burke Government also were important.

The Tripartite Overseas Mission of 1987.

During 1987 the State Government sent a Tripartite Mission on Productivity and Training to study skill training in Europe (Report, 1987). The mission (paralleling that of the ACTU and TDC) advocated action by the State Government to emulate commitments in major European countries to the development of skills in industry. A particular outcome was planning to establish a State Employment and Skills Development Authority (SESDA) which would bring government, industry and unions together in providing advice to government about skill development policy. The SESDA legislation was passed in September 1990 (Parl. Deb. (W.A.), 1990). This new initiative coincided with Commonwealth policy to shift the focus of TAFE and industry training across the

nation. Unless TAFE underwent long-awaited restructuring, it stood every chance of being by-passed by events and possibly superseded by a completely new

training authority.

Reorganisation of TAFE Central Administration, 1986-89.

Between 1986 and 1989, TAFE restructuring came to something of a climax. The Office of TAFE, formed in 1988, replaced the former TAFE Division and was placed within the joint responsibility of the Minister for Education and the Minister assisting the latter in employment and training matters. The Office was headed by an Executive Director, Mr. Michael Cross (now deceased), who simultaneously held the post of Executive Director of Employment and Training. The minister concerned, in a speech entitled "Taking TAFE into the 1990s", depicted TAFE "as the centre-piece of the Government's strategy to address the big economic agenda of skills formation, productivity and industry competitiveness" ("New Directions in TAFE", 1989).

TAFE Overseas Mission 1988.

During 1988 the Office of TAFE sent its own team overseas to study trends in vocational education and skills development (Report, 1988). Team findings documented the dramatic shifts overseas in workforce skilling and considered that for Western Australia, new long-term human resource planning with all interested parties involved would be vital to the future

competitiveness of industry. State-wide, bipartisan policies also were needed if vocational education and training were to receive the priority observed in other countries. Lower birth rates and aging of the population meant that future growth in TAFE would be concentrated in non-traditional skills formation within industry rather than in more traditional forms of technical and further education. The Mission supported the establishment of SESDA, to ensure that TAFE would not be excluded from industry training.

A New Corporate Executive for TAFE, 1989.

The convergence of Commonwealth and State policies resulted in long-awaited reforms to the organisation of Western Australia's TAFE system. In October 1989, TAFE was removed from the control of the Education Department. Now called the Department of TAFE, it falls within the

responsibilities of the State Minister for Labour, Productivity and Employment, who also has responsibility for the Department of Employment and Training. Mr. Kevin Woods received appointment as the Executive Director of this new department in 1990. Planning for a new corporate structure is still in progress.

During 1989 college level management underwent significant reform. Existing TAFE colleges were grouped into multi-campus organisations each headed by a new director, which were intended to effect a rationalisation of TAFE resources, a more flexible deployment of staff, and a better focus for regional training activity.

Colleges in the metropolitan area have been grouped into four major institutions: the Central Metropolitan College of TAFE (Perth, Wembley, Mount Lawley, Leederville and a projected campus at East Perth); the North Metropolitan College of TAFE (Carine, Balga and a campus planned for Joondalup); the South Metropolitan College of TAFE (Bentley, Thornlie, Carlisle, and a planned campus at Armadale). The regionalisation of TAFE services is planned for rural areas, embracing the Great Southern (Albany), Geraldton (Mid-west), South-West (Bunbury) and Midlands (Midland Junction) regions. Directors for the four metropolitan colleges were appointed in February 1990.

The reorganisation of TAFE courses and scheduling was another feature of the restructuring process. In 1986 the semester system was introduced and enrolment brought forward to December of the year before study commenced. Restructuring agreements in 1989 have broken completely with the school-based academic calendar. The colleges are now to operate on a year-round basis.

Restructuring TAFE Staff Conditions.

Restructured staff conditions were considered vital to achievement of long-term goals for TAFE. Earlier in 1982 the Dormer Committee, in considering ways to render TAFE more responsive to industry, had advocated substantial changes to conditions of TAFE staff. The ensuing controversy, however, caused the proposals to be shelved. Renewed initiatives taken in 1984 also produced strong opposition, including a strike among TAFE teaching

staff. It was pointed out at the time, however, that unless TAFE system productivity improved, TAFE would almost certainly be absorbed into the Department of Employment and Training.

TAFE restructuring in 1989 and 1990 re-opened the whole issue of staff conditions. By then, the wider industrial environment throughout Australia had changed substantially. Productivity trade-offs with respect to "second tier" wage awards were becoming widespread in industry, supported by both industry and the unions. TAFE teachers were asked in 1988 to consider staffing arrangements more in the line with TAFE needs in the 1990s. Particularly important was the need for TAFE colleges to share with industry a major role in skill development of the state's workforce subsequent to the passing of the Training Guarantee Act.

Industrial action in 1988 was successful in undermining proposals to redraft staff conditions. However, during 1989 the Department of TAFE made a concerted effort to negotiate a special award for TAFE teachers geared to national award restructuring principles and intended to break the nexus between TAFE teacher conditions and those applying to primary and secondary school teachers in the Ministry of Education.

The proposals in 1989 asked TAFE teachers to accept longer hours of attendance, more flexible academic and work schedules, reduced "penalty loadings" for evening teaching, and shorter annual vacations in return for

higher salaries and improved career opportunities. Staff teaching commitments also were intended to include a "case load" of industry-related skills training outside conventional class contact. Annual leave and attendance hours under the proposed conditions would be subject to negotiation within a college department, rather than tied rigidly to the existing summer and between semester vacation periods (Department of TAFE, 1989).

Staff development and career planning under proposed arrangements would assume special importance. Part of the "lost" vacation period would be devoted to staff development, including release to industry and skill enhancement. Suggested provision for staff review and promotion by merit have the objective of removing public service-style rigidities dating back to much earlier times. Proposals also include the recruitment of contract staff enabling TAFE to respond quickly to

changing conditions in industry. A new career progression is also proposed, involving merit-based rewards and possible promotion to a position of principal lecturer as a reward for excellence in teaching.

Professional preparation of TAFE teachers under the proposed award implied significant changes from existing arrangements. Under the 1989 proposals, staff were to receive an 8 week intensive in-service induction course and then begin teaching. They would be able to devote all or part of their staff development allowance (60 hours per year) to an advanced education course. They would need to complete a formal teacher education

qualification to cross salary bars giving access to higher level promotion posts. However, much of this requirement would need to be undertaken in a teacher's own time, since specific time release would not be provided.

The proposals included provision for staff to opt to remain under existing conditions, although all new staff were to be employed under the new provisions. Staff exercising this option would eventually pass out of the system through natural attrition. It was anticipated that ambitious teachers would agree to the new conditions.

The 1989 initiatives generated a great deal of unrest among TAFE teachers unwilling to concede any ground on work contracts. Union arguments stressed that staff had been attracted from industry, where wages were more attractive, because of the favourable conditions applying in TAFE. Detailed analysis also appeared to show that the financial rewards promised under the proposed new award were less than publicised. The upshot was that during August 1990 the State School Teachers Union called two strikes. A tenuous agreement was eventually completed in late September which breaks some new ground but leaves most issues subject to continued negotiation (Memorandum of Agreement, 1990).

TAFE in Western Australia has experienced such turmoil over staff conditions in recent years that morale has suffered considerably. Most staff concede that restructuring is needed, but will not accept the

implications where their own conditions are concerned. To some extent this scepticism may be traced to suspicion about government motives behind staff restructuring,

which goes back to union rejection of recommendations in the Dormer Report of 1982. These differed in only marginal ways from proposals advanced under the new award scheme of 1989. Even so, under the agreement of September, the Union has accepted the 50 week year and agreed to "make progress in negotiations" concerning such matters as salaries and conditions, career management systems, lecturer training, the position of principal lecturer, promotion by merit and transfers, alternative course delivery strategies and staff development. The TAFE staff proposals have effectively the status of a "log of claims" which the Union has agreed to negotiate according to broadly accepted principles.

TAFE teacher education, which is very expensive to TAFE departments under existing arrangements, faces a particularly significant challenge. TAFE authorities would like to abandon or radically modify it, and to place more financial responsibility upon the teachers themselves. The teachers, although ambivalent about present advanced education courses, nevertheless want to see them continued. Their dilemma is two-fold: on the one hand they recognise the value of an extended professional teacher preparation in terms of status and teaching quality; but on the other they naturally resist moves to shift the costs away from their employer towards themselves. On the matter of costs, the re-introduction

of higher education fees (in the form of a Higher Education Contribution Scheme) has substantially altered the financial implications of continuing present TAFE teacher education programs, for both TAFE organisations as well as the teachers themselves.

TAFE Course and Enrolment Trends.

Even without the restructuring ventures described, TAFE enrolments and course trends in the period 1975 to 1990 have fundamentally shifted the focus of technical and further education from that applying in earlier times. Western Australian patterns mirror what has been happening in the wider Australian economy. Technician and para-professional training have become the dominant feature of the TAFE system, with national award courses at the associate diploma level facilitating access to higher education. In the apprenticeship area, particular trends have included the introduction of national core curricula, modularisation and competency-based training which will present significant challenges to existing

modes of TAFE training. Adult education remains a significant aspect of TAFE operations, although facing something of a funding crisis in competition with "fee for service" courses. In this latter context, in Western Australia TAFE established the Customised Training Agency as its entrepreneurial body. This promises to expand dramatically under the stimulus of the Training Guarantee Act of 1990. Minority groups at risk in the employment market - including women, migrants, aborigines and the

handicapped - have received increased attention, although they remain to be integrated fully into conventional TAFE programmes. This also holds true for the Australian Traineeship Scheme where TAFE is concerned.

Part of TAFE staff resistance to restructuring proposals already described strongly focuses on fears that the drive for revenue from entrepreneurial ventures under the Customised Training Agency will contribute to a diminution of TAFE commitments to conventional award courses. At present these attract little revenue from student fees, although the matter of introducing tuition charges is under review. Staff vigorously oppose any suggestion that fees should be introduced, especially on a scale similar to that applying to higher education under the Higher Education Contribution Scheme.

Some final observations.

It has taken nearly 10 years to effect changes to TAFE organisation and administrative structures. These have been identified as essential for TAFE to contribute effectively within a new environment of skill development affecting the whole Australian workforce. Community impatience at the slow pace of this adjustment has been widespread. Unless TAFE changes its mode of operation, it might well be by-passed by skill training developments occurring already outside the conventional system of vocational and technical education. The steps outlined in this paper are only a beginning. They create the base upon which a flexible, pro-active and vigorous TAFE

system can win respect from Western Australia's industrial communities which are themselves facing momentous upheavals.

The professional preparation of TAFE teachers, while under threat in its current format from part of the restructuring agenda, perhaps assumes even greater significance than formerly. It provides one vehicle for

the resocialisation of personnel recruited from industry and imbued with an industrial culture which sits awkwardly alongside expectations of professional teachers. The capacity to respond quickly and flexibly to changing industry demands for training demands skills of curriculum design, instructional delivery and program assessment that if anything exceed those needed within conventional award course teaching in TAFE colleges. Entrepreneurial ventures with industry will also require the exercise of communication and negotiating skills which go beyond the needs of teaching in conventional award course contexts. Social policy imperatives, driven by Commonwealth programs and financial constraints, also imply a high level of interpersonal sensitivity (with unemployed youth and aborigines for example) that extends rather than narrows the professional responsibilities of TAFE teachers.

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