

**INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND  
TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Community Technology Centres Association

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Submission from Community Technology Centres Association to  
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO 6

Inquiry into vocational education and training in New South Wales

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**Terms of reference**

1. That General Purpose Standing Committee No 6 inquire into and report on vocational education and training in New South Wales, and in particular:

- (a) the factors influencing student choice about entering the vocational education and training system including:
  - (i) motivation to study
  - (ii) choice of course, course location and method of study
  - (iii) barriers to participation, including students in the non-government education and home schooling sectors
- (b) the role played by public and private vocational education providers and industry in:
  - (i) educational linkages with secondary and higher education
  - (ii) the development of skills in the New South Wales economy
  - (iii) the development of opportunities for unemployed people, particularly migrants and persons in the mature workers' category, to improve themselves and increase their life, education and employment prospects,
  - (iv) the delivery of services and programs particularly to regional, rural and remote communities
- (c) factors affecting the cost of delivery of affordable and accessible vocational education and training, including the influence of the co-contribution funding model on student behaviour and completion rates
- (d) the effects of a competitive training market on student access to education, training, skills and pathways to employment, including opportunities and pathways to further education and employment for the most vulnerable in our community including those suffering a disability or severe disadvantage
- (e) the level of industry participation in the vocational education and training sector, including the provision of sustainable employment opportunities for graduates, including Competency Based Training and the application of training packages to workforce requirements, and
- (f) the Smart and Skilled reforms, including:
  - (i) alternatives to the Smart and Skilled contestable training market and other funding policies
  - (ii) the effects of the Smart and Skilled roll out on school based apprenticeships
- (g) any other related matter.

**Response to Terms of reference**

Community Technology Centres serve small rural towns in NSW. There is normally no Registered Training Organisation in these towns, and rarely any provision at all for formal face to face vocational education and training. Obtaining enough enrolments at any one to enable class sizes sufficient for cost effective delivery of training by face to face mode is highly challenging. For RTOs that are not publicly funded, it is impossible to maintain a marketable fee structure and stay viable delivering face to face training in the thin markets of rural and regional NSW, without the economies of scale available to large colleges in major cities. Current models of funding make it even more unlikely.

With courses rarely if ever offered locally, lack of drivers' licences, and lack of public transport to larger regional centres are strong barriers to participation, particularly for young people. The end result is young people are forced to leave home early to attend

vocational colleges. The costs of living away from home make this impossible unless substantial levels of parental financial support are available. Traineeships cannot be offered without employers undertaking the complete role of delivering formal training, or else releasing trainees for large blocks of time to go to college.

E-learning is a game-changer in all this. It offers opportunities for delivery of VET training in rural and regional communities and thus to profoundly alter retention of young people with skills, and thus the labour market, business viability, and demographics of rural communities. There are flow-on effect in diversification and resilience of rural economies, decentralisation, and efficient use of infrastructure.

The availability of online courses is no longer a limiting factor. Vocational education and training is increasingly being delivered online, with a huge variety of industry sectors represented. . A recent Productivity Commission Report found that:

*The use of ICT in the delivery of education and training is already significant. Recent data show that online instruction was used in the delivery of around 40 per cent of VET qualifications, and computer disks or CD-ROMs were used in the delivery of nearly 30 per cent of VET qualifications (Productivity Commission estimates based on unpublished data from ABS 2009f) (Productivity Commission, 2011 p144).*

This is based on 2009 Australian Bureau of Statistics data. In the intervening years, development of vocational education online has increased dramatically and now almost all qualifications are available wholly or at least partly online.

However there are critical bottlenecks in accessibility of e-learning in rural communities to do with access to broadband internet and IT technical support. CTCs have the capacity to be a very cost effective means to open up these bottlenecks.

There is only one CTC community with fixed line NBN, and few with fixed wireless. Most are not on the NBN rollout map at all. The NBN rollout has halted all installations of ADSL and ADSL2 ports in exchanges. In many rural communities, feedback is that these ports are already fully taken up. With satellite oversubscribed, and mobile coverage in rural areas extremely scanty, this leaves communities with dial-up the only option.

This is the case for both businesses and individuals. Young people considering remaining living at home in rural towns or farm businesses, combining continuing education with farm work or family responsibilities are faced with the problem that they cannot access broadband with sufficient speeds to allow web conferencing or video tutorials.

Even where satellite or mobile internet is available, latency make satellite unsuitable for delivery of e-learning in any kind of real time. Cost and download limits make mobile unsuitable for delivery of data intensive e-learning.

Community Technology Centres in rural towns are a central point where rural vocational students can come to access the best grade of broadband locally available. Where the

town exchange is ADSL or ADSL2 enabled, they have taken up an available port early on, so that as broadband has become more popular and ports have been exhausted, they can provide public access. They can provide a virtual classroom, with facilitated access to broadband connected computers and IT technical support to connect to e-learning platforms, allowing people in rural communities to access a broad range of vocational education and training opportunities equitably.

The barrier here is that CTCs are unfunded community organisations. Charging individual students for access on a user-pays basis removes the cost savings possible through demand aggregation, and makes vocational education and training inequitably expensive for rural people.

There are 43 members of the Community Technology Centres Association, and a further 20 outreach centres. An allowance of \$5,000 per centre per annum would enable each centre to offer free use of a broadband connected and maintained computer for students to access vocational training, with ICT support for accessing courses. An allowance of \$10,000 per centre per annum would enable each centre to offer a training room with at least three broadband connected computers available in all business hours.

Solutions like these offer rural vocational students a way forward.