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**BARRIER REEF INSTITUTE OF TAFE: SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE
2000-2010**

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PREAMBLE

The post compulsory sector of education within Australia has been driven by governments to be more business like, competitive and achieve a greater degree of self funding. The vocational education and training sector has undergone continuous review and restructure throughout the past decade in an attempt to meet these objectives. The public provider, TAFE has been hard hit by the ongoing reform.

TAFE Institute are now required to have strategic plans, business plans and performance agreements with government to secure a large percentage of their recurrent funding, additional funding to meet full operating costs must be generated by institutes through fee for service activities.

The shift to a business model from a pure public sector model, has left many TAFE institutes struggling to survive.

The concept of developing strategic plans and business plans in an environment of changing government policy, continuous change and uncertainty seems impossible and generates a degree of cynicism at the institute level.

There are a number of models that can be used by educational planners to identify future trends. Scenario planning is one tool that is available.

Scenario planning uses the following steps to analyse trends, from which possible futures can be created.

The steps are to:

- Identify key issues involved
- Identify driving forces which may include social, technical, scientific and political changes
- Which of these trends are reasonably predictable, uncertain?
- What are the central themes that may be critical?
- What are the main themes or assumptions around which scenarios can be constructed
- Develop the scenarios, in the forms of a narrative that present a possible sequence of events
- Analyse the impact of the scenarios
- Analyse the implications for policy and identify indicators to monitor changes

(May, 1996 p161-168).

The application of scenario planning as a tool for strategic planning is presented in the report that follows.

INTRODUCTION

This report is to inform the strategic plan for the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE (BRIT) for the period 2000-2005. This will be achieved by analysing current and emergent trends and by identifying the opportunities and challenges facing the Institute in the next ten years. Scenarios for the future have been developed to assist readers to imagine two of the possible futures for BRIT. These are by no means totally fact or fiction, but present some possible themes and directions that could be the future.

What will the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE be like in the year 2010? How will people learn, what will the work of teachers be like? More importantly, what do **we** want BRIT to be like in 2010? The children who commenced school this year will be old enough to participate in vocational education in the year 2010. What future do we want to create for them?

Vocational Education and Training (VET) has undergone significant changes since the late 1980's. The continuing emphasis on skilling the Australian workforce to achieve increased competitiveness in the global economy has been a significant driver of change in this period.

The future for providers of vocational education and training will be influenced by increasing youth unemployment, the decline of rural and regional economies, rising social issues fueled by crime, disparity in the distribution of wealth, the uptake of new technologies and changes to the labour market.

VET has faced an uncertain position within the education arena for decades. The role of VET received significant focus through the seventies as a result of the Kangan report (Rushbrook, 1998). Successive governments have continued to review and redefine the role of VET and its relationship to the labour market and other education sectors. The constant reviewing has placed considerable stress on the VET sector, in particular the public provider TAFE, which has been subjected to continuous changes to policy and direction.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Themes from the Second International Conference on Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) held in Korea in 1999 identified six major themes emerging. All of these themes can be translated into the Australian context. The themes are:

- The changing demands of the twenty first century: challenges to technical and vocational education
- Improving systems providing education and training throughout life
- Innovating the education and training process
- Technical and vocational education for all
- Changing roles of government and other stakeholders in TVE
- Enhancing international co-operation in TVE

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) through the Ministerial Council have identified five key objectives for VET within Australia:

- Equipping Australians for the world of work
 - Enhancing mobility in the labour market
 - Achieving equitable outcomes in vocational education and training
 - Increasing investment in training
 - Maximising the value of public vocational education and training expenditure
- (1998, ANTA Bridge to the Future)

Terry Moran at the Education for Employment Conference (1998) described the key strategies essential to developing a robust vocational education and training sector.

Strategies would include:

- Rapid responsiveness to clients
- Flexibility of operations and capacity to customise
- Ability to operate on the basis of sound business principles
- Resource strength and access to current expertise
- Customer knowledge and understanding of the marketplace
- Quality procedures and measurement
- Capacity to compete with public and private providers at a local, national and international level

Moran went on to say that TAFE would need “*to maintain a sizable market share in this environment, TAFE institutes should be seeking to stand out on the basis of providing a high quality, leading edge product, and high quality customer service.*”

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN QUEENSLAND

One of the first actions initiated by the new Labor Government of 1997 in Queensland was a review into the TAFE system in Queensland. This was prompted by a perceived decline in the provision of VET brought about by the accelerated implementation of the competitive agenda. The Bannikoff Report was released in December 1998 and describes the consequences of the attempt to change the operations of TAFE Queensland at an accelerated rate. The major consequences for TAFE Queensland are described as:

- A decline in revenue from all sources
- Poor business performance in the industry funded market
- A decline in maintenance expenditure
- An increase in overheads
- A decline in the skills of staff

The Bannikoff Report is the key document driving TAFE Queensland at this time.

THE NEED FOR A NEW DIRECTION FOR VET

There is sufficient evidence at both the national and state levels to support a new direction for the delivery of VET products and services in the new millennium. The significant drivers for change are:

- The implementation of the National Training Framework, in particular training packages
- The focus on work based learning and assessment
- The continuation of the competitive agenda and the contestable basis for funding
- The development of new learning technologies
- The expansion of VET into the secondary and university sectors
- A shift in the job market and employment trends
- The increasing sophistication of client demand
- User Choice principles
- The refocusing of training reform on the demand side
- The growing disparity in income and wealth
- The growth in global markets accompanied by intensified international competition
- The emergence of service and knowledge based industries as sources of employment
- Changes in geographical and regional based employment opportunities
- The growth in small business
- Changing work arrangements, increased casual and short term appointments, with less full time permanent jobs
- The need to continually update skills
- The growing demand for a sense of community
- The need for lifelong learning

- An increasing emphasis on institute performance and accountability
- The demand for a sense of purpose based on whole of life not only work
- The increasing diversity of VET clients
- Increasing demand from access and equity groups

EMERGING TRENDS IN THE REGION SERVICED BY THE BARRIER REEF INSTITUTE OF TAFE

- Moderate growth in the Townsville/Thuringowa areas
- Declining populations in the rural communities of Ingham, Burdekin, Bowen and Charters Towers
- Rapid population growth in the community of Palm Island
- Economic growth in a number of industries across Nth Qld i.e. mining, health
- The increase in the number of males not completing Year 12 and not OP eligible
- An increase in the number of VET learners with low literacy and numeracy levels
- The shift from manufacturing and agricultural industries to knowledge based industries
- Global competition effecting the agriculture sector
- Competition for market share in apprenticeships and traineeships

CHALLENGES

The challenges confronting the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE in responding to the driving forces are:

- The development of the necessary skills and knowledge for staff to operate in the changing VET environment
- The development of an appropriate staffing mix to meet the future demands
- To develop of a training market funded by industry, individuals and government
- Increasing competition in the VET sector
- Establishing BRIT as an autonomous, viable business
- To maintain and grow the apprenticeship and traineeship market
- Changing resource needs, being able to realign resources rapidly enough to meet new opportunities, client demands and new technologies
- To be able to seize opportunities in a timely manner to gain market share
- High costs associated with maintaining current infrastructure.
- Developing an appropriate industrial relations framework to match the work requirements

OPPORTUNITIES

With every challenge comes the opportunity to do things differently, with the goal of continuous improvement. Some potential opportunities arising for the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE will be the opportunity to:

- Reach new customers through the use of new technologies and alternative delivery modes
- Establish strong alliances with business, community and industry
- On sell services as learners are required to gain new skills (repeat business)
- Develop new pathways between work, schools, VET and university for an increasingly diverse client groups
- Actively participate in the economic growth across North Queensland
- Establish partnerships to enter international markets
- Create a seamless post compulsory education through strategic alliances with schools and universities
- Use TAFE brand name for market leverage
- Be really innovative
- Expand our client base through diversification
- Create staff and student exchanges through new alliances

UNCERTAIN ELEMENTS

- Political and social pressures on VET
- Future funding sources for VET
- The rate of take up of new technologies
- Future employment opportunities
- The role of governments in the future of VET

SCENARIO 1: BARRIER REEF INSTITUTE OF TAFE – THE PROSPEROUS INSTITUTE

The Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE has established itself as a major stakeholder in the economic and community development in North Queensland. Strong alliances have been formed with industry in the areas of Information Technology, Community Services and Health, Engineering, Tropical Horticulture, Construction and Language and Literacy. BRIT has established Centres of Excellence in these vocational areas.

These business partnerships have facilitated the development of markets in Korea, Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific. The Institute not only provides vocational education and training to these countries, but also has a program of staff and student exchanges.

The decision to differentiate its markets in the nineties has proved to be an effective strategy that has paid off for BRIT. Programs and services are marketed and delivered to specific client groups. One of the lessons learned from the previous decades was that TAFE could not be all things to all people. In its attempt to do so, it did not give its customers any sense that they were special or important. TAFE suffered from mediocrity and poor financial performance.

BRIT undertook a major analysis of its business direction at the turn of the century, and made a conscious decision to invest in technology, emerging markets professional development and to internationalise.

The City campus is now focused on commercial and international business, with BRIT and James Cook University (JCU) having partnerships with local industry and commerce based around the knowledge sectors.

The region is well known for its seamless pathways between the secondary sector, VET and the University. Intensive collaboration between each sector and with the local community now provides students with a myriad of options for education and training. The links with the University have produced a range of courses that focus on skills and knowledge in areas where new employment opportunities have developed. A decline in the revenue base in the three sectors has encouraged the development of sound partnerships to maximise the existing resource base.

The focus of the Pimlico campus now centres on the development of entry level skills for youth. Schools in the region now utilise TAFE's human and physical resources to offer programs that prepare students for work. The options are not limited to work, as students are able to combine VET, secondary and University studies.

The National Training Framework has now been operating for 10 years. This has revolutionised the way in which vocational education and training is now delivered. A de-institutionalised model now operates in all vocational areas with TAFE students highly visible in work based and community based projects.

The shift to work based learning has pleased business and industry and as a result TAFE graduates are highly valued for their high level of relevant skills and knowledge. TAFE staff are also recognised for their expertise and professionalism as educators.

Workers now gain additional competencies as their working life demands. This has also made the cost of training more affordable to learners. BRIT staff now spend their time within enterprises customising training programs to meet specific needs. New business systems enable the management of enrolments, certification and administration to be done on line.

The Institute's marketing strategy is focused on specific client groups and market segments. BRIT is well recognised for its high standards in meeting the challenge of a diverse client base.

The Indigenous Centre for Education and Training has learners in rural and remote communities across North Queensland who access the Institute using a range of new technologies. The Health and Housing project which began in 2001 has achieved an outstanding level of success, with many communities now having the skills to design, construct and maintain housing appropriate to the cultural and environmental needs of the community.

The new medical school at James Cook University and the new general hospital has enabled a range of programs to be developed in and around the health sector. The outcome of this has been a significant increase in the number of indigenous people employed across the health sector.

The Institute has played a major role in the development of the "third sector" or the community sector. This sector has blossomed in the rural communities in this region. Community centres provide on line access to vocational education and training and university programs. These centres have also increased the demand for Adult Community Education (ACE) programs, which are funded on a contestable basis.

The demand for lifelong learning and personal development has fueled this growth. BRIT has now firmly established its presence as a vital part of each community.

It has become difficult to remember how teachers operated in the past. The shift in focus from teaching to learning has revolutionised teachers' work. The days of 14 students to a class, an eight hour teaching day, 21 hours per week, whiteboards and overhead projectors now seem so dull and boring.

Facilitators of learning no longer operate in isolated classrooms. They spend their time in workplaces developing individual learning pathways and customising resources to meet specific needs.

The Institute no longer works in isolation either; it is part of a complex network of business and industry, employment services and educators linking at the local, national and international levels.

Awards for excellent customer service for three consecutive years motivated all staff to continuously seek out new ways of improving business systems and service provision.

As an autonomous Institute, BRIT now operates as a business, made up of smaller business units. These business units are able to differentiate between markets to suit community needs. Through this structure the Institute has been able to achieve a balance between global reforms and local needs.

SCENARIO 2: BARRIER REEF INSTITUTE OF TAFE – THE SHRINKING INSTITUTE

The Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE has performed poorly in the last decade; this has largely been due to the failure to respond quickly to changes within the markets and communities serviced by the Institute.

The poor financial performance of the Institute in the nineties continued into the new millennium. This led to a severe reduction in markets and in the range of products and services provided by the Institute.

Another significant factor was the disparity between government policy for the VET sector and the impact of the driving forces present in the environment.

The school sector took a strategic approach to VET in schools at the end of the nineties. They formed strategic alliances with employers, job network providers and recognised training providers with the intent to maximise options for students. By doing so they were successfully able to minimise the costs of resources to implement VET. Schools in this region now deliver Certificate I, II and III to their students through these collaborative arrangements.

TAFE's position in the VET in Schools market was jeopardised by the government's lack of policy framework on the funding model to be used. Conflict arose between Education Queensland and the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations as to which department would administer the funds for VET in schools.

This caused TAFE to lose ground, as the funding for schools was not contestable. ANTA's practice of funding schools directly was out of step with other VET funding arrangements. Had TAFE been able to compete for these funds an alternative scenario may have occurred.

The main site at Pimlico with extensive Engineering and Hospitality facilities was taken over by Education Queensland in 2007 and is operated by a consortium of secondary schools in the region. They have also been able to work closely with training providers in the region to maximise resource utilisation and revenue generation.

TAFE Queensland never recovered from the loss of market share in the apprenticeship and traineeship market that emerged in the late nineties due to the implementation of User Choice. The pricing structure and the emphasis on achieving outputs, with less focus on outcomes, gave the private training providers a competitive edge over TAFE with its high recurrent costs.

High competition, lower barriers to entry, and a decline in TAFE's market share in the nineties characterised the entry-level training market.

The University sector which slow to take up the VET agenda has been very successful in the past five years in the development of Diploma and Advanced Diploma qualifications. Employer's dissatisfaction with the National Training Packages created an opportunity to develop a suite of courses that focused on the development of key competencies in addition to skills. James Cook University was strategic enough to target these courses in the areas of Information Technology, Engineering, Hospitality, Community Services and Health. BRIT no longer offers Diploma and Advanced Diploma level qualifications.

The University had capitalised on the growth of jobs in the knowledge sector that required a broader range of skills that TAFE had traditionally delivered. The focus has become education and training.

The shrinking revenue base severely impacted on the Institute's resource base. The rural communities of Ingham, Charters Towers, Bowen and Burdekin were hard hit by changes to the job market. These communities were primarily based around agriculture. These communities had not foreseen the changes that the new millennium would bring. There was a population shift away to the major centres, leaving the remaining population largely over 55 years of age, with high unemployment levels.

These trends made the TAFE centres in these towns unviable.

It wasn't all doom and gloom for these communities. The community took on a new determination and established community centres that were locally managed and able to access government funds. What evolved were a number of community centres with on line facilities and an Adult Community Education arm. These centres provided access to universities and TAFE courses on line from across the world and met the social and personal development needs of their communities.

TAFE Queensland has felt the outcomes from its failure to truly recognise and respond to the diversity of its client group. For decades our Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, people from Non English Speaking Backgrounds, the long term unemployed, women and people from rural centres have received unequal service provision from the VET sector. Programs for these groups were often seen as too difficult, too expensive and returning too low a profit margin to be considered as a major part of the business.

The provision of services had been one of compliance to Government act's and policy rather than a desire to truly meet the needs of these clients.

This attitude has resulted in a loss of market share in this area.

In 2001, a very powerful private training company was set up by a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They were very successful in competing for government funds. Since then over 80% of VET funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs has be lost from TAFE Queensland.

This impacted on the Palm Island campus, which was handed back to the community to self manage in 2005.

TAFE Queensland was very successful in the eighties and nineties in the provision of VET to non English speaking people funded by the Commonwealth through the Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP). The number of migrants arriving in Australia and this region has continued to increase steadily, as refugees continue to arrive from war torn countries.

Community based Migrant Resource centres have extended their training to include the AMEP programs. They have successfully competed for government funds. The remaining TAFE staff from that area have either retired or moved across to the community based provider. Their well established links with the community and ability to offer a range of services to migrants gave them the competitive edge.

One shining light in the access area has been the continued growth in Literacy, Language and Numeracy programs. TAFE has been able to maintain this market due to the quality of the delivery and the expertise of their staff. BRIT has grown this market into rural and remote communities by the use of new technologies. Private providers chose to work closely with BRIT to access literacy, numeracy and language programs for their clients.

BRIT had never been able to successfully capture the small business clients. This was due to the high cost of delivery, the lack of current and relevant skill base, lack of flexibility, and an inability to customise the products needed by small business. Now in 2010 the small business sector is serviced exclusively by private providers and on line services.

The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax in 2000 made the cost of TAFE programs out the reach of middle and low income earners.

BRIT's lack of revenue surplus and failure to invest early in the International market caused it to lose ground that was impossible to regain. Astute Institutes from across Australia had commenced working strategically with specific countries in the early nineties. This strategy placed them ahead of new players in this market. Institutes that failed to invest in internationalising have not been able to compete with the experience gained by those that entered the market early.

As a result of BRIT's reduced market share in the past decade it has been forced to reduce its' labour force and rely on short-term contracts for staff to meet project needs. This has had both positive and negative effects. The positives have been the ability to contract the skill base needed for specific projects with costs built into the project price. The reduction in overhead costs has enabled BRIT to be

competitive in the enterprise based training market. The negative effects reduced staff morale substantially.

BRIT's City campus operates as a consortium between JCU and BRIT. This has had mutual benefits for both partners, as JCU had always desired a presence in the City and BRIT has been able to focus this campus on a specialised market. The centre houses BRIT's administration with courses focused on the domestic and international markets for the provision of Information Technology, English Language, Business and Management and Community Services.

This has proved to be a very valuable partnership with the range of courses focused on specific niche markets. BRIT has etched a place as a broker of VET skills in the region.

The human resources at BRIT now consist of a core of administrators and project managers that administer the delivery, brokerage and the partnership arrangements with JCU. Staff are contracted to undertake learning facilitation and assessment as required.

The conversion from temporary employment to permanency of many TAFE staff in the late nineties was a costly exercise that impeded BRIT's ability to create a flexible workforce for the new millennium. The other significant factor was the outdated industrial framework that hamstrung the Institute as permanent workers adopted a work to the award mentality to minimise change and secure their jobs.

This was short lived. When the Institute was deemed bankrupt in 2007, large numbers of staff were made redundant. As most TAFE Institutes had an aged population at the beginning of this decade almost 60% chose to retire when the going got tough.

It has taken until now, 2010 to get the Institute to a stable position in the marketplace. The tide has turned and the Institute is looking forward to re-establishing itself as a major broker of VET services in the next decade. It is unfortunate that it failed to make the necessary hard decisions 10 years ago.

Being too slow to respond to trends, excessive government intervention in the training market, a lack of strategic direction and the failure to invest in new technologies caused BRIT to miss the boat.

The State Government's three year embargo on the continued implementation of competition policy in the late nineties had a doubled edged effect.

It gave those responsive VET providers an opportunity to refocus their business direction. It also weeded out the fly by night private training companies, which had mushroomed in Queensland in the nineties. The training providers that remained (both public and private) were robust and financially viable, with a very strategic focus on their markets.

They prepared for autonomy and competition and were able to analyse future trends and took the necessary action to prepare for the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The priority areas for the Barrier Reef Institute to focus on to become a robust, viable Institute are:

- The professional development of staff to meet the needs of a diverse client group
- The development of business acumen
- An emphasis on quality customer service
- Rationalisation of the existing resource base
- Overcoming inertia
- An organisational structure that is flexible and encourages ephemeral teams
- A review of its products and services

- The development of sound partnerships with the secondary sector, the University and business
- An investment in new technology to meet the needs of future and existing markets
- The development of an international capability
- Market research to identify future business directions
- The development of a first class marketing strategy to suit the diversity of clients

The important point to be considered in the development of a strategic plan for the Institute is that planning is not only about goods and services and markets. It is about the dynamics that exist and the organisation's behaviour in response to the environment, and the development of a sense of purpose.

It is up to us to invent the future.

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