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### **COLLOCATION IN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT - THE PEEL EDUCATION AND TAFE RESPONSE IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

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#### **Abstract**

Collocation of services in regional Western Australia is an important strand in W.A.'s Regional Development Policy. The intent of this initiative is to foster working relationships amongst stakeholder groups, with a view to ensuring regional Western Australian communities have access to quality services.

Challenger TAFE with two education partners, the W.A. Department of Education and Murdoch University, has produced a new concept in joint delivery of education and training. It goes beyond existing utility focused Australian models of education campus co-location and incorporates the values of a learning community.

Key factors influencing this initiative have been formulated from the positive flow-on from two national education and training policy decisions and through the cooperative and trusting local arrangements that have been built over the last decade, within the region.

These energies have come together at the Peel Education and TAFE Campus to produce a concept that extends beyond existing models and commitments to cross-sectoral education and training in Australia.

The model reflects local circumstances and a history of trust and cooperative activity amongst the organisations involved. It is not intended as a blue print for other sites because circumstances vary and this model may not be readily replicable.

#### **Introduction**

##### Collocation Policy in Regional WA

The state of Western Australia covers more than one third of the Australian continent and has just over 1.5 million inhabitants. Most of the population cluster in a small section of the fertile south-west of the state while the remaining areas experience a harsh dry climate and are extremely sparsely populated. The challenge for federal, state and local governments is to provide infrastructure and services to all community members as equitably as is possible. Regional and remote areas pose the greater problem in terms of communities being able to access quality government funded services at levels of cost that these services can cover. One strategy W.A. has encouraged, in order to maximise outcomes for government

investment in infrastructure is to encourage cross –agency groups willing to work on the co-location and collocation of their services.

The term collocation has been used in policy documents to describe a special process of collecting related or complimentary facilities or services into a joint facility. For example, health related services could be grouped together or advisory agencies delivered out of one location. The intention is to plan and provide facilities and services that are superior to the sum of the participating individual services. The intention is to provide more than the co-locating of the services.

Collocation therefore forms an important strand of WA's Regional Development Policy. The intention of this initiative is to foster working relationships amongst stakeholder groups, with a view to ensuring regional Western Australian communities have access to quality services. From the state government's perspective, the benefits attributed to successful collocation are a potential to increase the number and quality of services delivered in regional communities, to reduce capital and operational costs at a local, state and national level, and to foster superior services in some of the smaller communities through cooperation amongst organisations and agencies.

### The Peel Community

The Peel Region comprises six local government regions with the City of Mandurah as the administrative centre. It is located to the south west of the outer metropolitan area of Perth. Numbers of workers commute from the Peel region to employment in Perth. By clustering compatible services in smaller communities such as Peel, there is the potential to add value to the existing services and help ensure the survival and hopefully 'thrival' (Ellyard, 1998) of that community into the future. As the Western Australian State Deputy Premier explained in 1998:

*The promotion of regional areas as desirable places to live, work and invest is extremely important and so too is the provision of the necessary resources to enable regional communities to determine their own destiny more effectively. (Cowan, H. 1999)*

The state government's Collocation Initiative encourages government agencies, service providers and regional communities to investigate opportunities to share resources such as accommodation, infrastructure, utilities and staff in the delivery of compatible or related services.

Some small communities experience a tension between preserving small community lifestyles and community connected-ness, and a desire to remain small, on one hand and, on the other, global economic imperatives. Global issues seem to drive communities to seek to become parts of larger units and to respond to external economic influences by assuming 'bigness' must be the solution. As Ellyard (1998) warns: *By the year 2020, a new paradigm will operate. 'Planetism' will shape job categories, products and services, and work organisations of the first quarter of the 21st century.* Communities need to be aware of these trends but how they choose to respond to them is discretionary.

A example of a group of rural communities redirecting and refocusing their energies and commitment to valuing and preserving smallness is provided by Nebraska, USA. In the rural state of Nebraska, former and current primary producers are proving that small communities can cooperate and commit to reinventing themselves and creating an upswing in their local economy (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2000). Since the mid-west of the United States was originally settled in the nineteenth century, Nebraska's income has been derived from corn production. The local and state economies have suffered a decade of rural

downturn. Nebraska's young people have been migrating to larger urban centres and the health of the small local communities was declining in step with the added pressures associated with increased hardship and shifts in the population. This was impacting negatively on what had been a desirable lifestyle the communities wanted their young to have the advantages of. Economic threats brought on by the impact of commodity prices in global markets suggested that the prognosis for corn production was likely to remain poor. Through a range of community managed and designed, local 're-education' initiatives, the state of Nebraska has been able to redirect its economy and start to grow a diversity of new work opportunities to provide employment to encourage local young people to remain in these small communities. As well, Nebraska community working groups have established numbers of initiatives for investing in their own futures.

## **EDUCATION, TRAINING AND THE COMMUNITY**

As was demonstrated in Nebraska, and has been evident in some Australian small towns, a significant component of a community's health and well being is measured through the priority ascribed to education. Doughney (2000) explains that this is because education is not simply one of many community services but one of the most significant conduits to other important public and private goods such as employment, culture, values and personal autonomy (Hyland, T. 1999). It is therefore in a regional WA community's best interests to have as a primary goal, the building of, or providing enhanced access to, quality educational services.

While cost savings measures may be a positive secondary outcome of amalgamating local infrastructure and services, if saving money is treated as a primary motive for amalgamating services then a community may address a short term, financial difficulty but it has not established any process for building community improvement. As Ellyard (1998) points out: *Education planners will need to understand more deeply the nature of this world, the values and skills which will be needed for 'thrival' in this world.*

Some of these critical features of success for a community working towards improved education outcomes are likely to include their: desire to preserve a valued lifestyle, their desire to participate in particular kinds of work, their willingness to invest time and income in the re-invention and redirection processes within their community, and finally their determination to influence, or hopefully control, the community's joint destiny.

The Commonwealth Minister for Education, Dr Kemp (2000) indicated, *Ninety percent of today's teenagers will at some stage in their lives participate in post secondary education whether this is higher education or vocational education and training or both.* A comprehensive regional education and training facility therefore is a pivotal service to have available within any flourishing, regional community.

Numbers of experiments in co-location and / or services amalgamation in the education and training sectors have occurred in Australia during the last decade. These have met with varying degrees of success. Some examples have included initiatives in Nambour, in Queensland and Coffs Harbour, in New South Wales, at the Victorian University of Technology and on the Rockingham Regional Campus of Challenger TAFE, Western Australia, just twenty-five kilometres to the north of Peel. Balancing the interests and needs of the participating sectors often emerges as a challenging factor.

Based partially on its previous experience, Challenger TAFE along with two education partners, the WA Department of Education and Murdoch University, and with the local Peel

community is producing a new concept in joint campus delivery of education and training in Peel. The concept goes beyond existing Australian models of education and VET campus co-location and incorporates the policy directions of a range of decisions at both Commonwealth and state levels.

The benefit of the Peel approach is that the consultation and deliberation processes undertaken for policy development at Commonwealth and state levels have been applied to the planning process. Initiatives developed for the new campus sit within the scope (and possibility) of national and state frameworks of agreement.

## **COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING POLICY RESPONSES**

The development of the Australian Qualifications Framework [AQF] (1998) provided an opportunity for competency based vocational education and training to be recognised in a variety of learning contexts – in schools, public and private training provider organisations, workplaces and in universities. One of the opportunities the AQF provides is its ability to 'translate' courses into skill levels so that schools, public and private VET providers, industries and universities have a common language that they can apply to the design and manipulation of curriculum and courses across these sectors and in a range of contexts.

While the AQF documented levels of competence, the policy development body, the Council of State Ministers of Education and Training, [MCEETYA] had formalised a framework of necessary processes for applying the AQF to curriculum. For example, in July 1996, the body endorsed the incorporation of vocational education into the schools sector and, hence forward, VET operated in a similar way to that in the other sectors. Features of VET in schools, for example, training products and services are endorsed at a national level as is the case with other VET providers. This consistent arrangement for each sector has still provided sufficient flexibility to allow pro-active VET providers in schools to cater to a range of student demands with vocational education and traineeship arrangements. Vocational education in schools involves a work placement as well as studies in preparing a young person for work. These can be school-initiated and delivered accredited subjects or modules from technical education that have been accredited for delivery to school students. School based traineeships include a component of paid employment as well as completion of a prescribed number of accredited technical education modules.

Since 1997, Challenger TAFE (formerly South Metropolitan College) has developed productive relationships with numbers of high schools in the south-west metropolitan region of Perth and the regional South West of the state. The College role is to operate as the training provider and / or as an auspicing agency to local high schools. This has been particularly in cooperation with the Kwinana Education and Industries Partnership schools in the Rockingham, Kwinana, Warnbro and Hamilton Hill areas. These inter-sectoral arrangements have allowed for a rich mix of training products and services to be delivered to school students. Notably, one innovative approach was the development of school based traineeships where school students undertake paid employment to complete their schooling with a VET qualification and to also achieve a tertiary entrance score, thereby keeping their options open for post secondary education choices.

Linked with the initiatives developed with the government and non-government secondary schools in the area, the co-location of Challenger TAFE, Murdoch University and Rockingham City Council library services at Rockingham provided new opportunities. TAFE students can progress to degree studies after either their first or second year of post school,

TAFE studies. Students can choose from a number of pathways; to seek a VET qualification and then pursue university studies or shift to tertiary studies if they have decided their pathway lies in the direction of a university qualification.

The success of the program at Rockingham provided a good foundation for considering a further productive working relationship and an extended level of cooperation in the Peel Region, slightly further to the south. There was the opportunity in the Peel project to include a school sector partner within a shared campus arrangement.

## **STATE EDUCATION AND VET POLICY RESPONSE**

The policy background for establishing an extended working relationship with a school, VET and tertiary partner involved at Peel emerged from a number of decisions. In late 2000, the Western Australian Curriculum Council endorsed a recommendation that, if students were provided with an opportunity to undertake studies within a tertiary institution, those studies could be considered for Year 12 accreditation. Links between schools and the VET sector, and the VET sector and universities had been developed in 1997 at a national level through the Australian Qualifications Framework [AQF].

From 2001, all government secondary students from the Mandurah area of Peel will complete their post compulsory education at the Peel Education and TAFE Campus. The Peel Campus has the capacity to provide a mix of studies in secondary, post secondary and tertiary areas to students on the campus, local industry and community. To enhance the development of flexible pathway arrangements amongst the three sectors, an Education Development Unit with a Pathways Officer was established in mid 2001. The 'mix and match' arrangements made possible through the common framework provided by the AQF and through the endorsement at state level of tertiary level studies in schools have been extended at Peel. Five Industry Pathways groups comprising school, TAFE university and industry representatives are currently investigating all the opportunities that could arise from providing secondary education, vocational education, tertiary education studies and employment based training from the one location. It is anticipated that students at Mandurah Senior College, a composite of the upper schools from three local middle schools will have university subjects as a curriculum option in their upper secondary education studies in 2002. It is also anticipated that the current Mandurah school students, at some stage in their lives, will participate in post secondary education whether this is via higher education, or vocational education and training, or both.

## **GLOBAL AND LOCAL, THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME**

The education and training model developed at Peel, has occurred as a consequence of factors embedded in local circumstances and a history of trust and cooperative activity amongst the member institutions through their previously successful working relationships. The authors do not intend to suggest that the initiatives at Peel provide a blueprint for other locations. The education and training stakeholders at Peel acknowledge that circumstances will vary in other locations and features of this model may not be therefore readily replicable. The model being used at Peel reflects the organisational principles described by Collins and Porras (Collins & Porras, 1995); that values and operating principles shape practice. They explain: *Ideological control preserves the core while operational autonomy stimulates progress*. As well, Margaret Wheatley (2000) comments on similar successful practices in

the structure of organisations. She says: *The forms change but the mission remains clear. Structures emerge, but only as temporary solutions that facilitate rather than interfere.*

### A cautionary tale

In some Australian examples of services locating at one site, ownership of the decision-making processes has come under contest when there are decision-making groups with strong partisan interests. The decision-making model at Peel is conservative in its structure. The administrative structure established at the Peel Education and TAFE Campus took account of, and addressed the issue of one partner dominating the developmental processes for the Campus by establishing a range of structures and decision-making processes. The Australian National Training Authority [ANTA] (1997) developed guidelines for establishing a balance for the co-location and delivery of VET and university programs and services. *In developing and implementing policies for a seamless system, regard has to be given to the distinctive characteristics of both VET and higher education. The distinctive outcomes each sector is providing to clients must be retained, not diminished* (Australian National Training Authority, 1997). The Victorian experience of implementing these principles provoked the following cautionary advice: *While closer interaction between the university and VET sectors should be encouraged, this should not be perceived as being best achieved through proliferation of multi-sector institutions or universities delivering 'associate degrees' in VET* (Association of TAFE Institutes, n.d.).

The Peel Campus based its new model on lessons learned from the VET sector in Victoria.

The Peel Education and TAFE Board therefore has ownership of decisions and the process is located within a tripartite committee. The committee comprises the Challenger TAFE Managing Director, the local District Director for the WA Education Department and the academic head of Rockingham and Peel Campuses of Murdoch University. The Peel Education and TAFE Board consequently has representation and equal voting rights from each member agency and it directs the work of the Education Development Unit that has a working brief to maximise education, training and employment outcomes for the Campus students, the local workforce and community.

The newly formed Education Development Unit provides a conduit to and from local industry, the local community and other government agencies. The role of the Unit is to develop curricula, programs and services for the students on campus, the local workforce and community, in response to locally identified needs, and the advice of the Department of State Development, local industry and other special interest agencies and groups. The working model for the Unit can be described as; *Each structure has a unique identity, a clear boundary, yet it is merged with its environment*, (Wheatley, 2000). This is being achieved by developing industry and commercial partnerships that provide the required knowledge, training and on-the-job experiences to students to ensure they are well prepared for the industry they plan to enter. These working groups will be purpose driven and will last for the duration of the task involved. For example, each education and training pathway that is developed for students has been guided by an expert steering group comprising community and specialist membership. At Peel, education and training pathways will incorporate at least two of the following options: school education, TAFE training, university studies and work experience. Other attendant services may also be developed. For example, particular kinds of cross-sector mentoring and collegial arrangements and ways of jointly developing and managing portfolio education and training are items high on the agenda of 'must do's'. As well, the Board is establishing an arrangement for guaranteed placements in courses on the same campus for students exiting Mandurah Senior College and wishing to undertake studies at either Challenger TAFE or Murdoch University. One feature yet to be fully understood is the extent to which students from the region are prepared to travel to gain the

hands-on work experience they may require for their future employment. Unemployment rates for young people are extremely high (CES figure, 38%, 2000 for the City of Mandurah) and as many as 40% of skilled workers in the region are non-residents. Clearly, providing positive employment outcomes for local people will be an on-going challenge.

### Levels of trust

Some earlier Australian experiences in co-location of education and training services found that lesser partners were overwhelmed by the interests of one dominant partner. At Peel, dispute resolution was designed to operate from the bottom upwards. Should a difficulty be unresolved along the way, then the final decision rested with the three members of the Peel Education and TAFE Board. A similar model had operated successfully for a number of years at Rockingham Regional Campus, just north of Mandurah where Challenger TAFE, Murdoch University and the Rockingham City Council operate some joint facilities.

### Additional funding commitments

Marketing of the individual services provided by the member institutions on the Peel Education and TAFE Campus remains the responsibility of each organisation. Joint venture activities and the financial arrangements for their marketing are dealt with on a case by case basis. Similarly, any activities perceived by the Peel Education and TAFE Board to incorporate an element of risk will be addressed and underwritten on a case by case basis. Sources of shared recurrent funding for the collocation venture are derived solely from the recurrent funding provided to each of the three partners through their individual service level agreements at state or federal level.

Decisions on which institution would operate a particular service on the joint facility were based on track-records of the member institutions and the level of resourcing provided through their individual service agreement. For example, TAFE was allocated responsibility for Campus services, based upon its prior experience in managing that service and their more advantageous formula driven level of resourcing of infrastructure support, compared with the state Education sector. Murdoch University was given responsibility for communications services because of its superior expertise and capability in this area.

Development of the Peel Education and TAFE Campus is in its infancy. Currently (December, 2001), emphasis is being placed on joint education and training policy development and the identification of desirable education and training pathways for students from each sector. A second task of high priority is to establish an industry and community advisory body that will advise the Peel Education and TAFE Campus Board on education and training needs of the region and can provide links back to established agencies and groups within the region.

There is also the need for baseline data to be collected and collated on students', teachers', administrators' and parents' perceptions, preferences, desires and ambitions. This material can potentially be compared with state data and local demographic data already available, in order to design best-fit outcomes for students. An audit of this kind will be undertaken early in 2002, under the auspices of an ANTA Learning Communities grant obtained in July, 2001.

Currently, the Peel Education and TAFE Campus has set up high expectations in the local community, for example 150 more students returned to school for Years 11 and 12 at Mandurah Senior College than had been anticipated. This is signalling a high level of expectation in the watching community. As well, there is a high level of community enthusiasm and support for change and development. The Campus therefore needs to

demonstrate some improved outcomes for its students, to confirm its credibility in the community.

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