Resilience and Respect

The story of the Victorian TAFE Association
1999 - 2019
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A word from the Chair

Why a history?

Turning twenty is a milestone we thought worth celebrating.

As an organisation we also wanted to acknowledge the generation that steered the Victorian TAFE Association through its first two decades. It seemed timely to capture their thoughts and actions.

We engaged Pam Jonas to undertake this history project. Pam’s own career in our dynamic sector meant that she was familiar with our backstory. She meticulously scoured VTA archive materials, interviewed the characters and pulled this narrative together.

Organisational histories are challenging things. Knowing what to leave in or out; navigating diplomacy and confidentiality – it’s tricky when you also have your present stakeholders and future context to consider.

Over 20 years, there have indeed been tumultuous and challenging times for the vocational education and training sector, and for TAFE. We choose to celebrate the origins, hard work and achievements of the VTA that have brought us to maturation, with resilience and respect.

Today we can celebrate the vital role that our members - Victoria’s TAFEs and dual sector universities - continue to play in social and economic development.

As a peak body, it’s a privilege to support these contributions, which make a real difference to the lives of individuals and communities. As the voice of the sector, we are proud of a shared commitment to the inclusivity, prosperity and public spirit of vocational education and training.

Allison Jenvey
Chair, 2018 -
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VTA Timeline</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting the Scene (Introduction)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Back Story (Origins)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling the Stories (Advocacy)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Big Story (Government relations)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing Stories (Collaboration)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making New Stories (Engagement)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovering Stories (Research)</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Inside Story (VTA People)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Next Chapter (Future Stories)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements, References and Appendices</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Members</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Setting the Scene
(Introduction)
Every organisation has a story, and histories are tangible ways to preserve, share and own them.

The story of the Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) is inextricably linked with TAFE institutes, Victoria’s publicly owned vocational education and training providers. As the peak body for TAFE in Victoria, the events that have affected and impacted the sector have undoubtedly driven the work of the Association. But this document is not a history of TAFE in Victoria.

The Association has its own history. Its stories present insights into the actions and activities that have occupied the VTA for the past twenty years – touching on the events that helped to shape the Association, and those the Association helped to shape.

We begin with a merger. Along the way, we meet many passionate advocates, champions and defenders who operated in a context of government change and policy flux. There’s a public information campaign, a relationship between competition and collaboration, and a series of challenges to manage in an increasingly complex world.

Of the many threads that run through the VTA’s history, resilience and respect feature prominently.

Resilience has been a characteristic of the Association itself, and of its members, across two decades of significant change in vocational education and training (VET) policy and the operating environment for VET providers in Victoria and nationally.

Members and the Association itself hold great respect for the value, spirit and contributions of a strong public education system.

Respect for the VTA has been demonstrated by members who recognise how the Association has served and pursued their collective interests. Similarly, the Association has shown respect for its members and the critical role they play in the public provision of VET, and their contribution to the social, educational and economic development of the Victorian community.

This history spans the time frame from the VTA’s inception in 1999 – at the merger of the Association of TAFE Institutes (ATI) and the Victorian Association of Directors of TAFE Colleges (VICAD) – to its present form in late 2019.

Twenty years, three Executive Directors, and five VTA Board Chairs¹ later, the VTA’s knowledge of the vocational education and training sector runs deep. What we see today is the result of the continuous evolution of a successful organisation that has and continues to represent Victoria’s public providers of quality vocational education and training.

As an employer body, the VTA is unique; it is the only state-based Association for TAFE institutes in the nation, largely the result of Victoria’s proudly decentralised TAFE system.

¹ VTA Board Chairs: David Eynon (Swinburne University) 1999 – 2006; Tony Brandt (Wodonga TAFE) 2006 – 2007; Dominic Andreaccio (Kangan Institute) 2008 – 2014; Leonie Burrows (SuniTAFE) 2014 – 2018; Allison Jenvey (Wodonga TAFE) 2018 -
As a peak body VTA represents the interests of Victoria’s TAFE sector across a broad range of vocational education and training issues, and in international engagement.

Having only public providers as members means that the Association’s base is unique and committed to the public good. Core funding from subscriptions ensures that the VTA is ‘owned’ by members, which strengthens its representation and independent advocacy position.

However, this limited base has meant that at times the Association (and its predecessors) has faced financial challenges as member numbers dropped when institutes were amalgamated, merged, and restructured during the late 1990s and in 2013-14.²

In 1999, VTA membership sat at 19, comprised of 15 multi campus institutes and four universities with TAFE divisions. In 2019, the organisation’s membership includes all of Victoria’s 12 standalone TAFE institutes, four dual sector universities (universities with TAFE divisions), and one associate member, AMES (Adult Migrant Education Services).³

The VTA’s remit is specifically Victoria’s public providers. But the vocational education and training sector is a wide ranging and dynamic environment that traverses private-public provision and national and state jurisdictions. This broader context is reflected in the work of the Association and the reach of its members.

The complexity of the sector and the diversity of Victoria’s TAFE institutes have and continue to present a balancing act. The Association has to astutely balance the needs of members that vary in size, metropolitan or regional location and dual sector or stand-alone configurations. Then there’s the myriad stakeholders to navigate, including government, regulators, industry, students and the wider community, plus existing and potential competitors.

Over its twenty years, the VTA has navigated tensions and competing perspectives, attempting always to stoke the spirit of public education, and when necessary fanning the flames and fuelling the fire.

In 2019, we celebrate the legacy of this work and the strong TAFE network that drives prosperity and inclusivity across Victoria. In sharing the story, getting to this milestone, this history utilises the lens of current strategic objectives, as a thematic bridge between the past, present and future. As such, the reader will find chapters on advocacy, collaboration, engagement, research and government relations, and a section on the Secretariat, the people on the inside.

² In 1993, Victoria had 32 stand-alone institutes; by mid-1997 there were 25; and by the end of 1998 (following the Ramler Review) the number was reduced to 19 multi campus institutes. In 2014 the number of multi campus institutes was reduced to 12 as a result of more institute mergers.
³ Member profiles appear in the Appendix.
Pictured: Left, the VTA’s previous office before moving to its current home, right.
Above: The Association’s logos through the ages.
The Back Story
(Origins)
The close of 1998 marks the end of another eventful year in TAFE, and the end of an era for the Association of TAFE Institutes. On 26 November 1998, Members of the Association voted by Special Resolution to amalgamate with the Victorian Association of Directors of TAFE Institutes (VICAD), to form a new association to be known as the Victorian TAFE Association (VTA).  

While the VTA was itself a new entity, to some extent it forms Chapter Two of a story that began in 1982 with its predecessor organisation, the TAFE College Councils Association of Victoria (TCCAV). That body later became The Association of TAFE Institutes (ATI), which in 1999 merged with the Victorian Association of Directors of TAFE Institutes (VICAD) to become the Victorian TAFE Association.  

So while this history covers the VTA period from 1999-2019, it’s worth remembering that the thread of resilient peak bodies serving Victorian TAFEs spans almost forty years. This chapter details how the merger took place and outlines some governance structures that supported the partners to forge ahead as the VTA.  

Prior to merging, the two organisations were separate entities that worked closely together. Their respective Executive Officers had a collaborative working relationship. At times they shared office locations, regularly meeting to exchange ideas and collaborate as advocates for the public VET sector.  

The organisations teamed up to achieve many changes that would enable colleges and institutes to grow their operations with greater autonomy.  

A salient example is the campaign led by the TCCAV, and supported by VICAD, in the early 1990s to have the Victorian Government designate power to colleges to employ their own staff. The passing of the College Employment Act of 1993 was a major achievement that signalled evolution in the TAFE system. It also presaged the need for the TCCAV to increase its focus on industrial relations advice and services, to assist members to navigate the new complexities of employee relations and human resource management. This would become a hallmark function of the VTA.  

By 1998, the idea to establish a single industry body to better represent Victorian TAFE institutes and universities with TAFE divisions had been percolating through the memberships for some time. Activities often overlapped and it was recognised that benefits could be attained by having a single voice that spoke authoritatively on behalf of the whole sector.  

During that same year, a working group was convened comprising representatives from the two organisations. The group was tasked with considering the benefits of a merger and, if agreed, to create a process to bring it to fruition. The group worked through a host of legal, financial and governance ramifications. Following consultations within and across the ATI and VICAD, the decision was made to proceed.  

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4 David Murden AM, President ATI, ATI Annual Report 1998  
5 TCCAV Executive Officers successively - Virginia Simmons, Tim Smith, and Richard King; VICAD Executive Officers successively Geoff Rogerson and Bob Bangay  
6 Members were David Murden AM, David Eynon, Bob Bangay, Richard King, Bruce Mackenzie, Ray Griffiths, John Stephenson and Chris Cookson
On 26 November 1998, each Association held a Special General Meeting at which a resolution was adopted to amalgamate and form the Victorian TAFE Association (VTA). An Interim Board was appointed, with David Eynon chosen as Interim President.

Correspondence between the two predecessor Presidents anticipated “some prickliness in this merger matter until finalised.” Yet despite any teething problems, the two associations and the people within them remained committed to coming together as one. That meant that the newly created VTA had a relatively easy birth and a smooth start.

However, as with many newborns, choosing the right name required considerable discussion. Some wondered if the proposed ‘Victorian TAFE Association’ might be too generic. In hindsight, the Association has worn its name well and grown in recognition as it has matured.

In the 1998 final Annual Report for the Association of TAFE Institutes, President David Murden AM, thanked all those who had supported the ATI since its establishment in 1982 (as the TCCAV), “especially those who have participated on the Association’s Executive over the years, and who have so generously given their time and expertise to the enhancement of TAFE delivery in the state.”

The contribution of time and expertise by a host of volunteer council members and directors continued to be a stand out feature of the new Association. The VTA benefited from the ongoing involvement of many people who had been critical to the success of the previous associations, and who brought with them their experience, sector expertise and corporate knowledge. They also brought renewed vigour and enthusiasm for a newly created Association that carried future prospects for TAFE.

The transition to the Victorian TAFE Association was presided over by a stable group of CEOs and long-term institute Board Chairs. This meant that the new entity carried a legacy of values, structures and resources gained from the merged organisations. There was confidence that the new association was well placed to continue to support the growth of TAFE institutes in Victoria.

**Governance model**

The VTA’s organisational structure was deeply influenced by the purpose and composition of each of the organisations that merged at its formation. The new structure was a hybrid product of the original bodies, which had served distinct functions.

One was a professional association for institute Directors (or CEOs), the other an association for the institute Councils and Boards, with a focus on governance and policy. The new Association was configured to meet these distinct needs. This meant that the VTA had to balance the expectations of both Board Chairs and institute CEOs. The new Association maintained the distinction and separation by establishing a Board Chairs’ Forum and CEO Council7. Both of these forums continue to operate today.

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7 Historically the institute leaders held the title Institute Director (hence VICAD). This nomenclature changed during the late 1990’s and early 2000’s to Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Recognising this trend, CEO Council was deemed the most appropriate name of the forum for Directors/CEOs.
The Board Chairs’ Forum consists of all TAFE Board Chairs. From the outset it was tasked with providing advice, policy formulation and VTA strategic direction. A related function was its networking and information exchange among Board Chairs.

The CEO Council, comprised of all institute CEOs and dual sector equivalents, had as its primary objective to facilitate liaison and communication between CEOs, particularly in relation to building the capabilities of members and developing policies in key areas to help the Association influence public policy debates. The Council also operated as a place for members to share experiences and to learn from each other.

This structure meant that both groups retained a mechanism to address their specific issues. But their common ground also found a home. The introduction of the VTA Council brought these two groups together in a joint forum and decision-making body that carried overarching responsibility for the governance and strategic direction of the Association, and became the employer of Association staff.

The Administrative Committee, later known as the Executive Committee and more recently the VTA Board, was (and is) elected by the Association Council. This group report to the Council, and holds oversight of VTA operations and direction to the Executive Director.

The final element of the structure is the VTA Secretariat. Staff are responsible for implementing Council policies, and providing member services as determined by members. Priorities and work agendas are set by the Board based on the Strategic and Business Plans developed by the Secretariat.

The current structure of the Association is a streamlined version of previous incarnations. In many respects it mirrors the inaugural 1999 structure, and has served the VTA well as a framework to deliver on objectives. The flexibility to expand and contract with both standing and ad hoc committees has enabled the Association to adapt its structure to reflect emergent needs.
Strategic purpose

There is a clear continuum of purpose running from the predecessor bodies, which was evident at the VTA’s inception in 1999, and is still seen today. A point in time comparison of vision, mission, purpose and rules showcase the consistency in values, and a common mandate.

In 1999, the purpose of the newly formed Association was to:

- raise and engage in the intellectual, philosophical and community debate concerning the purpose of TAFE and client needs;
- establish itself as the leading voice advocating improvement, development and efficiency in the TAFE system;
- establish itself as the authoritative representative of the TAFE sector;
- lobby on behalf of the TAFE sector;
- provide services and assistance to improve the efficiency and capacity of members of the Association;
- manage state-wide and national projects relevant to the TAFE sector;
- establish close links with the business sector to promote and facilitate effective communications between business, TAFE, the tertiary education sector and the community;
- raise funds for the promotion and advancement of the TAFE sector; and
- conduct conferences, seminars and meetings to assist institutes and the Association to promote the TAFE sector.

The goals of the VTA Business Plan in 2000 were to:

- strengthen the principles of good governance by institute Councils;
- promote improved levels of resourcing for TAFE provision in Victoria;
- identify and promote appropriate measures to assess institute performance;
- promote the provision of relevant, timely and high quality professional development programs for TAFE staff; and
- participate in public debate on all matters affecting the public provision of TAFE in Victoria.

The purpose and goals above can be overlaid onto the purposes of the Association in 2019, and the resilience of the language and the objectives are easily identified.
Member services provided by the VTA include public policy advocacy, workforce relations advice, research, government liaison and representation, communication and governance.

New areas of activity were added over the years, and the Association adjusted its focus to respond to shifts in the operating environment, or as member needs dictated change. The Association has regularly reviewed its operations and strategic direction to ensure that it operates efficiently and effectively, and is best placed to assist and advise members with up-to-date services and advice.

From the outset, the Association made a definitive commitment to advocate for good educational policy and to promote the role of the public provider with evidence-based research and policy development. This work was prominent in the early days. When Executive Director Richard King left the Association in 2003, the foundations for a research and advocacy platform were firmly in place.

Over the next eleven years, under the leadership of David Williams, these arenas would both distinguish and test the resilience of the Association.

With the appointment of Andrew Williamson in 2015, the commitment to research and policy development was bolstered and honed to underpin the sector’s credibility and profile with their stakeholders and the wider community.

From the beginning, the VTA was charged with representing members in discussions and negotiations with the Victorian Government. This was often a fine line to tread as TAFEs are government-owned entities with government-appointed Chairs. The delicate dance was particularly challenging for the VTA at times when members disagreed with the policies set by their government owner.
Not a ‘green fields’ site

In many respects the key issues that shaped the VTA over its first twenty years were already in place or starting to emerge when the Association opened its doors in 1999. While the TAFE sector has grown and changed, and the operating landscape has at times felt like shifting sands, the key issues for the sector and the Association have remained constant – governance, funding, industrial relations and HR management, defining the purpose and supporting the development and promotion of TAFE.

The final ATI Annual Report in 1998 listed the key focus areas as TAFE workforce development, funding issues, VET teacher qualifications, institute performance measures, governance structures and human resource management. Each of these continued to be reflected in the VTA's inaugural Annual Report the following year.

A legacy issue for VICAD during the merger discussions was the need for the new organisation to address educational issues through robust research and policy development. In response, the new position of Policy and Project Co-ordinator was introduced to the VTA structure.

It quickly became part of the Association’s advocacy strategy to stimulate public debate on relevant issues. In 2000, the Monograph Series of discussion papers was released (over a period of two years). The papers canvassed topics such as “Educational Autonomy TAFE and Autonomy – Beyond Corporate Governance”. After each paper was disseminated, the VTA convened a forum to facilitate conversations. This enabled the Association to gather feedback and progress learning and ideas.

Another carryover task was to tackle the burgeoning issue of an ageing TAFE teaching workforce, and to find ways to equip teachers for the evolving world of VET. The first VTA Executive Director, Richard King, had participated in the TAFE Staff Advisory Committee Project for Trends in the Victorian TAFE Institute Workforce: A Research Report (2000) commissioned by OTFE.

To take this work to the next level, the VTA implemented a broad consultation strategy, under the banner, ‘TAFE Workforce for the Future Search Forum.’ This consultation led to the discussion paper – The TAFE Workforce: The Continuous Transition. This collaborative process with members was instrumental in raising current and emerging issues for TAFE institutes. In particular, the project raised the level of interest in the concept of the VET professional, and introduced options to develop and resource professional development opportunities, and create career pathways for TAFE teaching staff and managers.
The Search Forum kicked an early goal to deliver on the VTA’s objective ‘to promote the provision of relevant, timely and high-quality professional development programs for TAFE staff.’ It also set the scene for professional development to grow in prominence.

Another carryover issue concerned funding. The extent to which institutes were funding the Government’s student concessional fees policy remained a concern. In a pertinent paper, the VTA demonstrated that institutes were contributing almost $18 million a year, none of which was being recognised in funding support. The representations by the Association resulted in the Government providing $4 million to partially alleviate the burden.

Times have changed but the core values and purpose of the Association has remained – the delivery of quality services and outcomes to members, the representation of members across a broad spectrum of issues, contributing to the debate and development of good public education policy in VET, and being accepted as the authoritative voice of the sector in Victoria.

Workforce relations

Over the first fifteen years of the VTA, members were on a continuous learning journey to understand their responsibilities as autonomous employers who directly managed their own staff. Previously, staff were designated as Victorian Government employees. Since the 1993 College Employment Act, the TAFEs had taken on specific responsibilities that required an understanding of the scope of industrial relations laws. Not surprisingly members were ‘thirsty’ for industrial relations advice and assistance, and looked to the VTA for guidance. Consequently, managing industrial relations advice and services became an overriding function of the VTA for the bulk of its 20 years.

The first two Executive Directors (Richard King and David Williams) had each held industrial and employee relations roles at the ATI, so they both brought significant expertise to their VTA roles. Their appointments were indicative of the ongoing importance to members of these issues. It was clear from the outset that the Association had to be equipped to provide trusted advice and direct assistance to members - individually and collectively.

The VTA suite of member services developed to include workforce relations services, human resource advice and strategy, awards and workplace agreement guidance, and executive remuneration advice. The VTA has also provided members with assistance in dispute resolution and formal representation at the Industrial Relations Commission.

In 2003, on behalf of members, David Williams worked with Bruce McKenzie (CEO Holmesglen) and Ray Griffiths (CEO East Gippsland) to negotiate the first Multi Enterprise Certified Agreement for TAFE teaching staff with the Australian Education Union (AEU). The VTA managed the relationship with the Union on behalf of the members to embed the success of future agreements.
The relationship with the AEU was at times tense during these negotiations but it was always respectful, acknowledging a shared commitment to a strong public vocational education system in Victoria, with TAFE at its centre.

Shift in focus

In mid-2013, when the Association Council reviewed the role and purpose of the VTA, it recognised that members had matured; that their human resource capabilities had grown and they had become largely self-supporting. The need for the VTA to offer direct workforce relations assistance to members had lessened in significance.

The Association would continue to play a lead role in negotiating the collective teaching workforce agreements between the institutes and the Australian Education Union. There was also work to develop resources for HR Managers that would assist members to interpret and implement successive Multi-Employer Agreements (MEAs). The principal new resource A Manual for Best Practice in Employment Relations and OH&S was underpinned by an employer perspective, a step away from the inherited practice of relying on union resources. This revitalised sector-based information complemented the increasing maturity of the institutes. Today the VTA continues to support this development, and hosts a longstanding and vibrant HR Managers’ Forum.

With the prospect of a State Government election in 2014, and the expectation of future sector-wide reforms, the Association Council judged the future focus of the VTA should be towards member representation in the wider sphere, and a concentration on collaboration and stakeholder engagement. Thereby making the shift away from the VTA’s founding focus on industrial relations.

Following the resignation of David Williams in mid-2014, the search for his successor focused on selecting someone with a strong skill set in stakeholder engagement and a capacity to build the VTA into an organisation with ‘outstanding capability to influence government, industry and community.’

Pictured: Bruce Mackenzie (left) and David Williams (right) in discussion
Telling the Stories
(Advocacy)
“The Association spoke on behalf of the sector when we couldn’t always speak for ourselves.”

Advocacy has been at the heart of the VTA’s work right across its twenty years. The organisation’s initial purpose included lobbying, functions to advance the sector, and an active position as TAFE’s representative to stakeholders, which include government, industry and community.

The Association carried its member mandate whenever it spoke up for the public vocational sector, telling the stories of TAFE, showing what these public providers were, could and should be contributing to the economic, educational and social fabric of Victoria. In implementing its purpose, the VTA has enabled the sector and broader stakeholders to participate in public debates, behind-the-scenes discussions and broader reform work.

The VTA carried the mantle of its predecessors as the powerful voice for Victoria’s TAFEs in times of significant transformation and flux. The organisation has always striven to draw attention to Australia’s need for world class skills, and to showcase the value of a high-quality vocational education and training system to deliver those skills. This justified arguments for a sustained commitment to and investment in TAFE, the lynchpin of the system. While the VTA is an advocate for policy positions that directly benefit members, it also has a broader remit to promote good education policy.

Archival records and the people interviewed for this history highlight the breadth of successful achievements over the past 20 years. Issues related to funding, governance, competition and corporatisation, international education, workforce change, and the public purpose of TAFE have been high on the agenda. Recurring issues that required high-stakes representation have largely centred on threats and challenges to the public provider and to its elements such as community obligations, access and equity, thin market provision and regional access.

Together the VTA and its members have weathered public policy shifts that brought on enormous changes. These include contestable models for VET, strong competition and disruptions in international education markets, structural changes, disruptive technology, TAFE governance reform, organisational changes in dual sector universities, significant financial pressures on public VET providers, plus the ebb and flow of state governments and their support.

Over the last 20 years however, there have been game-changing events that have tested the resilience of the Association and its members. There have been critical periods in the history of the Association that have stemmed from the parallel fortunes of the TAFE sector.

The first decade of the Association (from 1999 to 2009) was dominated by reforms to the public sector through competition policy. The publicly funded VET sector was not immune to these reforms which came in the form of the Victorian Training Guarantee, a State Government policy designed to increase the supply of qualified trainees, stimulate private investment in training, and improve the quality of training through competition.
Preparations for the impending change began in 2007-08, with reforms initiated in 2009 leading to full implementation by 2011. The introduction of the policy effectively opened up the training market, ushering in years of change and challenge for VTA members, determining much of the advocacy work of the Association.

Adequate and appropriate TAFE funding has been a constant advocacy theme, as TAFEs navigated the tricky terrain of open markets and stakeholder relations with its government overseer and funder. The VTA has always tried to look beyond a single funding stream perspective, aiming to assist members to be agile and adaptive, while simultaneously arguing for proper funding and an ongoing commitment to the public mission.

“The Association has been careful not to position itself as perpetually importuning governments for more money. Rather our approaches have been designed so that the emphasis is on expanding the role of the publicly funded TAFE sector and smarter use of government funds so that the economy and the community generate enhanced value from the sector. In short, we present opportunities, not problems.”

The Association has continued to encourage members to develop a toolbox of constructive ideas with which to approach government negotiations, rather than to hammer discontent.

Building relationships

In order to strengthen its advocacy role, the VTA has always aimed for good relationships with key stakeholders, particularly the state and national participants who shape VET policy. The Association has facilitated regular meetings and generated opportunities for members to share their views with state government ministers and senior bureaucrats, as well as industry, business and community leaders.

The Association’s records include multiple references to operational and advisory meetings, correspondence, consultations, presentations and keynote speeches with state and federal ministers, opposition leaders, government department secretaries, business leaders, influential researchers, thinkers and luminaries.

One such luminary was TAFE graduate9 and thought-provoking speaker, the former Prime Minister, Paul Keating. At an Association Council special event on 9 September 2010, Mr Keating delivered a speech entitled, ‘The Global View and where Australia is placed related to TAFE, VET and Further Education’. Mr Keating considered the Victorian Skills Reform and its impact on mature age workers. After his address, he talked with institute members, displaying a genuine interest in understanding and listening to their views.

Media coverage of this event was positive, and unexpectedly it prompted the Victorian Government to reconsider its position on the eligibility criteria for mature age students who wanted to upskill or pursue a new career path.

8 VTA Annual Report 2001, Executive Director’s Report
9 After leaving school at 15, Paul Keating later went back to complete his HSC at TAFE.
The Association has been and continues to be regularly invited to nominate representatives to committees and advisory groups, and the Association independently develops considered comment and submissions on sector related issues. Examples include the Future of the TAFE Workforce Report (2001); the Essential Services Commission Review of Fees and Funding (2011); VET Funding Review (2015); and the 2018 Review of Research Policy and Funding Arrangements.

More recently, Secretariat members have been participating on significant committees such as the State Ministerial Advisory Roundtable on International Education. This high level access enables the VTA to advocate for the contribution of TAFE to Victoria’s international education pursuits.

The advocacy role pursued by the Association over the past 20 years has also created an enabling environment in which members have access to a number of benefits, including:

- a forum for cooperation and exchange;
- a means to support effective input into state and national policy formulation;
- a process to coordinate the representation of TAFE institutes and dual sector universities on key committees and Boards; and
- a strong voice for good education principles in government policy settings and directions.

Reflections from VTA dual sector members Allan Ballagh, ex-RMIT TAFE Director, and Alistair Crozier, ex-Swinburne University, recall the VTA’s strong advocacy around critical issues, including funding and contact hours, noting that the organisation didn’t shirk from constructive disagreement, and did a great job of garnering input from across the TAFE system, leveraging its well-connected networks.
As the collective voice, and being an independent entity, the VTA has the latitude to advocate and develop government relations in a way that individual members cannot, because of the constraints and conflict of TAFE institute ownership by the Victorian Government. This makes the Victorian Government a key non-member stakeholder. It’s a vital relationship that has been valued and tested across the VTA’s history.

The Association has always been an active advocate and representative for the sector in independent and non-partisan ways. In 2010, the Association Council took the decision to create its first state election policy package. This outlined, on behalf of members, what government support the TAFE sector wanted, and how it could support the Victorian Government to develop the skills base necessary for statewide economic and social growth. The package was circulated widely; to members, to people on all sides of politics, and other stakeholders.

This proactive initiative was well received. The VTA’s policy statement set the trend for future forays into election campaigns, encouraging political parties to invest in good education policy and to actively promote TAFE, the government-owned resource.

The VTA’s election policy ideas also set the scene for greater public involvement in advocacy and representation work down the track. From 2013-18, the Association produced a series of informative research reports including - *Training Days Models of Vocational Training Provision; Five Policy Priorities for a strong VET sector; The Importance of TAFE to Victoria’s Prosperity; and Strengths and Benefits of the Victorian TAFE Model*. These reports continued to influence the political environment and kept TAFE as a front of mind issue across the political spectrum.

This was never more evident than in 2014. There were significant issues surrounding TAFE in the lead-up to this state election campaign. Funding cuts, skills shortages, and the importance of a strong public TAFE network in Victoria brought the role of the public provider into the spotlight and strained relations between the government and VTA. In the wake of the 2012-13 budget cuts, the Association ran a sustained public information campaign under the title ‘Best Choice.’

The messaging contained a strong warning about the consequences of a diminished TAFE system. This was picked up on a wide scale in the community, with media references to TAFE rising from four to 1400 over the period of the campaign. For the first time in its history, public concern about the value and survival of TAFE put it on the front page as a Victorian election issue.

In November 2014, a new Victorian Labor Government was elected and immediate measures were announced to re-invest in public provision, with the TAFE Rescue Package and Back to Work Program. In 2016, the government announced the Skills First reforms and its vision for TAFE as the trusted partner of government. During the 2018 election campaign the incumbent government announced a further new policy of Free TAFE for skills in demand.
This combined series of policy measures was designed to restore the status of TAFE, and to put the public training providers on a trajectory to greater financial stability.

This all led to a new era for the VTA, to assist members to leverage these opportunities and for the Association itself to realign its services, activities and role as a representative organisation. This more settled context has meant that the VTA has been able to focus on representing what is good about and opportune for TAFE, rather than being in a combative position fighting on behalf of an embattled sector. Subsequently, the VTA’s role as a facilitator of collaboration among members has become more pronounced.

Since 2015, the Association and the Victorian Government have had a renewed and productive relationship. The Government has valued and utilised the expertise of the Association and its members. A concerted effort has been made to support TAFEs to overcome reform hurdles. There has also been recognition and acceptance of the public provider as Victoria’s VET leader.

Good government relations take time and effort. The VTA does a lot of work behind the scenes. In recent years, the Secretariat has leveraged the renewed relationship with the Victorian Government to develop stronger connections with the responsible department, the Higher Education and Skills Group (HESG). This has enhanced the VTA’s reputation as a trusted partner to identify value add opportunities and innovative projects that strengthen the sector. The VTA has been able to manage projects in collaboration with TAFE institutes, and with government support.

These projects cover diverse areas such as developing industrial relations manuals, delivering governance training and qualifications, offering leadership training and coordinating WorldSkills regional competitions. At the time of writing, there is also a TAFE Regional Alliance Project underway, and initiatives to grow regional international enrolments, train school business managers, and build shared student enrolment systems.

Overall, successive bureaucracies have supported TAFE institutes to meet government-set goals and targets, and the VTA has facilitated the Victorian Government’s relationship with TAFE networks.

In its time, the VTA has negotiated regular meetings with the shapers and influencers of training policy. Such meetings have enabled the Secretariat to productively exchange views on good policy and issues of importance to members. While the Association has not always agreed with government policies and direction, the chance to debate issues and present with authoritative experience has continued to inform government relations. In turn HESG (and its antecedents) have been able to tap directly into the hive thinking of the TAFE network.

Notwithstanding the need for the VTA to have a close working relationship with the Government, the Association has always been clear that unlike its members, which are publicly owned, the VTA is owned by its members. As such it retains the right to be an independent voice. At times, that has meant being critical of government actions, in attempts to offer alternative approaches to difficult issues. But sometimes you don’t choose your fights, they choose you.
Crisis point - international students

Some trends develop gradually over years, but eventually express themselves with explosive force, reshaping the operating landscape.

One example is the 2009-10 international student ‘crisis.’ A number of things collided to deliver a perfect storm that precipitated a three-year decline in enrolments. The factors included at least 50 private training organisation closures, changes to the legislation and regulation of migration laws, a spate of violent attacks on Indian students in Melbourne, and a resurgent Australian dollar.

This crescendo led to a crisis of confidence in the Australian VET sector, internationally. Problems emanating from the private provider sector rebounded on the reputations of all VET providers, including TAFE. The Australian VET sector’s reputation was in tatters in overseas markets.

While these issues were not caused by TAFEs, the Government looked to the VTA and its members to provide solutions. At a practical level, the Association worked closely with its members and the Government to provide places for affected students, and to restore the reputation of international education. The Association was inclined to ‘defend’ the vocational sector and the unique TAFE brand, speaking with the media to explain what happened to cause this situation, particularly pertaining to the private college collapses. The VTA also understood that this was a timely point at which the Government could defend and promote its own TAFE brand.

Victorian TAFE International (which merged formally with the VTA in 2016) ran a TAFE is Safe campaign to promote TAFE as the trusted brand for international students. The VTA Secretariat represented members in crucial talks, urging the Government to speak up in defence of Victorian TAFE as a safe, reliable, quality education and training pathway.

In its 2010 election policy package, the VTA argued that the market failure lessons from this international student experience were a red flag that pointed to the need for strong regulatory and quality assurance regimes.

Confidence in the TAFE brand as the government owned, promoted and preferred provider would become a more prominent theme for the Association. Through its networks and alongside the TDA, the VTA prosecuted the case for a change to government policy to promote preferential status of TAFE. The aim was to safeguard the TAFE brand and have TAFE qualifications as a priority for visa applicants. This has not yet become a reality but it remains firmly on the Association’s wish list.
Crisis point - funding pressures

In 2012-13, the sector came under enormous pressure as a result of severe funding cuts. The open market approach implemented under the Victorian Training Guarantee had led to a blowout in the Government’s vocational and education training budget. VET funding was being diverted from the public sector to private operators.

In the 2012-13 budget the Victorian Government announced the removal of ‘full service provider’ funding to TAFE, as well as cuts to subsidy levels for VET courses assessed as low priority. This cut to the public system effectively reduced the TAFE budget by an estimated $320 million a year. This decision sent shock waves through the system, threatening the viability of courses, portending job losses and campus closures. At a fundamental level this move challenged the very fabric of TAFEs as comprehensive providers of public education.

In May 2012, the VTA’s Association Council prioritised the impacts of these budget cuts on their agenda. Several CEOs and dual sector Directors discussed their anticipated staff cuts, redundancies, program cuts, and campus and facility closures. But their main concern was for reductions in support services that were critical for disadvantaged learners, and the prospective loss of public confidence in TAFE to deliver social and economic benefits to individuals and communities. The removal of full-service funding was seen as an outright rejection of the core value of TAFE to provide for disadvantaged groups.

The members’ collective response was to argue against the excessive budget cuts. There were also real practical and philosophical concerns raised about losing the ‘public’ nature of Victorian VET provision. It was considered imperative to protect TAFE to retain the specialist role of the public VET provider; a role that had been roundly supported by the community and documented in the VTA commissioned survey ‘Best Choice’.

As a consequence, members voted overwhelmingly for a resolution to defend the TAFE sector and to campaign for the restoration of full-service provider funding, and an upward revision of program funding. Both measures were aimed at enabling institutes to continue to provide broad training options, and to be properly resourced to deliver the Government’s own education and training targets.

The Council resolution was worded to acknowledge the need for the Government to reign-in budget blowouts but also to “clearly indicate opposition to the cost cutting measures the Government has delivered to TAFE through the State Budget.” The Resolution further articulated the desire of the VTA and all members to work in partnership with the Government to maintain vibrant and viable TAFE institutes.

After this meeting, the Association ran a sustained statewide community information campaign to explain the impact of the budget cuts on TAFE and public provision. The campaign garnered the support of many voices – community, industry, unions, academics and many media commentators. The campaign recorded some 1400 media hits, the largest ever public discussion of the value of vocational education and the role of public provision.
The VTA became the crucial conduit, by articulating and persuasively communicating member views and the impact of ‘savage cuts’ in conversations with government, opposition, media, influencers and the community at large. The VTA led this prominent information campaign for almost two years.

This ultimately ‘successful’ episode in the Association’s story was the closest the VTA has ever come to foundering. It won the battle to raise community awareness, yet it almost lost the war by falling victim to the Government’s ire.

In 2013, the Victorian Government perceived that the VTA was politicising VET issues. It severed all ties with the Association, and signalled an intention to work directly with individual institutes. The VTA lost its capacity to represent members directly to bureaucrats and the Minister, and the government withdrew its sponsorship of the Association’s events. The VTA’s work was greatly hampered and its role and rationale were under threat. Adding to this vulnerability, regulatory and organisational changes at dual sector universities resulted in them requiring less member services, which reduced VTA fees income.

The Association members stood by the VTA but the difficult situation compelled the Association to review its current position and future role.

At the September 2013 Association Council meeting, the Administrative Committee reported back from an August workshop, to guide Council discussions. Two significant directions were subsequently adopted; the commitment to re-establish relationships with the Minister and HESG; and to facilitate discussion on the VTA’s future and its structure at the November Council meeting.

The November meeting set a new direction for the VTA. The coming year 2014-15 was declared a time to rebuild the critical relationship with government, to regain representational access for members. There was now to be a definitive shift from an industrial relations focussed organisation to one with an ‘outstanding capability to influence government, industry and community.’

CEOs and institute Chairs were encouraged to work more closely together to promote the achievements, benefits and role of TAFE in the state’s economic and social future. Rather than being in competition, the emphasis was for TAFEs to find ways to collaboratively shape their futures by harnessing the power of collective strength.

This new direction set in train the work of the Association into the next five years.

Arguably, the public information campaign run by the Association ahead of the 2014 election laid the basis for the recovery of the TAFE sector under the newly elected Labor Government. The Association had strongly argued the case for the specific purpose and value of TAFE, a perspective that was embraced by the then opposition in its campaign. After the election, the new Andrews Government drew on the VTA’s advocacy and evidence platform to support the restoration of TAFE status and leader of the state’s vocational education and training arena. This commitment has continued to present day 2019.
Good governance

“There is a contestable model of vocational education and training provision requires TAFE institutes to combine private sector behaviour, such as entrepreneurial pursuits, with public sector requirements for accountability.”

Good governance has always been an important issue for the VTA. The competitive market for VET training funds sharply focussed the advocacy role for the Association and put the spotlight on governance structures and capabilities. There was an urgency to petition the Victorian Government for increased financial and governance autonomy so that public TAFEs could compete with private provider counterparts.

The move to a demand-driven system highlighted tensions for TAFEs between the autonomy they required to operate in an open market and the accountability required of them to expend public money. Some of the perceived constraints included the EBA frameworks, and marketing and communication approvals.

Supporting the development of governance standards and practice in an increasingly autonomous operating environment has been an ongoing VTA service. In an environment characterised by regular changes to governance, increasing levels of autonomy and rising expectations on directors, the development of effectiveness, accountability and professionalism in the performance of TAFE Councils and Boards has long been a feature of the VTA.

Additional responsibilities created new expectations, and demanded specific skillsets within TAFE leadership and management. Changes in government policy also shifted requirements along the way. Whenever changes were implemented, the VTA played a key role in assisting member organisations to understand and transition to new roles and responsibilities. The Association steered members through a multitude of governance reforms and changes.

The VTA’s discipline of regularly reviewing governance issues has driven members to consider and consistently address key governance questions. Information and training for Boards and CEOs, developed and managed through the Association, critically resourced members to keep them well informed and ahead of the curve. Over the years, institute Boards have increased their composition diversity, and grown in their experience and expertise. This has contributed greatly to the strength of institute governance, and to the confidence of the Association as the voice of the public provider.

The VTA inherited good governance as a strong priority member service. It also inherited resources developed by its predecessors. The Excellence in Governance: a Guide to Best Practice in TAFE Institute Councils Manual first released in 1996, laid a foundation for the future. The VTA subsequently built and maintained a suite of governance resources for Councils and CEOs to adapt their skills in the ever-changing landscape.

10 2011 Victorian Auditor General’s Performance Report on TAFE Governance
For example, in 2006, the Association managed a series of good governance workshops. It also signalled a roll-out of Financial Reporting workshops in 2007. CEOs and Board Chairs were canvassed on topics for future events. The VTA continued to actively support member practices. Practical work included updates and iterations to the *Excellence in Good Governance Guide*; regular seminars and training for Board Chairs, Board members, CEOs and Board Secretaries; and the development of governance qualifications and training in partnership with the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) in 2016.

The VTA also assisted members to contribute to informed and measured debate on governance policy issues, and kept its ear to the ground on what the key issues were. In 2006, the Association facilitated a diagnostic technology and governance survey with TAFE Council Presidents and CEOs. The results helped to identify the capacity of Boards to deal with potential governance and risk management issues that emerged from an increased reliance on information communication technologies.

In terms of getting TAFE governance set-up right, the Association participated in state government enquiries, like the 2008-9 Dandolo Review of TAFE Governance. After the Dandolo review, the Victorian Government instigated the Strategic Dialogue Process. This required institutes to attend annual meetings to disclose their growth plans for the contestable VET market. The VTA assisted Councils and CEOs by clarifying the expectations of the Government in this dialogue process, and by providing a mechanism for CEOs and Councils to share their experiences and learn from each other.
Sharing Stories
(Collaboration)
“As TAFEs became more independent they went from a system to a group of institutes with autonomy. They lost the collaboration with commercialisation. But as things matured, their thinking matured and they could see the commonalities. The VTA promoted collaboration and the value of their collective wisdom.”

Developing collaboration and communication with and among members has been critical work for the Association. The Secretariat has benefited immeasurably from talking directly with members about pertinent issues, and discovering future opportunities.

The Association’s governance structures, events and networks have always given members the opportunity to collaborate; to benefit themselves and contribute to sector development. The CEOs interviewed for this project spoke openly about their participation in CEO Council as being an integral tool for professional development. It provided an informal place to learn from peers, share experiences, and to bring their focus back to education policy through collaborative conversations, in an otherwise competitive environment.

While members have at times been concerned with defending or growing their patch in the open market context, the VTA has provided mechanisms and forums through which shared interests can be consolidated. The VTA has provided opportunities for all voices to be heard and exchanged, so that members can collaboratively deliver TAFE’s public mission.

Getting together: the State Conference and more

A hallmark feature of the VTA story is the State Conferences. These annual events have and continue to be an integral way to discuss contemporary issues, convey big picture ideas, communicate trends, gather for collective consultation, and to connect and network. The events support stakeholders to explore important issues and rethink ideas, exposing audiences to innovative educational, operational and funding models.

The Association has always striven to provide high value experiences with high calibre speakers and stimulating events, an achievement that is evident across the long list of programs. The conferences have attracted high level government speakers, international guests, strong sponsorship and interested attendees.

Historically, the VTA’s predecessors held longer Director-level conferences often over a weekend, generally at a regional institute campus and with an inwardly focussed agenda. As the TAFE sector and vocational education evolved, the State Conferences became more inclusive and outward looking. Today, interest in the conferences extends beyond the VTA membership, and participation is now open to many stakeholders.

Over the years, participant feedback has been consistently positive, reflecting the effort that goes into program development, the quality of the speakers, and the planning work of the Secretariat.
For over twenty years the conference has brought together the senior stewards of the sector, with the exceptions of 2007 when no event was held, and in 2013 when the conference was replaced by a one-day seminar on governance, to respond to pressing policy changes.

The conference themes tend to reflect pressing issues and prevailing moods. Since 2015, conferences have projected an increasingly optimistic tone and attracted more than 150 TAFE Board members, CEOs, and people in executive and management roles.

A look back across VTA conference program titles points to a trajectory of challenges, and the VTA’s intent to equip members to tackle these challenges and leverage emerging opportunities.

The International Women’s Day celebration is a newer event but one that has become an adjunct and important one for the VTA calendar. The event was established in 2008 to provide an opportunity for the sector to come together to share in celebrating women and to hear inspirational women speakers. In response to changing needs and times, the event was reshaped in 2017 and focussed into an event that celebrates the contribution of women to TAFE and the public education sector, their leadership, and their achievements, with inspirational women speakers drawn from the TAFE sector itself.

11 In 1998, VICAD held a Women in TAFE dinner with Kaye Schofield as guest speaker but this appeared to be a one time event.
Getting to know you: the networks

“The networks are part of the success story of the VTA.”

Over the years, the VTA has opened up multiple networks for members across a range of positions and institutional functions. These network groups have established solid communication paths, informed the policy landscape and connected peers to support and collaborative opportunities.

The networks continue to shape the VTA and its member stories. At the time of writing in 2019, the VTA Secretariat hosts or convenes close to 30 networks. An important outcome of the networks has been communities of practices among topic leaders, where members come together to share knowledge and experience, and build collective sector capacity.

Vitally, these networks are a conduit and resource to inform the development of VTA policy and submissions. This ensures that the Association’s work captures the comprehensive knowledge of members, and enables direct experience to inform the Association’s contextual understandings. As a result of the networks, the VTA’s advocacy work has remained informed, relevant and grounded in real practice.

The VTA has always relied on member input and feedback on its strategic direction and objectives, policy work and day-to-day activity. Members provide a horizontal view across the sector, and a vertical slice of detail. Throughout the history of the Association, Members have participated in the networks, state committees, national committees and ad hoc working groups. Many have represented the VTA in parliamentary inquiries, participated in external forums, addressed conferences, contributed to the Association’s activities and helped organise events and functions.

The networks have enabled large numbers of TAFE staff, from across the state, to share practice, break new ground, open their minds and contribute to debates that influence education policy. Multiple networks have delivered ongoing professional development and support. The HR Managers’ Network and the Victorian Association of TAFE Business Managers (VATBM) have been critical voices to the work of the VTA since its beginning. Other networks have been created in response to specific needs or special interests.

Pictured: HR Managers’ Network meeting at the VTA office
International Education

The **Victorian TAFE International (VTI)** Network was formally brought under the umbrella of the VTA in 2016. Victorian TAFE International Inc. had operated alongside the ATI (then VTA) from 1998 as a separate incorporated association.

VTI members were TAFE institutes and its primary purpose was to be an association for TAFE staff who worked in international education. Its further purpose was to provide quality advice to the VTA on international education issues, and to inform strategic directions for the enhancement of the TAFE brand internationally.

VTI Inc. had always liaised closely with the VTA and it was both accountable to and reported to the Education Standing Committee of the VTA Board regarding its activities. While it was not authorised to express views on behalf of the TAFE system, its advice was often sought by external stakeholders. There was at times confusion about the role of VTI Inc. and the role of the VTA around international education issues.

The 2010 international education crisis highlighted that this was an area that needed to be more closely monitored. The VTI Inc. was operating in a highly dynamic market and it was recognised that its members would benefit by being resourced from within the VTA structure.

During 2015, discussions were held regarding the transitioning of VTI Inc. from a separate incorporated entity to a network within the VTA structure. As a result of discussions in 2015, VTI Inc. was unincorporated and in January 2016 was brought ‘in house’ as a formal network of the VTA.
Working with a collaborative focus, the re-created VTI has enhanced efforts to identify, facilitate and develop projects between member institutes; and to promote the TAFE brand in international markets with a co-ordinated voice, marketing their collective strength.

Regional voices

While the Association has always been located in Melbourne, it has been conscious of access and inclusivity, and committed to supporting the diverse needs of individual members. Technology has also made it easier for members to connect and collaborate with less travel disruption.

Regional institutes face challenges not encountered by their metropolitan counterparts. On the whole, these TAFEs are smaller organisations, distant from the centre, and they operate in more limited markets serving distinct demographics.

The VTA has recognised that while common issues such as funding, governance, IR, government policy settings and member advocacy transcend geographical location, members in the regions have unique issues. The VTA has endeavoured to provide the platforms and mechanisms for regional members to share their perspectives, for inclusion in VTA policy debates and Association governance.

Over time, the Association has responded to a number of regional reviews and inquiries at both state and national levels. Regional TAFE institutes have generously contributed to the VTA information gathering that informed this advocacy work and broader agenda.

Throughout its existence, the VTA has benefited strongly from the contributions of regional leaders, who have also ensured that regional Victoria’s voice is heard. From VTA Board Chairs, like John Stephenson, Leonie Burrows and Allison Jenvey, to regional CEOs such as Angela Hutson, Joe Piper, Win Scott, Ray Griffiths and Barry Wright, regional leaders have and continue to make significant contributions to policy development and ensure that regional issues are never far from the thoughts of policy makers.

In the spirit of collaboration, a concerted effort has been made to expose metropolitan colleagues to regional institutes. The VTA State Conference has also at times been held at regional locations so participants could understand the regional context and experience.

In addition to networking with their metropolitan counterparts, regional CEOs have benefited from a peer network. The formation of a regional TAFE CEOs network brought them together to canvass pertinent issues.
This collaborative group has been a valuable forum to broach sensitive subjects, such as amalgamations. According to one CEO such an ‘uncomfortable conversation’ was made easier by having the VTA broker discussions in a ‘safe’ and enabling environment.

A 2010 regional marketing project, coordinated by the VTA Secretariat, was significant in raising the profile of regional TAFE institutes.

Commencing in 2018, the Regional TAFE Alliance Project, is financially the largest single project managed by the VTA to date. It is sponsored and co-ordinated by the VTA with financial assistance from the Victorian Government.

The project involves seven regional TAFEs working collaboratively to develop shared education resources and delivery across regional Victoria, supported by a digital collaborative hub.

Dual sector perspectives

Dual sector universities - those that offer both higher and vocational education courses - are another distinct subset of the VTA membership. The formalisation of this provider category in Victoria brought complex challenges and a whole new landscape for TAFE Directors to navigate at the turn of the century.

The reflections of two former dual sector Directors¹² Allan Ballagh and Alistair Crozier indicate that the VTA was a vital nurturer of inclusiveness and unity among the larger Melbourne-based TAFE institutes, dual sector providers, and regional TAFE institutes.

VTA was a critical forum through which TAFE directors were exposed to the wider melting pot of challenges and ideas, in order to maintain a broad perspective on the purpose of TAFE education.

In their recollections, Allan and Alistair acknowledge the VTA Secretariat as a highly professional and effective unit that punched above its weight, and played a critical role to maintain productive relationships and communication between TAFE providers and the government.

Although challenges remain - particularly around public perceptions of VET compared with the notion of ‘higher’ education - the inclusion and collaboration of all members has strengthened the capacity of TAFEs to forge links between the national university and state-managed vocational systems, to enhance pathway opportunities and outcomes for students.

¹² Allan Ballagh, ex-RMIT TAFE Director, and Alistair Crozier, ex-Swinburne University.
Making New Stories
(Engagement)
TAFE institutes are an integral part of their communities, right across the state. In metropolitan and regional areas, the VTA's members support individuals and intersect with local businesses, community agencies and industry stakeholders.

Even so, it has been challenging at times to attain public understanding and stakeholder recognition of TAFE’s unique role and its economic and social value for students, industry and the broader community.

In recent years, the Association has recognised the need to move towards more explicit engagement, to reiterate value, but also to create new opportunities for innovation or partnership, and to grow the TAFE ‘brand’. By building ongoing relationships, and supporting members to do the same, the VTA has forged targeted connections that bolster TAFE’s ongoing capacity to make a real difference.

These engagements happen at the high level among peak bodies or sector-wide industry players. The VTA has also encouraged place-based strategies to leverage local connections and meet needs that can only really be identified on the ground by people asking questions, having conversations and sharing information.

Over two decades, the VTA has interacted with a diverse array of stakeholders, such as businesses and industry peak bodies, academia, government departments, unions, and other peak bodies in the VET sector. This has provided valuable opportunities to advance TAFE and to work collaboratively with stakeholders on common issues or innovations.

Friends and allies

In its time, the VTA has established core relationships and partnerships with counterpart organisations that share its commitment to public education.

**TAFE Directors Australia (TDA)** is one of those key partners. This peak national body was established in 1998, around the same time as the VTA, to represent Australia’s publicly owned TAFE institutes and university TAFE divisions, and the Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC).

The two organisations have had a close and successful relationship. As an affiliate member, the VTA has contributed actively to TDA policy and research activities. A number of Victorian CEOs and VTA members such as Bruce McKenzie, Virginia Simmons, Nicholas Hunt and Mary Faraone have contributed their intellectual energy and leadership to both Associations. The synergies led to a mooted merger in the 2000s but the VTA opted to retain its independent status as an affiliate member in close alignment.
The relationship has meant that the VTA contributed to the national conversation around governance, architecture and market design for the National Training System. The two organisations also collaborate closely on the development of federal election policy platforms, and VTA submissions and expertise enhanced the TDA's research capacity.

Under TDA's current leadership, the relationship between VTA and TDA is stronger than ever. VTA's advocacy in the federal policy arena is always prefaced with an acknowledgment to its national equivalent.

As a concrete example of how engagement can benefit the sector, a key partnership with the VET Development Centre (VDC) has supported the Association to champion scholarly practitioners in TAFE. This has been strongly aligned with the applied research happening in the institutes.

In 2011-12, the VTA undertook a study on behalf of the VDC to examine the nature and extent of research activity in Victorian TAFE institutes. The study, *Naming and claiming a research culture in Victorian TAFE* was a discussion starter on the subject of research capacity and capability in TAFE. The research highlighted potential professional development activities that the VET Development Centre could pursue to build the professional capabilities of the TAFE workforce.

The project tapped into the Victorian TAFE network to explore and examine what the environment for applied research in TAFE organisations looks like, and the ways and extent to which research is actually undertaken. The findings ignited a spark and generated recognition of the research capability and capacity in TAFE. The Association has further guided members to appreciate and promote what is happening at their institutes, so that the public better understand the value of TAFE, and so that what is being discovered can be exchanged for broader application.

The VTA continues to work closely with the VDC, noting the complementary roles of the two organisations and the sector-wide benefits of collaborative leadership.
Discovering Stories
(Research)
“The VTA has reached out internationally for good education policy, staff development and research direction.”

Research and development are important tools for the VTA to realise its mission. The Association has always openly explored the conceptual issues, philosophical principles and practical realities that underpin the public provision of VET and the role of TAFE.

Over the years, a breadth of activities have been undertaken to build the research capacities of TAFEs, and to grow workforce capabilities. The VTA’s research agenda has supported good and robust education practices, and given gravitas to the specialist work and insights of the vocational sector.

As a peak body, the VTA also taps into research to discover and articulate what resources the TAFE sector needs, and to highlight what it does and contributes. Quality research has always provided a solid foundation to inform advocacy and engagement efforts, particularly in relation to sector development and policy influence.

The VTA’s submissions and policy papers remain a key prong of the communications strategy; informing collective views of the sector and shaping decisions and outcomes. This is evident from the introduction of the Monograph Series in 2000 right through to the 2018 commissioned report, The importance of TAFE to Victoria’s Prosperity.

Sharing innovation case studies is another way that the VTA builds capacity. It has also done significant work to showcase the applied research potential of the VET sector. In 2018, the VTA offered a submission to the national Review of Research Policy Funding Arrangements. The Australian Government was looking at reform opportunities to deliver on its agenda for ‘Boosting the Commercial Returns from Research Strategy’.

The VTA grabbed this opportunity to shine a light on the research capacities and capabilities of the VET sector and to demonstrate how the right policy and funding incentives could enable providers to realise innovations – particularly in partnership with industry. The VTA’s paper (and subsequent appearance) challenged the Review Committee to look beyond the predominant view of the university sector as best placed for research and development. This submission showcased how vocational education providers could share and commercialise knowledge. It was an important contribution to demonstrate that VET providers, and TAFE in particular, were the missing link in the research chain.

Gathering the evidence

The VTA’s policy positions have always been garnered by consulting members through focus groups, surveys, targeted responses, and tapping into the specialist knowledge of people in the Networks. This ground work has meant that the policy positions were well developed, tested and accepted for their clarity and deep insights into TAFE experiences.
The high value of member advice and respect for their opinions has been mirrored in the quality and expertise of VTA submissions and policy position papers, across the spectrum of issues at national and state levels. By broadly canvassing members, the VTA’s research has become respected for its integrity of purpose, independence and non-partisan approach.

A dip into the archives reveals the depth and breadth of the work done by the Secretariat in collaboration with members. The plethora of issues covered includes higher education, quality, education loan schemes, pathways, training policy, IR/HR legislation, funding, governance, research and finance. These pieces constitute an impressive collection of evidence-based resources that informs high level thinking about VET education, the value of investing in public provision, good governance and innovation.

Painting the picture

From 2012-18, the Association commissioned a number of research projects to strengthen its position as a robust, independent and critical voice. The aim was to paint the picture for strong government investment in and promotion of its own public system. The research has enabled the VTA to inform decisions on public provision, during and beyond election cycles.

The 2012 report, BEST Choice: Community Attitudes to TAFE and Vocational Education and Training, emphasised the strength of community support for TAFE. These research findings underpinned the public information campaign to redress the 2012/13 budget cuts.

The following year, Training Days: Models of Vocational Training Provision, presented a clear case on the impact on TAFE of 2009-13 contestability policies. Most importantly this report offered constructive ideas for the Victorian Government to support the system to overcome challenges, and suggestions on how to build a sustainable framework for the future of the state’s public providers.

In 2018, ‘Five Policy Priorities for a strong VET Sector’ outlined an agenda for change for Victoria’s VET system to 2025. That same year, The importance of TAFE to Victoria’s prosperity was also commissioned, adding to the research insights from the 2017 LH Martin report, Strengths and benefits of the TAFE Model. All of these reports tangibly articulated the strength of the public VET sector, and bolstered the Association’s credibility in stakeholder engagement, advocacy and representation.
Next generation

In recent years, the VTA has also added a couple of other research strings to the bow. Innovation and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) have become significant focal points.

The Association has been keenly showcasing to members the value of innovation and the potential of applied research partnerships between TAFE and industry. The Secretariat has been informed by the Canadian model and other international examples, and is exploring how to create similar opportunities in Australia.

The VTA has also led a move towards scholarly practice for TAFE teachers, with mechanisms to recognise and encourage applied research in TAFE. As a result of a study project, the Association successfully argued to have applied research included in the 2018 TAFE Multi Enterprise Agreement, recognised as continuous professional development. A number of institutes have created dedicated research bodies within their organisational structures, and the VTA now hosts a regular series of webinars to showcase, celebrate and recognise the exceptional applied research and innovation activities taking place across the TAFE network.

The Association continues to work to provide opportunities for the dissemination of research and to build a culture of research and scholarship that permeates throughout the sector. In 2017, the Association introduced its Applied Research in TAFE webinar series, which provides an outlet for TAFE researchers to showcase their research efforts and to interact with peers. The VTA is also a founding member of the VET Practitioner Research Network, a community of VET researchers that brings together VET researchers from across the nation. In addition, the VTA works with the Australasian Vocational Education and Training Research Association (AVETRA) to showcase and elevate TAFE research, including through AVETRA conferences, the regular hosting of events as part of AVETRA’s OctoberVET festival, and recognising TAFE researchers through the conferring of awards. Finally, the Association works to build the sector’s research capability, such as through the publication of Doing Applied Research in Victorian TAFE Institutes: An introductory guide (2019), and the hosting of capability development workshops delivered by internationally renowned VET leaders.

By sharing case studies, telling the stories, and championing policy and practice projects, the specialist work of the sector can be recognised and harnessed by stakeholders.
The Inside Story
(VTA People)
Team players

The Association Secretariat has always been a small but formidable team.

With the 1998 merger process, all ATI Secretariat staff were transferred as employees to the new Association. Richard King was appointed as the Executive Director, David Williams continued to guide industrial relations services, and Alice Macklin, Rosemary Walls, Lisa Grant and Denis Arthur sustained the day to day operations.

The inaugural VTA team was joined by Janelle Thomas in a new policy role, initially engaged to develop a series of discussion papers. She stayed with the VTA until 2002 when her path took a turn into comedy. Under the stage name, Nelly Thomas, she went on to become an award-winning comedian, ABC radio presenter and professional MC. With a nod to a one-time TAFE marketing campaign, it’s amazing where TAFE can take you!

Across its twenty years, the VTA team has taken TAFE stakeholders through interesting times, professionally juggling voluminous and diverse functions to support members and inform sector development. This has and continues to include writing submissions, coordinating committees, facilitating VTA networks, delivering the annual State Conference and special events, plus advocacy and representation.

The continuity of staff highlights the team’s commitment to public education, and is testament to a cohesive organisational culture. Over twenty years there have been only three permanent Executive Directors – Richard King, David Williams and Andrew Williamson, with Nita Schultz an interim appointment between David’s retirement and Andrew’s commencement.

The in-house operations and specialist consultant teams have also remained steady. Over the years, the names Jim Andrews, Nita Schultz, Anna Bejanoff and David Hanneford became synonymous with the provision of high-level member services. The Secretariat’s structure has also enabled it to respond to demands by contracting to meet capacity and capability requirements. As such, the VTA team has become flexible, agile and dynamic.

Pictured: Left and moving right, VTA staff 2006, Jim Andrews, Nita Schultz, Anna Bejanoff, David Williams, Andrea Newton and David Hanneford. Current staff are pictured on the right, and moving right include Trevor Goddard, Angela Nicholas, Anna Bejanoff, Andrew Williamson, Arnaldo Barone, Andrea Newton, Sharon Junker and Mick Prato (current staff not shown include Les Burr, Vicki Lagaris and Nita Schultz).
Leadership

The appointment of the Executive Director has mirrored the changing needs of the Association members. The appointments of Richard King and then David Williams were an indication of the continuing importance of the industrial relations role to members. Both brought strong industrial and employee relations backgrounds to the role of Executive Director. Andrew Williamson’s appointment in 2015, following David’s retirement in mid-2014, indicated the shift in focus for the Association towards stakeholder engagement, research and representation.

This story would not be complete without special mention of David’s contribution to the VTA over a 17-year period. David’s first six years as the Employee Relations Consultant at the ATI and the VTA, meant that in 2003 he was the natural successor to Richard King as Executive Director, a role he carried out with a passion for the sector and integrity in all of his dealings.

Along with his broader leadership role, David continued to provide specialised, sought-after advice and direct assistance to members on their industrial relations issues. Over the years, he represented members in various commissions, and led member negotiations with the Australian Education Union. David’s IR legacy includes the first enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) for TAFE teaching staff, and later, the first Multi-Employer Agreement (MEA).

After the hard-fought campaign of 2012-2013, David resigned in 2014. He left with a raft of achievements on behalf of the public VET sector and Association members. He went with the accolades of his peers and the respect of those he had worked with over his 17 years. Letters of congratulation in the VTA files on his departure point to his ‘critical advice on negotiating industrial relations issues’, his ‘outstanding contribution to TAFE’, and on being ‘a strong and fearless advocate on behalf of Victorian public TAFE institutes’.

Andrew’s appointment ushered in a new era for the Association. Along with the launch of a new corporate identity which modernised the logo, the vision and mission of the VTA was refocussed to reflect their new direction.
At the table, serving members

“Driven by the members, facilitated by the VTA…”

The Secretariat has always fought to be at the table when important issues and changes were debated – publicly on occasion but mostly working effectively in the background. Developing the important relationships that ensure the VTA has been and continues to be an important stakeholder consulted by government and industry.

With a committed secretariat supported by the vast capability of the membership, the VTA has always punched above its weight. Where appropriate, either independently or collectively with the TDA, it has been a prominent voice in relevant national issues and forums.

At the policy and advocacy level, a great deal was attempted and achieved over the last 20 years. Yet the Association also never lost focus of its active operational programs. Industrial relations were only a part of the story. The Secretariat has developed and continuously delivered a vast range of quality services for members.

For example, contributors to this work commonly recalled the initiative around copyright monitoring and licencing. VTA staff identified a gap and opportunity. The team’s solid research and market intelligence convinced members that there were substantial benefits to be gained by collaboration. The Secretariat subsequently negotiated a collective agreement with the Copyright Agency Ltd (CAL), which resulted in major cost savings for members.

This initiative also led to a Copyright Liaison Officers Network to support the capabilities of staff in this arena, which continued to reduce the institutes’ copyright liabilities.

As new technologies emerged, these were leveraged by the Secretariat for member benefit. The Secretariat has grown its technology capabilities, and that has translated into enhanced communications, connections and resources for members. The current use of a ‘Virtual Conference Satchel’ at the VTA State Conference is a far cry from a 1986 minuted discussion about investing in a fax machine to communicate with member colleges!

Today’s website reveals a vibrant organisation that has maintained pace with technological change and innovation. A variety of core membership services, adjunct and allied projects are accessible in digital format. The VTA’s flexible online resources offer members across the state ready access to information and materials that inform their work. In particular, the regional institutes are able to engage more easily in networks and member activities.

Pictured: Regional TAFE Alliance team (left to right): Christine Nicholas, Andrea Radley, Colin Foote, Glenn Kelly and Julie Day.
The Next Chapter
(Future Stories)
Now its 21st year, the Victorian TAFE Association has come of age. The people interviewed for this project celebrated the impact of the VTA on both the strategic and operational direction of the Victorian TAFE sector over many years and on many fronts.

As an industry association, it is unique in its field – the only state-based organisation for TAFE institutes – and it has drawn on the diversity and collective wisdom of members to build a strong research and evidence base that informs its representative role and policy development.

A significant achievement of the VTA is its work to increase participation of staff from member institutes in its advocacy and support activities. Through the creation of forums, networks and communities of practice across a wide range of areas, the VTA has been able to harness the vast resource of practitioner expertise and experience. It has used these resources as an evidence base from which to lucidly and expertly advocate on behalf of members in its responses, representations and submissions to the countless reviews and policy shifts in and around TAFE and the VET sector.

In the field of industrial relations, the VTA has impacted the terms and conditions of TAFE senior management, teaching and administrative staff, by assisting members to increase their autonomy and mature their own human resource management. Under the current MEA, the VTA continues to support effective and consistent implementation of the TAFE teacher industrial agreement.

At a governance level, VTA has impacted the professionalism of CEOs and institute Boards through its long-term focus on increasing the autonomy of institutes and facilitating the development of the skills needed to deal with increased levels of responsibility for Boards. The discipline of consistently reviewing governance issues has driven members to regularly address key governance questions as they apply specifically in the TAFE environment and in a wider sense.

The VTA has responded through the continuous development of effective and appropriate governance materials, resources, training, and exposure to up-to-date governance changes, trends and thinking through seminars and events.

The existence of the Association itself as a forum for CEOs to gather, share knowledge and expertise has impacted the professional development of and support for CEOs. The CEO Council has provided a collaborative environment for sharing their experience and a space for informal peer to peer mentoring. It has enabled new CEOs to learn and be supported in their roles, and for the longer serving CEOs to have their skills and expertise acknowledged and valued.

The VTA has been a vital forum to gather collective wisdom and share knowledge and expertise, growing the capabilities and confidence of the TAFE sector.

Over the last 20 years it has demonstrated resilience as an organisation and endeavoured to showcase the remarkable resilience of the TAFE sector; and continued to show its respect for the members through its focus on their evolving needs.
The primary source for this project was the minutes of the meetings of the various councils, committees and networks that comprise the governance structure and wider membership activity of the Association. What reading these minutes demonstrates more, and above all, is not the minutes, but the hours, weeks, months and years of work given to the Association and the TAFE sector by literally countless people.

In that context, it is always dangerous to mention specific people in recounting the activities of an organisation, for fear of leaving someone out. More names have been left out than in this story but a number of names featured time again in the early merger documentation and were mentioned in interviews as key figures in a historical context.

A number of the early pioneers of the TCCAV such as Don McKenzie, Virginia Simmons, David Eynon, John Stephenson and David Murden AM contributed significantly to the Association and to the merger of the TCCAV and VICAD to create the Victorian TAFE Association. They were passionate champions of TAFE and took a strong interest in how the Association would work to promote a much wider understanding of the importance of TAFE’s role.

Looking forward

After 20 years, the VTA is now well placed to contribute to challenges beyond the operations of public provision, and to lead more strategic forays into important public challenges, such as global warming, social change, and the future of work.

The 2019 Conference Delivering on the Public Mission continues to urge members and stakeholders to carry forward the tradition, and commit to the spirit, values and mission of public education.

To achieve this, the VTA is working to a Strategic Plan with five key focus areas. They are ‘familiar’ themes but underpinned now by bolder expectations that point to a mature organisation assured in its capacity to represent its members through:

- **Advocacy** and the rigorous pursuit of targeted research to provide the evidence base to inform policy development.
- **Collaboration** by establishing and promoting collaborative and sharing models within Victorian TAFE sector, to building on the collective strength of institutes.
- **Engagement** by developing relationships beyond the institutes into industry and community.
- **Research** by leading the promotion of VET initiated research and bolstering VET sector research capability and credibility that is recognised by key stakeholders.
- **Government relations** by strengthening communications and the trusted advisory relationship between VTA and government.
The story of the VTA is defined by on-going debates in Victoria (and nationally) about TAFE's purpose, and the role of publicly provided vocational education and training. As the VTA moves into its third decade, it will to continue to revisit this debate in collaboration with its members.

The TAFE sector has often been understated and underrated. It's not always well understood how vital role TAFE is for securing the social, educational and economic prosperity of its communities. The VTA will continue to speak up and speak out.

While this story is ostensibly to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the VTA and its members, it also allows a better understanding of the role and culture of the Association and may assist in planning future directions.

Hopefully, sharing this history and its stories will contribute to people better understanding the significant value and contribution of Victoria’s TAFEs and dual sector universities.

The future is a new story and it's easier to be progressive in a time of support and stability.

The story continues........

Pictured: From the top row moving left to right: David Williams, The Hon Jacinta Allan, Dominic Andreacchio, Virginia Simmons, Les Burr, Nita Schultz, Joanne Stringer, David Hanneford, Angela Hudson, Sheila Fitzgerald, Pam Jonas, John Stephenson, Ray Griffiths, Vicki Lagaris, Leonie Burrows, and Andrew Williamson.
Acknowledgements

References and Appendices
Acknowledgements
The VTA would like to acknowledge the contributions of a pivotal group of passionate people who generously gave their time, shared memories and offered advice and research assistance to this project.

We have chosen to respect confidentiality and to retain anonymity of direct quotations arising from these discussions. Where quotes are directly attributed, these have been obtained from documented proceedings or the public record.

Thank you to:

Allan Ballagh
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Angela Nicholas
Arnaldo Barone
David Williams
Helen Kronberger
Nelly Thomas
Pam Caven
Ray Griffiths
Tim Smith
Win Scott

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Best Choice: Community Attitudes to TAFE and Vocational Education and Training, GPS Research, 2011

Five Policy Priorities for a strong VET Sector, 2018, VTA

Meetings, Board Chairs’ meetings, CEO Council meetings

Minutes from TCCAV, VICAD, ATI, VTA – Board meetings, Association Council

Other VTA records from Standing Committee minutes, media files, State Conference brochures, Annual Reports

Report on the Strengths and benefits of the TAFE Model, LH Martin, 2017

The importance of TAFE to Victoria’s Prosperity, KPMG, 2018

Training Days: Models of Vocational Training Provision, Per Capita, 2013

Appendices

VTA Board Chairs
David Eynon (Swinburne University of Technology) 1999-2006
Tony Brandt (Wodonga TAFE) 2006-07
Dominic Andreaccio (Kangan Institute) 2008-14
Leonie Burrows (SuniTAFE) 2014-18
Allison Jenvey (Wodonga TAFE) 2018-

Current Board Members
Allison Jenvey (VTA Board Chair and Chair, Wodonga TAFE)
Amanda Brook (Board Director, Box Hill Institute)
Nicholas Hunt (VTA Treasurer and CEO, William Angliss Institute)
Frances Coppolillo (CEO, Melbourne Polytechnic)
Barry Wright (Executive Director Vocational Education & Training, Federation TAFE)

State Conferences
1999  Communicating for Success
       East Gippsland Institute of TAFE
2000  TAFE in the New Economy
       South West Institute of TAFE
2001  Pathways to the Future
       Swinburne University of Technology, Lilydale
2002  TAFE: and proud of it!
       Charles Sturt University, Albury
2003  The Learning Organisation
       SuniTAFE, Mildura
2004  Who pays for TAFE?
       Central Gippsland, Morwell
2005  Victorian TAFE in the Global Economy
       William Angliss Institute
2006  Transformation and Change for TAFE in Victoria
       Victoria University Conference Centre
2008  Sustainable Futures for TAFE
       The Gordon
2009  Delivering Success in a Contestable Future
       Victoria University Conference Centre
2010  TAFE in the Tertiary Landscape
       Novotel Forest Resort Creswick
2011  Gaining the Edge: Outcomes, Equity and Innovation
       Hilton on the Park, Melbourne
2012  TAFE Leading Skills Enrichment
       Hilton on the Park
2014  Public VET Providers – Strong and capable
       Holmesglen Institute, Moorabbin
2015  Leading Transformational Change
       RACV City Club
2016  Future Now – Collaborate Innovate
       RACV City Club
2017  TAFE: Advancing Victorian Prosperity
       Rydges Melbourne
2018  TAFE: Dynamic, connected, invigorated
       RACV City Club
2019  TAFE: Delivering on the public mission
       RACV City Club
International Women’s Day Speakers

2008  Anne Summers (Writer and Columnist)
2009  Natasha Mitchell (Journalist)
2010  Caroline Wilson (Sports Journalist)
2011  Robyn Moore (Voice-over Artist, Presenter and Speaker)
2012  Susan Barton (Founder & Director, The Lighthouse Foundation)
2013  Carolyn Creswell (Founder & Managing Director, Carman’s Fine Foods)
2014  Judith Slocombe (CEO, Alannah & Madeline Foundation)
2017  Win Scott (Chief Executive Officer, Sunraysia Institute of TAFE), Virginia Simmons (Director, Virsis Consulting) & Berwyn Clayton (Emeritus Professor at Victoria University)
2018  Frances Coppolillo (Chief Executive Officer, Melbourne Polytechnic), Allison Jenvey (Board Chair, Wodonga TAFE) & Claire Rasmussen (Chief Academic Officer, Kangan Institute)
2019  Geraldine Atkinson (President, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.)

Glossary

AMES  AMES Australia
ATI  Association of TAFE Institutes
BCA  Business Council of Australia
CEO  Chief Executive Officer
EBA  Enterprise Bargaining Agreement
HESG  Higher Education and Skills Group
IWD  International Women’s Day
MEA  Multi Enterprise Agreement
OTFE  Office of Training and Further Education
OTTE  Office of Training and Tertiary Education
RMIT  RMIT University
TAFE  Tertiary and further education
TCCAV  TAFE College Councils Association of Victoria
TDA  TAFE Directors Australia
VET  Vocational Education and Training
VDC  VET Development Centre
VICAD  Victorian Association of Directors of TAFE Institutes Inc.
VTA  Victorian TAFE Association
VTI  Victorian TAFE International
Our Members
AMES Australia

AMES Australia is one of Australia’s leading migrant and refugee settlement agencies. Each year it supports newly arrived migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to settle here through orientation programs, English tuition, vocational skills training and employment services.

Under its vision of ‘full participation for all in a cohesive and diverse society’, the organisation supports migrants and refugees to achieve their social and economic goals.

AMES Australia assists more than 30,000 people annually to find their places in Australian society. The organisation’s programs are aimed at fostering a sense of belonging among our clients and they are underpinned by a recognition that social participation is a key ingredient in maintaining social cohesion. AMES Australia also works to create community links between its clients and the broader society.

Formally established in 1951, the organisation’s antecedents were the hundreds of dedicated teachers who selflessly volunteered their time to help the thousands of new arrivals from post war Europe to successfully settle in Australia through the acquisition of English language skills.

AMES Australia has been at the forefront of significant social change, supporting new arrivals as they begin to contribute economically and socially to our diverse communities. The organisation was intrinsic in implementing the notion of multiculturalism; a term that was new in the 1970s but which now is accepted as an accurate description of the cultural and ethnic diversity of contemporary Australia.
Bendigo TAFE and Kangan Institute

With a history dating back to the 1850s gold rush, Bendigo TAFE and Kangan Institute are divisions of Bendigo Kangan Institute (BKI). Both TAFEs have a combined footprint in regional Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne that stretches from Richmond to Echuca, and also includes Docklands, Moonee Ponds, Essendon, Broadmeadows, Castlemaine and Bendigo.

Through strong partnerships with industry and strong support from the State Government’s Skills First reforms, Bendigo TAFE and Kangan Institute help to build Victoria’s workforce for today and tomorrow. With more than 40,000 enrolments each year, the courses at both TAFEs cover automotive and trades, business and IT, food and fibre, hair and beauty, health and community services, creative, culinary and hospitality, as well as Indigenous and foundation courses.

Bendigo TAFE and Kangan Institute operate three Centres of Excellence which provide leading edge training in state-of-the-art facilities. Its Automotive Centre of Excellence (ACE) leads in developing state-wide automotive VET approaches and practices based on innovative industry driven training initiatives. It attracts students from across Australia and Asia and the highly successful ACE model is now being replicated in India.

The two other Centres of Excellence are in Bendigo. The Health and Community Centre of Excellence offers courses in healthcare, disability, aged care, home care, early childhood education and care, and community services. The Food and Fibre Centre of Excellence offers courses in agriculture, horticulture, conservation, land management and animal studies.

As part of a robust Victorian TAFE network, Bendigo TAFE and Kangan Institute work closely with other TAFEs and leading universities to provide world-class vocational education and training services. They also partner with vocational education and training providers and universities worldwide to design and deliver accredited and non-accredited offshore programs, with over 400 international students a year receiving training and support at their campuses in Victoria.

Bendigo TAFE and Kangan Institute are amongst three TAFE providers of vocational education and training to the Victorian prison system and provide training to students across public and private prisons, as well as forensic mental health facilities.

Bendigo Kangan Institute’s CEO works closely with government representatives, business and community leaders to grow the organisation, with the primary focus on meeting and exceeding the needs of students, employers, industry and the community.
Box Hill Institute

Box Hill Institute (BHI) is one of Australia’s leading vocational and higher education providers, offering certificates, diplomas, bachelor degrees, and postgraduate qualifications. It is one of Victoria’s largest training providers with over 460 courses and more than 45,000 enrolments across secondary, vocational education and training, higher education and industry sectors. BHI takes great pride in its ability to successfully deliver a broad range of quality vocational education and training services locally and internationally.

BHI is located in Victoria with sites in Box Hill, Lilydale and in Melbourne’s central business district, where the Institute is co-located with the Centre for Adult Education (CAE). It also delivers offshore training and education services around the world, at locations including China, Indonesia, Iran, Kuwait, Macau, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Vietnam. In addition, BHI provides training and education services through a number of large contracts, including Department of Defence, Department of Justice across eight Corrections Victoria facilities, and across many workplace locations.

BHI is home to Specialist Centres and Centres for Excellence delivering the highest standards of industry focused training solutions across biosecurity, small to medium enterprises, ICT, nursing, air conditioning, refrigeration, mechanical, plumbing, and electrical technologies industries. It is a leader in delivering cyber security courses with a purpose-built Cyber Security Operations Centre.

Keeping students at the heart of its operations, BHI runs a large number of authenticated training workplaces to provide real life working conditions for its students, including Flowers on Elgar, Fountains Restaurant, Lilydale Lakeside Children’s Centre, Pets on Elgar, and Hair and Beauty Salon on Elgar. It also has the largest music studio in the southern hemisphere.

BHI is a member of the Global Education Network, a unique collaboration of four international training providers in Singapore, USA, and Canada, with a focus on student and staff exchanges.
Chisholm Institute

Chisholm was established in the South East region of Melbourne, and now extends across eight campuses in the South East of Victoria and beyond in the workplace, online and offshore, to deliver engaging education that makes a real and lasting difference to the diverse local, national and international communities and markets.

As a leading TAFE provider, Chisholm plays a significant role in supporting the diverse student groups and industry clients and partners, to meet current needs, and adapt to the rapid changes taking place globally. By doing this, Chisholm contributes to an inclusive, diverse and successful local and national economy. Chisholm provides contemporary, accessible and relevant education and training that keeps pace with what students and businesses need, while fulfilling the role that a TAFE Institute can and should be.

Chisholm delivers a range of qualifications across the AQF from senior secondary courses to degrees and post-graduate qualification, and is committed to supporting and enhancing the culture and diversity of over 36,000 students.

As educators and a local employer, the Institute is connected its purpose of enhancing the social and economic futures of individuals, businesses, enterprises and communities. Chisholm has built a solid foundation and a strong reputation over many years to build on a commitment to create a sustainable and high performing organisation.

Chisholm is committed to changing the lives of the diverse community, through transformational education and training, for the current and future needs of industry.
Federation TAFE

Federation University Australia is a dual sector university providing vocational and higher education across a national and international network of campuses.

Originally the University of Ballarat, one of Australia’s oldest higher education institutions, it became Federation University Australia in January 2014 upon amalgamation with Monash University’s Gippsland Campus.

Federation TAFE is home to vocational education and training delivered by Federation University Australia. Federation TAFE has a long history of assistance to industry in western Victoria. Ballarat has been a hub for innovation in industry ever since the Victorian gold rush in the 19th Century.

Federation TAFE has a strong focus on employment-based training and offers a broad range of education and training programs and aim to be both innovative and adaptable to meet the skills needs of their region and beyond. Training solutions reflect state and national priorities addressing the training needs of individuals and industry in the specific areas of automotive, building, construction, manufacturing, engineering, business, IT, graphic design, food, rural services, nursing, hairdressing, beauty therapy, community and children’s services.
GOTAFE was established in the 1920’s and is the largest tertiary education provider in Northern Victoria providing a link between education and the local community. GOTAFE campuses are located in Shepparton, Wangaratta, Seymour, Benalla, Werribee and Wallan.

GOTAFE offers over 200 courses in study areas including Business & IT, Creative Services, Education & Teaching, Health & Community, Hospitality, Events & Tourism, Hair & Beauty, Manufacturing & OH&S, Agriculture, Food & Fibre and Technical Trades. GOTAFE partners with universities to provide opportunities for articulation and further study.

GOTAFE works closely with secondary school students to access vocational education through collaborative ventures and to provide students with a pathway into careers. GOTAFE’s Skills and Jobs Centre’s assists job-seekers looking to start training, workers needing to reskill and unemployed workers needing guidance for retraining. GOTAFE is growing and exploring new ways to meet the needs of individuals, industry and community.
Holmesglen Institute

Holmesglen has emerged over its 37-year history to become one of Victoria’s iconic TAFE institutes. From humble beginnings as a specialist training provider for the building, construction and ceramic industries located in an old munitions and pre-fabricated housing factory, today Holmesglen’s educational programs, industry partnerships and facilities are recognised as sector-leading.

It’s eight sites include Holmesglen at Eildon, which provides recreation, learning, accommodation and commercial conferencing facilities set on a 660-acre working cattle farm, agro-forestry and wildlife zone. Holmesglen at Eildon is a RACV Victorian Tourism Awards Hall of Fame inductee after winning three consecutive business event gold medals. In 2019, it established two new campuses – one specialising in nursing and the other in civil construction.

The Institute is particularly known for its financial sustainability, international education activities and its enduring educational and commercial partnerships. It was the 2017 Victorian and Australian International Education Provider of the Year and each year welcomes over 3,000 international learners to Melbourne. Its offshore projects and partnerships are gaining strength in Japan, while continuing to provide educational opportunities in China, Mongolia and Indonesia.

Holmesglen’s flagship partnerships with the Electrical Trades Union, Healthscope and the Cross Yarra Partnership have given rise to new ways of embedding education and training into the workforce at Futuretech, the Holmesglen Private Hospital and the soon to be constructed Victorian Tunnelling Centre. In 2019, Holmesglen won its third consecutive Victorian Training Award for Industry Collaboration of the Year with the Royal Children’s Hospital for its integrated practical placement for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Holmesglen’s 20,000 plus learners reflect the diversity of our communities – they range in age from 15 to over 80, come from 160 countries and speak 130 different languages. Its programs are similarly diverse. From the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning to post-graduate studies, its certificates, diplomas and degrees offer Victorians the opportunity to gain a job or take their career to the next level across 43 different fields.
Melbourne Polytechnic

Established in 1910, Melbourne Polytechnic has a reputation for quality hands-on training. Offerings range from short courses through to vocational and higher education programs in areas such as Civil Engineering to Community Service, Creative Arts to Business and much more.

Melbourne Polytechnic is dedicated to providing students and partners with programs that prepare students for the world of work, and provide industry partners with world-class value-adding students.

Melbourne Polytechnic promotes a rich and diverse culture a large cohort of international students as well as delivering programs with 25 partner institutions throughout Asia.

Friendly, knowledgeable teachers are at the forefront of education that offer opportunities in practical work placement, networking with industry, and in modern training facilities.
RMIT University

RMIT is a multi-sector university of technology, design and enterprise with more than 91,000 students and 11,000 staff globally. The University’s mission is to help shape the world through research, innovation, quality teaching and engagement, and to create transformative experiences for students, getting them ready for life and work.

RMIT’s three campuses in Melbourne – Melbourne City, Brunswick and Bundoora – are located on the unceded lands of the people of the Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nation.

As a global university, RMIT has two campuses and a language centre in Vietnam and a research and industry collaboration centre in Barcelona, Spain. RMIT also offers programs through partners in destinations including Singapore, China, Hong Kong and Indonesia, with research and industry partnerships on every continent.
South West TAFE

South West TAFE is the region’s biggest and most highly regarded provider of skills training. Their home base and largest campus is in Warrnambool and they have campuses in Hamilton, Portland and Colac and training facilities also located at Glenormiston and Sherwood Park (Deakin Warrnambool).

Their primary aim is to provide high quality, future focused vocational education and training that creates a lifetime of opportunity and employability for people in their region. This focus has led to South West TAFE being recognised as the number one training organisation in Victoria for improved employment outcomes for students.

South West TAFE offers over 150 nationally recognised qualifications and short courses to more than 6000 students, using a blend of on-campus, off-campus, online, workplace, VET in Schools, traineeships, apprenticeship courses and modules delivered via regional adult learning centres.

They are committed to working with local industry to deliver skills training for in-demand jobs and to help address regional skills shortages. As a result, their graduates have a very high chance of finding employment and excelling in their chosen fields.

They deliver training to the Great South Coast region of Victoria, state-wide, interstate and internationally. Their teachers have vast practical industry-relevant experience and their state-of-the-art training facilities give students a perfect place to learn practical, hands-on skills. They offer a range of placement and study opportunities for students, both locally and internationally.
Established in 1980, SuniTAFE is the brainchild of a number of locale educators who recognised that access to post-secondary education was integral to the needs of the growing Sunraysia community and regional industry. It has grown into a vibrant community that includes the two main campuses at Mildura, Swan Hill, rural campus’ at Robinvale and recently established campus in Horsham, and a training farm at Cardross. Additionally, SuniTAFE now has programs operating in most states and territories in Australia, as part of their commitment to building educational partnerships and expanding the opportunities for their students to succeed.

They offer a range of vocational courses that reflect recognised growth areas in the region that the Institute serves, including in areas of skills shortages such as horticulture, agriculture, conservation and land management, irrigation, business, transport and distribution, health and community services, commercial cookery and hospitality, building and construction, engineering, automotive and other trades. The region is a major food producer, with grain, livestock, fruit and wine grapes being the predominant industry outputs of the region.

The Institute also specialises in language and literacy training. Courses can also lead on to university programs through pathways SuniTAFE has with university partners.

Areas of study include: Automotive, Building and Construction; Business, Finance and Technology; Community Services and Health, Education and Languages, Engineering, Food and Wine Processing, Beauty, Hospitality, Tourism and Events; Primary Industries and Environment; and Visual Arts, Design and Multimedia.

SuniTAFE offers courses for international students including: English Language, Accounting, Leadership and Management, Information Technology, Automotive Trades, Early Childhood Education, Aged Care, Horticulture, Commercial Cookery, Chef/Restaurant Manager, and Hotel Management.
Swinburne University of Technology

Swinburne University of Technology is a dual-sector institution creating impact through science, technology and innovation. It provides world-class programs to domestic and international students, with three campuses in Melbourne and a fourth in Sarawak, Malaysia.

Swinburne’s pathways and vocational education courses build practical skills and create opportunities to progress to further study. This includes in the fields of design, media, information and communications technology, business, finance, health, science, education, social services, trades and engineering technology. It offers higher education in health, arts, design, business, law, science, engineering and technology.

Swinburne takes a career-oriented approach to education and has forged strong industry connections that inform its programs and benefit staff and students.

Swinburne’s international reputation for high quality teaching and research, as well as excellent graduate outcomes, has secured the university a place among the best universities in the world.
TAFE Gippsland provides courses for vocational education students in the Gippsland regional with campuses throughout eastern Victoria, from Warragul to Lakes Entrance.

For 85 years, the Institute has been helping Gippsland communities thrive by empowering local students and supporting local businesses. They offer a variety of courses from pre-apprenticeships and accredited short courses to certificates and advanced diplomas, and flexible study options from full-time, part-time or online.

The Institute offers tailored workplace training to help Gippsland businesses upskill their staff and succeed in achieving their goals. They have partnered with community, business and government organisations, delivering training in everything from first aid and customer service to automotive and aviation.

Their influence in the region goes beyond their programs. It extends to a wide range of social initiatives that underpin an integral part of our mission as an educational institute – to participate in the social and cultural development of Gippsland. Through projects including their Community Cafes, Pamper Days and Community Forums – where they invite anyone to share ideas on TAFE’s role in shaping the region – they are continually enhancing their contribution to the wider community.
The Gordon

The Gordon is one of the largest regional TAFEs in Victoria operating as a public education and training organisation. Serving Geelong and the surrounding communities for over 130 years, The Gordon’s role continues to be the delivery of quality education and training, aimed at meeting the needs of current and future workforces, as well as providing clear pathways to further study.

The Gordon offers hundreds of short courses and nationally accredited qualifications across apprenticeships, traineeships, certificates, diplomas, and advanced diplomas, which can lead to a great career or create a pathway to university.

Programs are delivered across a substantial regional footprint with campuses and centres in Geelong, Wyndham and Colac.

More than 13,500 students study via a range of modes including on-campus, off-campus, full and part-time, online and industry-based. Approximately 60% of students come from the wider Geelong region.

The Gordon plays a key leadership role in assisting the region’s economic and social development. The Institute works in partnership with secondary schools, universities, employers and the community, to deliver positive learning outcomes. The Gordon also continues to focus on building its onshore and offshore international delivery.
Victoria University Polytechnic

Victoria University Polytechnic (VUP), the TAFE division of Victoria University, has a long, rich history, encompassing a 100-year commitment to providing high quality, accessible education and enriching the community.

It delivers accredited courses, apprenticeships, traineeships and customised training programs that link closely with industry. VUP gives every student, school-leaver, career-changer and those looking to move up in their career a personalised learning journey that recognises their unique skills, interests and learning styles.

VUP offers courses in: business services, legal & logistics; community services & youth work; communications, arts & design; early childhood & education support; English and preparation programs; hair, beauty and make-up; health, nursing and care industries; hospitality, tourism and events; sport and wellbeing; systems and information technologies; and trades.

Program delivery occurs across five campuses in Melbourne, Footscray, St Albans, Sunshine and Werribee.
William Angliss Institute

William Angliss Institute is Australia’s largest specialist centre for foods, tourism, hospitality and events training. The Institute operates nationally and internationally, delivering industry focused training from youth learning and half day programs through to bachelor and masters degrees, from traditional pub hospitality to five-star customer service, from on-campus to the workplace and remote sites.

Established in 1939 by prominent Melbourne businessman and philanthropist Sir William Angliss, as Australia’s first trade college dedicated to providing training for the food industry, the Institute is now a renowned specialist education and training Institute offering more than 72 nationally recognised training programs.

Within its specialisations, the Institute offers a full complement of programs from VCAL and VET in Schools through Certificate, Diploma, Degree and Masters programs. The Institute is delivering training in every State and Territory in Australia. The Institute continues to develop program offerings internationally. Partnerships in China, Sri Lanka and Vietnam and a Tourism Continuing Education & Training (CET) Centre in Singapore support an international delivery platform. The Institute continues to conduct off-shore project development work with industry, governments and development-aid agencies.

William Angliss Institute’s programs are delivered to over 20,000 students annually at its Melbourne, Sydney and offshore campuses, as well as various workplaces in Australia and offshore. With approximately 22,000 enrolments annually comprising local and international students based on campus or participating in workplace training.

The Institute prides itself on its passionate and dedicated people, with long standing industry ties, who contribute their knowledge and experience in delivering specialist education and training of the very highest standard.
Wodonga TAFE

Wodonga Institute of TAFE is based in north eastern Victoria in the City of Wodonga on the Victorian/NSW border. The Institute has a proud reputation of being a leading vocational education provider and has been recognised at state and national level, being awarded the Victorian Large Training Provider of the Year in 2002, 2008, 2015 and 2018 and the Australian Large Training Provider of the Year in 2008 and 2018.

The Institute was established in 1986, however operations weren’t moved to the current main Campus site until 1988. This Campus was shared with La Trobe University for approximately 10 years. The Institute commenced delivery with Health and Childcare training and offered workforce training for local businesses.

In 1991 Campus buildings were extended as delivery expanded into new disciplines. In 2013 operations were further expanded with the integration of the Driver Education Centre of Australia (DECA) into the Institute and driver training was delivered from sites across Victoria. Further expansion into the transport and logistic areas saw the development of the Logic Campus at Barnawartha North in 2014.

Wodonga TAFE currently provides training and education from Certificate I to Advanced Diploma level, locally and nationally. Courses study areas include: Health and Community Services, Hospitality, Tourism and Events, Business and IT, Arts and Design, Construction and Engineering, Motorsports and Transport, Agriculture and Horticulture as well as English Language disciplines. The Institute’s focus on the quality of our delivery has achieved consistently positive Student Satisfaction and Module Completion measures.

The Institute’s strong partnerships with industry has resulted in strong Employer Satisfaction outcomes. We deliver industry specific training to local and national industry partners including the Transport and Motorsports industries within specialist training facilities. The Institute also has a strategic partnership with the Australian Defence Force, providing training for over 5200 recruits in 2019, across multiple locations.

As a public provider, Wodonga TAFE recognises the importance of VET delivery within our local community and the impact this has on building our region’s workforce and supporting employment outcomes. The Skills and Jobs Centre plays a vital role in this support, implementing successful programs locally and in nearby rural communities. Being located within a cross-border city (Albury/Wodonga) provides the Institute with unique opportunities and challenges and our co location with La Trobe University offers opportunities for our students as well as the sharing of resources.
The story of the Victorian TAFE Association
1999 - 2019
Resilience
and
Respect