

Inquiry into the Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture

The following information is readily available in the public domain and does not appear to have been considered in the decision making process regarding the closure of residential facilities and courses at Murrumbidgee college of agriculture 9TOR 1 (b)):

As at 30 June 2002 there were 29 Registered Training Organisations in the wider Riverina region, 4% of the 830 in NSW (NSW VETAB Annual Report 2001-02). Murrumbidgee college of Agriculture was the second largest of these RTOs, behind TAFE NSW Riverina Institute. In campus terms MCA would rank with the larger TAFE NSW Riverina Institute campuses.

There are over 40 Registered Training Organisations operating in the Riverina including locally based, NSW metropolitan and interstate providers. The local training market is still susceptible to supply-side shifts and has not yet developed to a level of demand driven provision. The closure of a large RTO effects this supply side imbalance.

In 1998 Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture enrolled 792 students, 44 full-time, 689 part-time and 59 trainees. The previous peak was 344 enrolments in 1997. In 1999 the College enrolled 5,084 students, 67 full-time, 4,929 part-time and 88 trainees. In 2001 the College enrolled 3,451 students, 32 full-time, 3,305 part-time and 114 trainees. Total enrolments represent a 363% increase on 1987 activity.

While there has been a low level of full time enrolments the College has a significant number of part-time enrolments. The significant increase in total enrolments since 1998 has been due to an increase in part-time enrolments, reflecting a general trend in VET to module enrolments rather than full courses. Part time enrolments first occurred in 1994. This trend is particularly relevant for the rural sector and reflects a strong preference for this style of learning activity. 90% of graduates found employment immediately at the end of their training programs.

In 2001 enrolments of trainees are at their highest historical levels and have continued to increase since 1989.

In 2001 the College had a high level of disadvantaged group enrolments – 132 ATSI (3.8%) and 257 NESB (7.4%). These enrolments are comparable to those of TAFE NSW – Riverina Institute.

The College has been an Affiliate Institute of Charles Sturt University since 1997, recognising the close ties between the VET programs of both institutions. Increased collaboration and cooperation between the College and University has resulted, particularly in the viticulture and food processing training programs and the National Wine and Grape Industry Centre.

While this information is based on the last publicly available published figures (2001) there is no reason to believe the trends drastically changed in 2002-03. The trends indicate the College was following the general trend in VET and, in fact, was a leader in agricultural education in this respect. This is also evidenced by the College's recognition in state and national awards.

Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture was the winner of the Inaugural National Indigenous Peoples' Training award in 1998, sponsored by ATSIPTAC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Peoples' Training Advisory Committee), in recognition of exceptional contribution to vocational education and training for ATSI people. The Aboriginal Rural Training Program is customised for the participating communities and is designed to articulate into other courses offered by VET providers. The Program is recognised as national best practice and the College has been funded to implement interstate co-operative projects.

Murrumbidgee College was also NSW Training Provider of the Year in 1998 (selected by NSW VETAB) and one of four finalists in the ANTA National Awards. This award recognised the College's achievements in partnerships with industry/community/educational organisations and its responsiveness to reform and changes in vocational education and training.

The College was a finalist in the 1999 NSW Vocational Education and Training Excellence in Schools Award.

The College was a finalist in the NSW Training Initiative of the Year Award in 2003, losing to an eventual national finalist and national runner-up.

It should also be highlighted that consultation with the relevant professional communities would have advised NSW Agriculture that MCA is the only broadacre dryland farming training facility in NSW and Victoria. Withdrawal of services significantly disadvantages access to training for one of the recognised food bowl areas of Australia. Facilities at other agricultural colleges are specialised for the geographic areas in which they operate and do not replicate the facilities and expertise available through MCA.

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