

Tasmania *Tomorrow* presents
POLYTECHNIC EDUCATION CONFERENCE
The New Polytechnic Education – Why? What? How?
8 & 9 May 2008
Bellerive Oval Conference Centre, Bellerive

Conference Synopsis & Report from Roving Reporters

Day 1

This is really happening! A focus on why, how and what does it mean for me? Participants articulated a strong difference in the cultures of the current college and TAFE and were primarily concerned about how this change will affect them personally.

Dr Michael Vertigan was very favourably received and strongly affirmed the polytechnic model. For many, he instilled confidence as Chair of the Tasmanian Polytechnic Board with a clear vision of the big picture. Delegates were pleased that Dr Vertigan recognised that funding is essential to productivity and student retention.

Delegates thought that Lee-Anne Fisher's presentation provided a good industry perspective on the need for industry/business partnerships with the polytechnic. Ms Fisher also highlighted the value of informal and non-formal learning which is often overlooked in the national training system.

Dr Damian Blake's presentation on applied learning reinforced a lot of what is happening already in TAFE and colleges and the value of it leading to increased engagement for many. Delegates noted Dr Blake's comment that the learning styles and preferences for young people 'at risk' are similar to that of adult learners.

Dr Tom Karmel's address was also affirming and stimulated thought-provoking discussions related to the value of lower-level qualifications, retention rates being higher than the statistics show, opportunity for the polytechnic to provide 'real' VET alternatives, generic skills in vocational qualifications and risks associated with streaming. Dr Karmel summarised his presentation by saying that the Tasmania *Tomorrow* model is a great opportunity for the provision of a rich vocational education for Tasmanians, but there are many challenges to be met. Dr Karmel showed a keen interest in progress of the initiative with some trepidation in relation to the national statistical responsibility of NCVER and the colleges that the polytechnic will bring in sorting out the interface between school and VET statistics.

Day 2

A shift in thinking was brought about by Eric Sidoti and Professor Brian Caldwell. Together they successfully changed the focus from the implication of change for teachers, to the change needed to address the individual needs of 21C learners.

According to the feedback forms, delegates were engaged and stimulated by Eric Sidoti's presentation. Mr Sidoti's presentation inspired trust and excitement for the

future. His comment that the initiative was “daring but low risk” because we know essentially it’s not working for a lot of young people now, anywhere in the country, was well received. His presentation highlighted the importance of the socialisation role of education, but at the same time, not ignoring what we’ve learnt about the importance of education and skills to the economy and productivity. There was no objection to the fundamental criterion in all of this is being the best interests of the learners.

Professor Brian Caldwell’s presentation also stimulated thinking and provided a good global perspective. Again, it highlighted the importance of the economic justification of the initiative and used international comparisons and expanded on the implications, including resourcing and governance for the polytechnic.

All three concurrent presentations received an excellent response from participants. Participant’s that attended Andrew Fuller’s presentation on *‘Engaging tricky adolescents’* found the presenter to be extremely motivating and entertaining. Participant feedback was extremely positive with all that attended saying that they gained a lot from the session, including tactics they can use to relate to young adolescents.

Those that attended Patrick Wright’s presentation on *‘Working with adults returning to learning and earning’* were equally impressed with the presentation which shifted the focus of the conference from young people to adult learners.

Jill Downing’s presentation on *‘Diploma, advanced and beyond – an approach to higher level qualifications’* also attracted positive feedback. Her presentation talked about the importance of reflecting on teaching practices and strategies and how to foster and encourage collaboration between teachers at the polytechnic and teachers at UTAS.

The conference provided the opportunity to highlight why we need to change and set the scene so that everyone is on the same page. The conference raised many issues and implications which provide a clear basis on which to proceed. Although implementation challenges were acknowledged, motivation to overcome these difficulties was enhanced. There was a real buzz in the air at the conclusion of the conference with many participants feeling ready for the positive change and to move forward.

Chat Sessions

Discussions from groups were on the practical implications needed for the creation of a new organisation focussed on the needs of learners. Delegates appeared keen to get started on the logistics of how they can work together across the organisations to promote life long learning for all. Feedback from participants indicated that they found the ‘chat sessions’ valuable and that they played a very important part of the conference program. The sessions following on from keynote presenters provided a great networking opportunity to meet people from all sectors. Ideas, concerns, fears, excitement and possibilities were shared and participants gained a better understanding of how others work. The discussions helped people move on and there was a noticeable change on day 2.

Transition Workshops

Again, the biggest positive aspect of the transition workshops is that people from all sectors had the opportunity to discuss the cultural shift that needs to take place and look forward to making a successful transition to polytechnic education. There were mixed reactions to the transition workshops, with some participants finding it useful, while others were looking for more strategies to help deal with the cultural shift.

Summary of 'chat session' discussions – 'roving reporters'

Key comments/ideas/themes were collected by roving reporters during chat sessions. The main points are captured below and are grouped by topic.

INDUSTRY/BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

- Industry doesn't understand the needs of 'at risk' students and strategies they can use to help, e.g. mentoring
- Some vocational areas have more opportunity to be engaged with industry than others
- Industry visits must be balanced and the teacher needs to be knowledgeable of the industry area and the relevant training package to impart industry confidence in what's being learnt
- One week work placements are insufficient
- Polytechnic needs to reach out to industry, they won't necessarily come to us
- Industry needs analysis, perhaps on regional basis
- Need meaningful industry feedback
- Close links/partnerships with industries and enterprises through industry reference groups and peak bodies
- How do we promote polytechnic education to industry? The concept will not work without industry backing
- Students need to understand the requirements and expectations of a real workplace – young people don't always respect punctuality, and work ethics etc
- Some work placements result in students gaining employment and subsequently leaving education, ending up with a low level qualification. Employers need to support traineeships for completion of study
- Where will ALL industry placements come from for ALL polytechnic students?

STUDENT NEEDS

- Literacy and numeracy needs need to be addressed - without these essential skills learning progress will always be limited
- Develop a learning agreement with students – a contract type arrangement with their input
- Need to recognise that there are other barriers to engagement e.g. transport, accommodation
- Could develop a 'buddy' system with mature-age learners
- Pastoral care is still important post-Year 10
- Counselling and support needs of students

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

- Not all students going to the polytechnic will have a definite pathway and will want to swap and change possibly more than once as happens at college now. The polytechnic needs to be flexible enough to allow for this
- Polytechnic education provides the opportunity for academic and applied learning to be offered concurrently at different levels
- The polytechnic needs to have entry points at different levels
- Need to ensure learning occurs in the correct context as applies in industry – students need to see their learning as ‘authentic’
- Will partnerships between remaining colleges and polytechnic be possible?
- Holistic education - the polytechnic needs to support students in becoming confident learners with good generic workplace skills and socially active citizens

PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

- Taster options and trial career pathways should be offered to prospective students
- Literacy and numeracy needs to be addressed before students get to polytechnic level to provide the foundation skills for further learning
- Exiting Year 10 students need to have a clear idea of what the Polytechnic structure will be like
- Induction programs to the polytechnic is needed to set the context for learning and expectations
- Current pathway planning model in high schools is not intensive enough to prepare students for post-Year 10 options

TEACHER REQUIREMENTS

- Vocational expertise and ‘teaching practice’
- Facilitation skills
- Ability to manage students at a range of levels and ages
- Access to professional development
- Classroom management skills concerns
- Unclear of what teacher quality assurance arrangements will consist of
- 21C learning – teachers need to have technical skills to engage with Gen Y. There is not only a need for teachers to be aware of modern technology but to also update their skills and delivery methods accordingly

APPLIED LEARNING

- For applied learning to be effective, the learner must have learnt to learn skills
- How will applied learning be used in both VET and TCE subjects?
- Many college teachers already use applied learning as well as TAFE teachers
- Applied learning requires the engagement of the individual, i.e. the individual needs to be empowered and take responsibility for their own learning, needs to see the relevance
- Applied learning suits unskilled workers

- Class sizes need to be realistic to enable applied learning to occur and be managed by teachers
- Literacy, numeracy and IT need to be contextualised in applied learning

DISENGAGED OR 'AT RISK' LEARNERS

- Young people will be engaged if they can be put into meaningful courses to suit their level of commitment – getting them into the right area is the key
- Needs to be support programs such as Newstart or Pathways for those at risk, taking a new start, or those that are unsure where they fit
- Needs to be many options and support for those students identified as being at risk, including lots of flexible pathways and modes of learning

CAMPUS LIFE

- Social activities will be driven by students if they are given the framework and opportunity
- “socialisation” – some adults need to develop social skills as well
- The design of buildings can support or impede socialisation
- TAFE is more segregated due to it's structure of delivery teams, whereas, colleges are more unified – the polytechnic needs to keep the unity
- How will the polytechnic ensure that young people still have opportunities for “fun”?

MISCELLANEOUS

- Concerns about timeframe for implementation
- First impressions will be important – the first impression is the Guide to Courses coming out in June
- The new structure needs to be promoted to the general community, using appropriate language, i.e. not educational or political
- Need to know more about how the Polytechnic and Training Tasmania fit together
- Branding is important – information regarding the names of the new organisations needs to be out now so prospective students can start to identify with it
- Must ensure that the good things that are happening now are not lost
- Needs to be plenty of funding to get a successful start-up and progress
- Does the notion of year 11/12 really fit with the true concept of polytechnic education?
- This is a good economic time to make these changes
- Timeframe and speed of change
- Delayed implementation for 4 colleges complicates decision making and planning)
- Industrial issues, e.g. teacher qualifications, industry skills and experience, where teachers will be working, will there be sufficient resources
- Loss of college/TAFE identity