

## Rural and remote vocational education and training relies on TAFE

### Key points

1. Regional TAFE Institutes are prominent local institutions with an unmatched geographical footprint in provincial, rural and remote communities. These regional locations provide crucial access to tertiary education for regional Australians, and leadership for economies and communities in the regions.
2. Vocational education (VET) funding models should recognise the true role of regional TAFE Institutes, as this carries some marginal cost to vocational education delivery. This is not only important for regional economic development, but sustaining this capacity in the regions for TAFE is critical for reliable supply of apprentices and essential skills in thin training markets.

### TAFE's role in regional communities

TAFE operates across almost 1,300 campus locations across regional, rural and remote Australia.

TAFE institutes are prominent regional institutions. As both major employers and training providers, regional TAFEs have long been embedded in local communities and understand local business needs and opportunities. TAFE is critical to indigenous delivery.

Regional TAFE Institutes put employment opportunities in the grasp of country Australians by responding to industry demand for skilled workers. TAFE's prominence is accompanied by high community expectations for regional social and economic leadership and a responsibility to build local skill for local businesses.

This is evident in a recent survey of Queenslanders' attitudes to TAFE, where 84% agreed that TAFE contributes to economic development and social cohesion in regional communities.<sup>1</sup> A Victorian survey found 80% of respondents from both regional and metropolitan areas believed TAFEs meet a real need in skills training and job markets.<sup>2</sup>

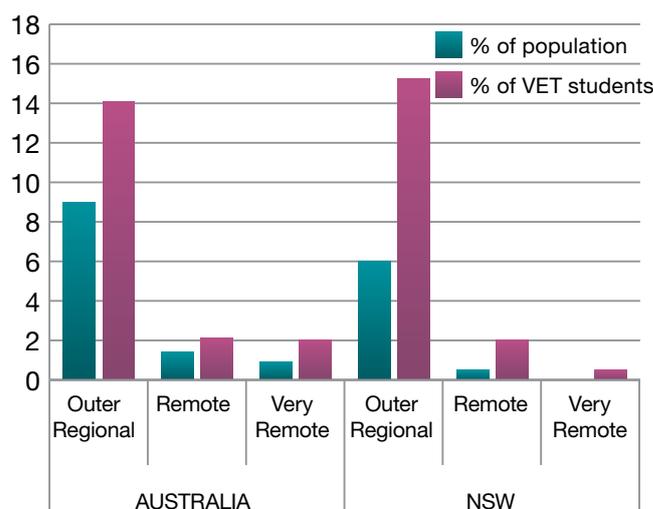
In regional Australia school and tertiary education attainment is lower than in major cities.<sup>3</sup> People are twice as likely to have VET qualifications as higher education qualification. In capital cities, a higher proportion of people hold tertiary qualifications.<sup>4</sup> VET students feature prominently in outer regional areas (Figure 1.)

TAFE provides access to VET, tertiary education and pathways to employment in these areas for young people leaving school, for existing and retrenched workers, and for people who have left school with no qualifications.

Many of these students do not often travel to metropolitan centres to continue their studies and/or to maintain currency of skills and qualifications.

Regional TAFE Institutes to lift aspiration, remove barriers to education and are instrumental in closing the gap on employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians in regional Australia. Despite lower attainment and lower socioeconomic status, students from regional Australia often succeed in higher education at a rate similar to higher SES students.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 1: Percentage of population and of VET students from rural and remote areas at national and NSW state level<sup>5</sup>**



## Skills development in thin training markets

In Australia's regions industry diversity is high, population densities are low and geographical spread is wide. High quality, efficient training provision in these regions requires close cooperation between TAFE, community agencies and services, other training providers, and with local businesses.

By necessity, regional TAFE Institutes maintain multiple small campuses, support small student cohorts and travel to remote areas to service local communities and businesses. While they are increasingly delivering quality blended learning programs to reach their students, low demand for training can mean financially unviable learning programs in thin training markets.

NCVER official data confirms TAFE does the 'heavy lifting' in these markets. TAFEs bear considerable extra marginal costs to successfully maintain and provide the highest quality delivery to students and local enterprises – regardless of class size or enterprise location or industry demand.

Private providers have in many cases not shown interest to invest in locating in remote Australian regional areas. The cost of quality training facilities in the trades for example, is not a profitable proposition.

## TAFE Directors Australia recommends that:

**VET funding models explicitly recognise the true costs for regional TAFE Institutes in meeting community and industry expectations for high quality training in thin regional markets.**

1 TAFE Directors Australia, 2012, *Queensland Community and Industry Survey: Attitudes towards TAFE*, Sydney. Unpublished paper.  
 2 Victorian TAFE Association, 2012, *Community Attitudes to TAFE and Vocational Education & Training*, Melbourne. Unpublished paper.  
 3 Harvey A, Burnheim C and Brett M (Eds.), 2016, *Student Equity in Australian Higher Education Twenty-five years of A Fair Chance for All*, Springer.  
 4 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013, *Perspectives on Regional Australia: Non-school Qualifications in Regions – 2011*, Catalogue Number 1380.0.55.011, webpage.  
 5 Stone, C, 2012, *Valuing Skills: Why Vocational Training Matters*, Centre for Policy Development: Sydney, page 11.  
 6 Gale T and Parker S, 2013, *Widening Participation in Australian Higher Education*, CFE Consulting: Leicester, UK, page 19.