INQUIRY INTO FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NSW TERTIARY EDUCATION SECTOR

Organisation: Alphacrucis College

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ALPHACRUCIS COLLEGE

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NSW TERTIARY EDUCATION SECTOR

NSW PARLIAMENT - LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO.3 - EDUCATION

29TH JULY 2020

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Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education

Legislative Council

NSW Parliament

6 Macquarie St

Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Chairman and the Education Committee,

On behalf of Alphacrucis College, I wish to thank the Committee for the invitation to provide feedback regarding the future development of the NSW tertiary education sector.

This inquiry comes at a key moment in Australia's history when the tertiary sector is going through dramatic change. This crisis however can provide significant opportunity to innovate, form new partnerships, and equip the tertiary sector in playing a key role in the development of an 'educated workforce' able to restore the Australian economy during and after the current COVID crisis.

Please find attached our submission below which responds to selected terms of reference. I pray for wisdom and vision for the committee as they seek to guide our sector through these uncharted waters.

Warm Regards,

Professor Stephen Fogarty

President

Background - Alphacrucis College

1. Established in 1948, Alphacrucis College (AC) is at the forefront of equipping leaders for careers of influence in education, business, social science, chaplaincy, theology, and community services. AC is also the national college of Australian Christian Churches (ACC), the largest movement (by attendance) of Protestant Churches in Australia, consisting of over 1000 churches and over 375,000 constituents.

2. AC is a multidisciplinary and dual sector college, offering courses in education, business, social science, and theology from VET courses through to PhD. Although being based in Parramatta NSW, AC operates campuses in Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Hobart and Auckland. Courses are also delivered through onshore and offshore study centres, including in Finland and the Philippines, through third parties and a global online platform.

3. In 2016, AC was approved by TEQSA as a self-accrediting higher education provider (HEP) based on a history of quality learning and teaching. **AC currently has an application being processed for recognition in the University College category**.

4. AC currently enrols nearly 4000 students, studying across all courses and locations, and has maintained steady and consistent growth over the last decade. AC is currently ranked No. 1 as the leading Australian provider in student satisfaction with the overall quality of educational experience (QILT) across all universities and colleges for postgraduate business and management courses.

5. AC currently employs 200 staff, around 50 with doctorates. It also has five research centres: the Australian Pentecostal Studies Centre (APSC), the Centre for the Future of Schooling (CFS); the Centre for Learning and Scholarship Skills (CLASS); the Jagelman Institute (JI); and the Centre for Korean Diaspora Studies. A recent external assessment of theological research judged AC equivalent to an ERA score of 4 (above world standard).

6. AC's vision is to be 'a global Christian university, transforming neighbourhoods and nations'. The College is driven by the understanding that a dynamic hybrid of entrepreneurialism, a commitment to justice, and to local partnership will transform human communities.

7. AC is an educational not-for-profit with a mission-base, being a company limited by guarantee with a majority of independent Board members.

(A) Tertiary education's economic development role, especially university campuses and Country University Centres (CUCs) in regional NSW

There are economic advantages through independent tertiary providers in the regions

8. Tertiary education plays a key role in society, made even more significant in the regional areas of Australia's unique education landscape. Tertiary institutions can function as hotbeds of innovation and entrepreneurship, driving partnerships with business and industry, and thereby becoming powerful economic engines. They can transform cities and communities by providing employment, developing linkages between public spheres, addressing societal challenges, fostering creative debate, and forming career pathways for Australian citizens and global talent.[1] Fundamentally, tertiary institutions can improve lives as agents of social mobility and intellectual advancement, being key to the future prosperity of NSW and its people.

9. Independent tertiary providers are underrepresented in regional NSW but could well play an expanding role in providing solutions to the multi-faceted problems facing education and regional economic development. The problems include:
    1. **The brain drain** – the exodus of promising local regional talent who cannot pursue careers locally.
    2. **Community vocational learning** – a lack of regional access to vocational education and adequate industry qualifications.
    3. **Generation Y housing affordability** – The growing economic and social disenfranchisement of the younger generations as they cannot afford to own a home for the first time in Australia's history. By strengthening the education stability of regional areas it enables the confidence of young families to migrate away from capital city disfunction.
    4. **Professional development access** – Professionals often have to travel large distances at significant cost compared to city colleagues to access the latest research and development in their fields.

10. Another central challenge is that of publicly funded universities having a monopoly on credentialing and the 'information economy'. This risks becoming what has been identified in the USA as massive false market bloated by the lack of alternatives.[2] Many corporates now find university-based education largely irrelevant to their training needs, too slow, expensive and inflexible, choosing instead to run their own academies and programs. PWC for example, having repeatedly complained about the quality of university accounting graduates in Australia, commenced its own Higher Apprenticeship Program via a Diploma of Business taught through Work Integrated Learning (WIL).[3]

11. If given the opportunity, independent tertiary providers are more likely to be economically literate and bring advantage to regional areas due to their business-minded structures under the same TEQSA and ASQA standards. Academics in independent institutions are required to do 'double-entry bookkeeping', meaning that they not only need to teach at a high quality to ensure continued revenue, but also are active in recruitment. Added to this, the greater diversity of thought and student satisfaction within independent tertiary providers allow for increased innovation.

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[1] Addie, J.P. 2017 Seven ways universities benefit society, https://theconversation.com/seven-ways-universities-benefit-society-81072

[2] Marvin Lazerson, 'The disappointments of success: Higher education after World War II', Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 559 (September 1998), p.65.

[3] https://www.pwc.com.au/careers/students/higher-apprenticeship.html

12. Another important element of economic development and tertiary engagement in regional areas is the strong communities and opportunities around independent and Catholic schools. Often such schools are undergirded by thick relational capital,[4] have layered connections with the local business community, and facilitate private contribution. In NSW there are more than 500 independent schools and campuses, of which 144 are in regional and remote areas of NSW.[5] These schools have less bureaucratic and centralised limitations, and are therefore able to be flexible and responsive to expansive and innovative partnerships with higher education.

13. A key example of this is the St. Philips Christian College (SPCC) network of schools based in the Hunter/Central Coast regions. In 2017, AC formed a partnership with SPCC to create the St Philip's Teaching School[6] which aimed to bring to bear tertiary options for the over 600 staff and 4000 students working across the six campuses of the SPCC cluster. Over the last few years this partnership has successfully fostered multi-faceted tertiary and economic opportunities in their local educational context, including:

    1. VET in schools (VETiS) for over 150 students (estimated to expand to 250 in 2021) in areas of local industry demand including tourism, hospitality and childcare;
    2. A highly competitive clinical-based teaching cadetship providing Initial Teacher Education (ITE) delivered entirely locally (see more on the Hub model below);
    3. An entrepreneurship incubator providing Diplomas of Business to students and the community, partnered with the Cessnock Chamber of Commerce;
    4. Post-graduate degrees and professional development in education and leadership for teachers and executives within the schools; and
    5. An international partnership with schools in the Pacific which enables online VET skill-sets to be delivered in tourism and teacher training.

14. AC recommends that the NSW Parliament commission an 'independent regional education advisory workgroup' to assist with exploring linkages between tertiary, industry, schools and regional communities.

Regional teacher quality is at the heart of regional economic development

15. The above example highlights the core area of regional development which can only find its solution in tertiary provision. One of the most significant factors in educational outcomes is teacher quality, and this is particularly evident in RRR areas. Retaining long-term, culturally knowledgeable, high-performing and locally committed teachers would go a long way to closing the educational gaps (12-18 months by the age of 15), thereby lessening the educational and economic barriers for tertiary aspirations. The regional teacher drought cycle needs to be broken before new pathways can be formed.

16. The problem of consistent regional teacher quality, and in some cases regional schools being unable to hire anyone at all, is multifaceted:

    1. **Decline of attractiveness of the teaching profession**
        i. Teaching as a 'social advancement pathway' by lower middle SES students, is no longer so clear, largely for broader social and generational reasons;
        ii. The old Australian emphasis on security of career ('teaching or the bank') taught by the Depression generation, has declined as a social motivator;
        iii. The massification of school education has occurred post-war, with the consequent rise in centralization, compliance and reporting, has led to the restriction of intrinsic motivators (such as sense of community, interpersonal relationship, etc);

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[4] See CSA Relational Schools Report
[5] Numbers obtained from https://www.aisnsw.edu.au/
[6] https://www.spcc.nsw.edu.au/foundation/our-schools/st-philips-teaching-school

    iv.   Broader social criticism of the profession, the offloading of family and social concerns onto the classroom teacher, and the politicization of school-related issues, have also had an impact on the perceived status of the profession;

2. **Lowered standards and detached university ITE courses**
   i. The massification of university-based initial teacher education (ITE) has taken place, with the significant expansion of teacher education enrolments by universities, in low-cost, theory-driven classes which substantially delay exposure of ITE students to the classroom;
   ii. Concurrently, Universities have been essentially incentivized to disengage from their local communities of practice and shift attention towards research. These factors have led to the 'debasing' of the currency of a teaching degree's perceived worth;
   iii. The 'artificial market' created by the dominance of the ATAR entry system has shifted status from lower ATAR entry point serving professions, towards higher demand areas such as law, medicine, finance, etc. In this false economy, capable students feel the need to 'spend' their ATAR points on the highest value course, in the highest-ranking university, available to them, further debasing the value of vocation;
   iv. The debt trap associated with increasing Higher Education qualification processes, combined with the compounding casualization of the teaching workforce (as governments have sought flexibility and 'efficiency' in contractual relationships) has rendered teacher preparation an uncertain, high-cost pathway;

3. **Unsupported teachers leading to high attrition rates**
   i. Only 40% of students who commenced ITE in 2015 went on to work in schools. This is a massive waste of taxpayer money through Commonwealth supported places (calculated at over $300 million per annum).
   ii. End-on, compliance regimes (such as LANTITE, continuous professional learning thresholds, pre-service values and ability testing, etc) load obligations on teachers often without adequate systemic support, change and identity management, sensitivity to local/ community needs, and address to the career progression of staff.
   iii. Early career exit from teaching has reached 'epidemic proportions', a factor exacerbated by the age bubble in senior cohorts. Research indicated that poor teacher education, burnout, lack of support for new teachers, working conditions, and discipline issues within negative school cultures exacerbate this.

17. The experience of improving initial teacher education over the last 30 years has indicated that neither of the preferred approaches of government work terribly well in eliciting cultural responses to complex problems.
    i. On the one hand, government has attempted significant expansion of expenditure (through NPPs and CSPs) etc, with the result that there are more calls for continued review of initial teacher education than at any time in the post-war period. More money alone, without attention to the structures by which teacher education is delivered, and the impact of this upon local communities, is not the answer.
    ii. On the other hand, state governments have been enamoured with high stakes testing, and increasingly burdensome and end-on compliance regimes (such as LANTITE and raised entry bars). None of these deal with the cultural and social contexts out of which beginning teachers come.

18. The conventional model of Australian teacher-training is almost exclusively provider-centred, with chronically poor reference to end-user, ie. local schools and their specific needs. AC believes that the conventional model should be flipped, **where exceptional higher education is delivered entirely onsite to local school clusters**. This strategic HR approach would allow schools to sponsor annual cohorts of quality pre-service teachers and provide clinical training from day one. It would enable a tertiary-industrial partnership approach to teacher training, embedded in regional knowledge and the unique ethos of the schools – also called the **'Hub model'** (see below).

19. This solution of local opportunity of course does not cover the broad range of higher education opportunities, but it does provide a clear solution for the education sector which in turn would solve the

rural teacher drought, prevent a significant level of 'brain drain' from the RRR areas, and provide pathways for similar models in a wider range of fields (e.g. VET, business and health degrees). A clinical, localised **'Hub model'** could provide:

1. Increased ITE students from the local communities (rather than 'FIFO' teachers), which guarantees teachers of greater knowledge, commitment and connection to the unique needs of the locality;
2. Opportunity for the broader disadvantaged communities such as many of those students from Indigenous backgrounds;
3. School cluster autonomy which allows greater selectiveness by offering scholarships to candidates who are under-represented within their cluster;
4. Ease of the financial stress, isolation and work commitments which harm the emotional health and well-being of regional students due to the opportunity to study locally. Remaining in one's local community for tertiary study means that there are greater support networks for RRR students and less disadvantage;
5. Improved attractiveness of the teaching profession and improved quality through elite ITE cadetships;
6. Specialised induction with entirely localised clinical training for guaranteed classroom readiness and integrated practices;
7. Clearer career pathways with comprehensive executive training and subsidised teacher-researcher opportunities which provide higher levels of mentoring and support for professional teachers;
8. Greater principal autonomy in ITE selection with the potential inclusion of IQ, EQ, numeracy and literacy, ethos, community knowledge and known referees for more transparency and quality;
9. Greater community engagement through vocational training opportunities within school clusters;
10. Localised professional development through tertiary-supported master-teachers using regionally targeted research;
11. Stronger tertiary/provider partnerships for increased integration of schools and systems;
12. Provider-based input and autonomy of the specific learning needs of the region;
13. Increased public confidence in ITE and the stabilisation of regional education;
14. Supportive Early Career induction and training programs;
15. Focused and well-articulated professional development oriented towards local communities of practice and linked to ongoing career aspirations (as opposed to the "fragmentation, waste, lack of coherence, remoteness and … insufficiently practical" PD typifying many centralized professional development or compliance-led programs); and
16. Mobility, both social (in terms of remuneration and reputation) and geo-social (ie. the ability to experience different places and life chances by moving location or even country).

20. AC recommends that the Education committee commissions political representatives to physically observe alternative models of teacher training and assess the impact on educational and economic development in regional communities. For more information and references around improving of the teacher profession, see AC's submission into the Federal inquiry into improving the teaching profession.[7]

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[7] https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=6f47179a-a1a9-4139-bdc4-c029d96963c7&subId=664559

21. Both the Prime Minister and the Federal Minister for Education have indicated the need for an 'educated workforce' to be able to restore economic strength post the COVID-19 pandemic. The draft VET reform roadmap[8] has also highlighted the need for stronger alignment and integration between VET and higher education, as well as developing strategies which improve quality and delivery of VET in schools.

22. What the roadmap has correctly identified is that there are too may gaps in the education pathway for students to fall through. There are gaps between schools and TAFE/VET providers, TAFE/VET providers and tertiary providers, as well as school and tertiary providers. This is in part due to the tertiary sector's 'low view' of VET qualifications and disconnect from the local needs and learning ecology of school clusters. However, this season provides an opportunity for stronger relationships, new linkages, more dual-sector providers, and opportunities for innovation which will drive economic development in regional NSW.

23. Independent tertiary providers gaining greater access to grants tailored to VET/tertiary partnerships will drive innovation and economic activity. One of the lessons of economics about innovation is that it tends to come from new firms entering a market rather than existing firms.[9] Depending on the structure of the market, innovation will spread to the incumbent firms, with some incumbent firms who fail to adapt exiting the market. The monopoly of public universities does not bode well for innovation in higher education in Australia.

24. As well as organisation innovation in higher education there is also the question of whether large bureaucratic and mostly comfortable institutions are a good environment for generating the innovation and collaboration with industry that Australia needs. The potential for organisational and product innovation in a moribund industry is nicely illustrated by the recent history of the religion industry in Australia.[10] It was a market dominated by a few large longstanding organisations (the Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches), which were being abandoned by their customers from the 1970s. Then along came a new entrant, Pentecostalism, with a radically different organisational structure and leadership style, offering a product much more appealing to cotemporary Australians. Interestingly, the two largest Pentecostal churches Hillsong and C3 were started in Sydney by immigrant New Zealanders, outsiders who saw the possibilities more clearly than any of the executives of the incumbent organisations. The Pentecostal movement has now passed the Anglicans to be the second largest Australian religious group measured by attendance, behind the Catholics whose numbers have been held up in recent decades by large migration inflows.[11]

25. AC recommends that the NSW Education Minister explore a new set of grants, partnered with the Federal Government, tailored to cross-sector innovations across tertiary and VET which are accessible to independent providers.

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[8] https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/vet_reform_roadmap_consultation_draft_0.pdf

[9] Palangkaraya, Spurling and Webster (2016) survey the literature on firm level innovation.

[10] The literature on the economics of religion is discussed by Iannaccone (2012) based on an Economic Society of Australia conference keynote address.

[11] NCLS Research (2001-16).

(B) The mission of NSW universities with a particular focus on the role of universities to serve specific geographic communities

Universities need to evacuate the 'ivory tower'

26. Although cliché, the ivory tower metaphor is useful in understanding the challenges into the future development of the NSW tertiary sector, particularly in regard to the need for tertiary education to serve specific geographic communities. Academic capital is not currently being dispersed in such a way to meet the changing needs of Australian society.

27. Most Australian universities operate, particularly within education, under a 'retail' model. That is, students are uprooted from their local geography to spend 3-4 years in an environment detached from much of the tangible needs of their communities, and then complete a degree which all too often does not translate effectively back into industry or the professional workforce.

28. Additionally, there have been reports of the ivory tower with its high vantage point looking increasingly further away for its students. There is now heavy reliance upon international students to 'balance the books' with some universities as high as 30-40% of their revenue.[12] This is not to say international students don't make an important contribution to Australian research, economy and society. However, it seems to be increasingly at the cost of the domestic, and even regional, vision.

29. AC and other independent providers prefer to re-distribute academic capital as 'big tertiary' to local domestic communities in a subsidiarity model, allowing autonomy and flexibility within school and industry clusters which can adapt to the local conditions. It is therefore importance that the dominance of the largely centralised Australian public University system is countered by enabling opportunities for local expression and innovation of higher education in specific geographical communities.

A renewed higher education focus on Australian interests and communities

30. It is an opportune time to consider reform within NSW higher education, due to the pandemic's impact which has forced universities to explore alternative approaches to education – particularly utilising online services and other technologies. The risk is however that higher education could become even more detached from the individual student, local industries and Australian communities, lowering the quality of teaching and graduates.

31. It is worth noting that many university degrees have strong relationships with the 'end-user', which is the industry. Medicine is the strongest example, with practising doctors and hospitals prescribing the regularly updated education requirements for medicine degrees, as well as connecting large proportions of students into regional and rural experiences.

32. End-user connection is not the case for education degrees however, with large gaps evident between the higher education provider and the industry. This is a particularly key sphere as education and training provide the backbone for any attempt at creating self-sustaining regional learning ecologies. Schools themselves, the industry end-user for education, have little say on what kinds of teachers are being pumped out of the system. Reports from regional schools who cannot readily attract teachers are that those graduates they do get may have a reasonable understanding of the critical theory around racism in basketball but are woefully undertrained and ill-equipped for the classroom.

33. AC recommends that more '**Hub models'** (see below) are initiated across public, Catholic and independent school clusters that can place the education industry 'end-user' - in this case consortia of

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[12] https://theconversation.com/how-universities-came-to-rely-on-international-students-138796

schools - at the centre of the logic of teacher higher education. In this model the tertiary provider becomes a highly accredited facilitator and 'expert critical friend'. The industry end user can then form partnerships with tertiary to create bespoke pathways and models that are adapted to local conditions.

Shift to the Pacific as a strategic and missional focus

34. One of the geographical communities which NSW tertiary has an opportunity to serve, and which strengthens Australia's interests, is that of the South Pacific nations. Although many Australian universities would provide easy access, support services and even scholarships to many within the Pacific, what is needed is a greater 'missional' focus away from financial gain and 'pulling in', towards service and 'sending out' at a key time in Australia's regional strategy.

35. In the [2017 Foreign Policy White Paper](), Australia identified that engagement with the Pacific should be one of our highest priorities. In 2018, Australia committed to 'stepping up' partnerships in the Pacific to support economic growth, security and stronger relationships. The relationships included enhancing the social, educational and cultural links. According to the report:

    1. *An increased focus on skills and education will be vital if the Pacific is to realise its economic potential. Again, the relatively small populations and economies of most countries mean that vocational training and higher education are often best dealt with by pooling resources and expertise.*

36. The current educational challenges in the Pacific include a lack of access to quality VET and tertiary education and concerning levels of numeracy and literacy at early childhood, primary and secondary levels. One of the pivotal issues impacting the low educational levels is the education and training of teachers, with the shortage of experienced and appropriately trained teachers in many Pacific countries becoming desperate. Without adequate teacher training the region will struggle to improve economic growth in line with population growth, with the imperative for Pacific Island countries to provide quality education and skills training suited to labour market demands.

37. What is particularly significant is the opportunity for NSW tertiary to connect with the *'spiritual capital'* of the South Pacific.[13] NSW has the largest contingent of faith-based tertiary providers, and this enables unique dialogue and partnership due to 92% of the region's population professing a Christian faith. Churches are the most significant civil society group in Pacific nations, and in most places deliver over half of the health and education services available, particularly in rural areas. Pacific churches hold 'dense' networks, have extensive local knowledge and hold the trust of citizens. Therefore the 'faith element' is significant for Australia's educational policy considerations within the informal institutional contexts of subsistence economies.

38. AC recently published a report on 'South Pacific Faith-based Education and Training'[14] which explores the educational needs of these nations in further depth, but relevant recommendations for this inquiry include:
    1. *That the Australian Federal and State governments should liaise with Australia's faith-based VET and tertiary bodies to evaluate where the key areas of need are for educational resources, research and training in South Pacific countries.*
    2. *That Australian governments should initiate a 'Pacific Training Scheme' and include a provision for denominations and faith-based educational institutions to propose for initiatives for partnering with educational institutions in South Pacific nations.*

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[13] 'Spiritual capital' can be understood as a set of resources stemming from religion and available for use in economic and political development (Berger, P.L., & Redding, G. (2011). The hidden form of capital: Spiritual influences in societal progress. New York: Anthem Press. p2)

[14] https://www.ac.edu.au/south-pacific/

3. *That a forum be established to facilitate discussion between South Pacific ambassadors, faith-based educational institutions and church denominational networks to explore education and training needs and innovative solutions which leverage the strong existing ties between Churches, Australian-based South Pacific communities and South Pacific nations. This would focus particularly on programmes that train and retain Pacific Islanders in their own location, rather than a process of relocating candidates to Australia to train.*
4. *That Australian governments assess the cost-benefit of economic subsidies for Australian faith-based educational institutions to deliver content locally to the Pacific through partnerships between schools, tertiary bodies and local churches.*
5. *That funding be made available to facilitate both student exchanges and teacher exchanges between faith-based schools in Australia and the South Pacific as a means of promoting both cultural exchange and the sharing of personnel.*
6. *That Australian governments initiate Sport Entrepreneurial Leadership Programs linked to training pathways and include a provision for faith-based educational institutions to make proposals.*

(E) Levels of integration of the tertiary education sector with industry

Dual-sector providers are the bridge to integration

39. For too long tertiary have effectively treated trades as 'second rate'. This view has partly been responsible for the current 'gaps' in our education pathways which impede student's ability to connect with significant careers in the industry. The gaps that many students fall through exist between:
    1. Schools and VET;
    2. VET and tertiary; and
    3. School and tertiary.

40. However, we can see that levels of integration of tertiary education with the VET sector can lead to hi-tech economies. Internationally, Germany is the envy of the world on the industry partnership and training front. The federal Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (BiBB) has established a strong dual pathway system, into university, or into highly skilled trades. The model lies not only at the heart of student honour, but national honour, with key systemic partnerships between large industries, universities and schools. Students are not only trained at school but are also employed by companies such as Volkswagen and Bosch, while at school.[15]

41. Partnerships between school communities and higher education and VET providers could develop not just certification, but 'jobmaking learning ecologies' which are able to evolve with local business skill needs. The existing models in the Entrepreneurial specialist schools in South Australia[16] and the Entrepreneurship Hub at Cessnock, NSW[17] have successfully developed training pathways with local industry such as business, mining, hospitality, IT, tourism and social service. These partnerships also allow kids to remain in the highly structured school context, its class bells, pastoral care and friendship networks, rather than wandering off to TAFE which has notoriously failed the skills sector in recent years.

42. VET has been in schools for many years, but only ever as an add-on, not within its own dynamic high-status narrative. For status to return, this narrative has to change, and tertiary involvement through dual-sector providers can provide the status, vision, and research required to integrate into the industry Australia needs to rebuild the economic damage and develop the next generation into the 'educated workforce'.

VET Alternative University pathways in NSW schools

43. Bringing dual providers, and particularly tertiary, into schools not only enables strong trade pathways, but also an alternative pathway for university entry. The ATAR pathway has its place for those wanting to pursue straight academic studies, but as it is a 'ranking' system it ensures that not all students (no matter how well they perform) will have a high enough score to enter university. For those who don't pursue an ATAR pathway, there is the feeling that just doing the HSC has a remedial worth.

44. An alternative is to map VET qualifications onto existing HSC courses, thereby integrating skills and industry with a tertiary pathway. Some universities accept a Cert III as an ungraded equivalent to a 67

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[15] For further analysis see the recent opinion piece from AC's Deputy Dean of Education, Dr David Hastie. https://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/its-time-to-rebuild-the-apprenticeship-system/news-story/c7c98c9fd6288172a362ad7fb582dea1

[16] https://www.education.sa.gov.au/teaching/curriculum-and-teaching/entrepreneurial-learning

[17] https://www.acbusinessschool.com/news/entrepreneurship-network-formed

ATAR score, a Diploma as 74, and an Advanced Diploma as up to 84 (sometimes enabling the student to go directly into the second year of study). This provides untapped opportunities for tertiary studies for all students, not just those on the ATAR pathway.

45. *Explanatory example - Madeline is a year 9 student interested in creating movies and film. Her career advisor, a trained tertiary coach, informs her about the opportunity to map her existing HSC studies onto a VET program through a dual sector provider partnered with the school. Madeline agrees, and at the end of that year is awarded a Cert II. By the end of year 10 she has her Cert IV, and by the time she finishes year 12 has completed her Advanced Diploma in Screen and Media which includes a work placement facilitated by the career advisor. She enters UNSW with an ATAR equivalent of 80 straight into the second year of their Bachelor of Media in Screen and Sound production, while also able to support herself with a job in the screen industry due to her previous experience and qualifications.*

46. AC is currently in negotiation with over 50 independent schools nationwide who are implementing this model of VET/tertiary curriculum mapping industry integration. One high-end Sydney school are intending to partner with AC to put their entire year 9 cohort of 200 students on a range of Cert II's, with the aim of all students having completed Cert IV's/Diplomas by the end of high school.

47. In regard to the pragmatics of such integration, VET/tertiary training in the general school learning environment through the existing Hub models that AC is engaged with involves several aspects:
    1. All programs are mapped against the standard Australian curriculum and skill sets, which are then determined for overlap and, where possible, recognition of prior learning (RPL).
    2. Students are given both 'concurrent' and 'alternative' pathway options, depending on close consultation with parents, assessment of skills, desired outcomes, and those programs which are most likely to engage the student in effective learning.
    3. All classes occur within the school timetable, but in the case of a Hub approach the school timetable itself has been adapted to ensure that students have maximum flexibility aligned to learning outcomes.
    4. Students have the opportunity to either take standard HSC subjects, which are 'topped up' and assessed in such a way as to ensure VET program compliance or take allowable VET replacement programs instead of standard HSC subjects.
    5. Students spend three and a half days of the week working in project groups and in standard subject outlines, and 2 days a week in supervised "work integrated learning" settings (which can be paid cadetships).
    6. This means that students can emerge with either a graded HSC plus a VET award, or an HSC with a non-graded, estimated ATAR entry point to a local university.
    7. In regional areas, a large minority of students currently seek a direct focus on VET subjects and trade subjects leading to a traineeship. This program enables students to commence traineeships early.

48. An example of an existing program can be seen in the Young Entrepreneur Scheme (YES) Pathway at SPCC.[18] This takes the standard, alternative pathway (built around separate VET units) already used in many schools and 'puts it on steroids'. Students have the opportunity to not only complete their HSC but also exit with a completed Diploma of Business. At the end of Year 12, students will matriculate to the University of Newcastle (or another HE Provider of choice) with both an ungraded ATAR of up to 75, as well as wide range of VET qualifications, and the sort of critical social capital which arises from work experience in the real world of business.

49. AC recommends that the NSW Parliament ensure that 'HSC VET curriculum mapping' is enabled for Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas in NSW by education standard bodies such as NESA.

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[18]SPCC - https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/st-philips-christian-college/assets/src/cessnock/YES_Pathway-5.pdf. AC - http://www.cfs.ac/yes_business.html

(F) The quality of campus life and student freedom of expression

The important role of faith-based tertiary institutions

50. Faith-based tertiary institutions (FBTI's) play an important role in providing quality of campus life and freedom of expression in NSW. FBTI's are established by a religious body to create a higher education community to engage in learning, teaching and research in the context of that religion's beliefs and understanding of the truth about the natural world and humanity and the nature of education and knowledge.

51. FBTI can provide a unique and positive experience with aspects including:

    1. high student satisfaction recorded across the majority of engaged fields through national QILT surveys;
    2. a powerful emphasis on the formation of positive communal relationships between executives, academics, staff and students;
    3. strong emphasis on vocational support and mentoring with resources provided to the development of civic character, service and faith;
    4. an increased focus on community service and learning programs, as well as support for strong civic networks (e.g. churches, mosques, temples);
    5. intellectual communities which hold epistemologies that shape unique perspectives on knowledge and truth which in turn impact learning, teaching and research;
    6. shaping the governance, policies, ethics, efficiency and goals of more than 20% of health services, 35% of primary and secondary education, 60% of social services, 80% of charities and over 13,000 churches in Australia; and
    7. the provision of the vast majority of theological education graduates with a high rate of employment, improved social and public health outcomes and lower crime.

Issues of religious freedom in NSW tertiary

52. There are however numerous examples of limitations of tertiary student, staff and institution freedom of expression surrounding people of a religious worldview. This includes:

    1. the banning of Christian groups on university campuses who hold faith and conduct requirements for leaders (including the recent attempt by the Sydney University Union against the Sydney Evangelical Union);[19]
    2. the expulsion of Christian students for privately sharing their beliefs (the most famous case being Felix Ngole in the UK but with recent cases in Australia too);[20]
    3. heavy pressure to remove Australian academics from positions for their writings based on their religious worldviews or involvement with religious organisations (the most high-profile example being Dr Stephen Chavura. In 2017, activists publicly pressured Macquarie University to fire Dr. Chavura because he was a Director of the Lachlan Macquarie Institute, a Christian political

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[19]   https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/city-east/sydney-university-backflips-on-threat-to-deregister-evangelical-christian-group-over-faith-declaration-requirement/news-story/ad5ec528e545a3fe0ec9baa274d4d1a0 and https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/red-alert-politics/university-of-iowa-bows-to-legal-pressure-lets-religious-groups-require-their-leaders-to-be-religious

[20] https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/oct/27/christian-felix-ngole-thrown-out-sheffield-university-anti-gay-remarks-loses-appeal and Josh's story https://www.acl.org.au/josh_story

training organisation. Dr. Chavura received no support from university governance or management, and his contract was ultimately not renewed);[21]

4. abuse, theft and violence on Australian university campuses targeting legitimate rallies involving primarily students of faith (particularly during the SSM plebiscite);[22]

5. University staff disrupting and defacing the legally expressive activities (and encouraging their class to do likewise) of religious student organisations;[23]

6. Law societies refusing to recognise graduates from institutions holding orthodox Christian positions on sexuality and gender;[24]

7. State higher education commissions threatening to remove accreditation status of faith-based tertiary institutions;[25] and

8. Local government entities refusing access to student teachers, partnership programs, and contracts regarding the use of city facilities.[26]

53. These examples provide a strong argument for governments to secure the freedoms of faith-based tertiary institutions (FBTI) who can provide alternative education options for student and academic expression. Religious freedom in tertiary institutions are by no means assured, and AC urges the Education Committee to consider the importance of religious freedom and freedom of expression to the future of the NSW tertiary sector and recommend further religious freedom legislation.

The need for greater competition, diversity and choice

54. Diversity in the tertiary sector is not only beneficial in providing alternative choices to prospective students and faculty, it is beneficial to Australian society in offering alternative ways of understanding the world, how to use academic disciplines to live well in the world and to help people and solve issues confronting the world. Student freedom of expression is also improved by increasing diversity of thought, culture and practice.

55. Unfortunately, in NSW tertiary we can historically observe increasing institutional, and intellectual, monoculture. From the 1990's onward, tertiary education in Australia has come to reflect other monopolies and powerful industries which tend to dominate the market, produce the best products, and pay off for those who invested and worked in it. But, like other monopolies, tertiary education has failed to recognize its hubris and the environmental changes occurring around it. Even the complaints about tertiary mirrored those hurled at corporate monopolies: over-priced and poor-quality products, poor service and inattention to customers, inefficient and bureaucratic, unwilling to adapt to new markets, technologically backward, administratively bloated, and too concerned with frills rather than the core product.

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[21] See https://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/gay-rights-activist-michael-barnett-turns-on-christian-academic/news-story/ba36cfd3c967370371f8b9edb3f69dec. There is also a famous overseas example, Australian Catholic and Oxford professor John Finnis, where people attempted to remove him from his position for his philosophical writings on gender identity, natural law, marriage and sexuality https://thefederalist.com/2019/01/11/oxford-students-want-worlds-top-natural-law-scholar-fired-catholic/

[22] https://www.smh.com.au/education/police-called-as-hundreds-of-protesters-surround-sydney-university-vote-no-rally-20170914-gyhca1.html

[23] An overseas example can be found here but anecdotal evidence is that similar actions are also taken in Australia - https://www.thecollegefix.com/professor-told-class-erase-pro-life-chalking-pays-17000-settle-lawsuit/

[24] The main legal cases representing this issue is **Trinity Western University v Law Society of Upper Canada**

[25] **Gordon College v New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)**

[26] Also **Gordon College v New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)**

56. For these reasons, therefore, it is clear that for a significant change to come over the face of tertiary education, federal and state policy needs to be directed towards the diversification of the system, its reward structures and funding.

57. Economics Professor Paul Oslington, in his chapter on Competition Policy in Higher Education,[27] recommends two practical ways diversity in Australia's tertiary system can be improved:

    1. **Facilitate new universities** - The combination of Australia's underdeveloped culture of educational philanthropy and the challenging policy environment make it extremely difficult to start new universities.

    2. **Restructure public universities to facilitate takeovers and exit** - In the current environment, there seems to be an implicit political guarantee that no existing university be allowed to go to the wall, and certainly not a regional university, or university in an outer metropolitan marginal seat. By forcing the incumbents to adopt governance arrangements that facilitate the transfer of control to a new management (where the university is consistently making losses or underperforming in other ways), NSW can discipline the incumbent management and improve outcomes, even if takeovers don't happen.

58. The division between 'public' and 'private' constituencies is iniquitous, in the sense that those who are successful in redefining the content of what is public obtain a monopoly over 'public' funding, and vice versa. Australian students need to be able to vote with their feet, and drive diversity across the system. Only then will there be institutional support for a truly free market of ideas.

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[27] "Competition Policy in Higher Education" by Paul Oslington in *The Australian University in Crisis* edited by William Coleman. Connor Court. 2019.

(H) The current levels of coordination and/or support provided to NSW universities by the NSW Government;

Government support for University College status

59. AC can strongly affirm the support of the NSW Government Minister for Higher Education and Skills, Geoff Lee, regarding our application for University College status. His letter of support, and previous letter of support from former Education Minister Rob Stokes, demonstrated that NSW was open to new independent entrants in the tertiary market. The only previous successful entrant under the new TEQSA arrangements in the last decade was also a NSW provider, Avondale University College.

Limited assessment provision for innovation

60. To date, AC has found there to be very limited opportunities for independent tertiary and dual-sector providers to access State grants for school and industry partnership innovations in regional NSW despite repeated initiative from the sector. This could be in part due to:
    1. the cross-portfolio nature of such innovations
    2. a large NSW education bureaucracy that struggles to adapt to decentralised proposals
    3. the dominance of teacher unions which control the movement and training of ITE
    4. an inability or unwillingness to adequately assessment new proposals
    5. a 'desire to avoid policy churn'
    6. The dominance of an only partly successful TAFE NSW system
    7. barriers for new entrants in training programs such as 'Smart & Skilled'

61. When combined with a lack of support from Federal Government for independent providers there is clearly a lack of market competition, which in turn stifles innovation. The Federal barriers include:
    1. Nil or limited Commonwealth supported places (CSP's)
    2. A lack of access to research grants with the ARC
    3. a 20% loading fee on student loans for independent students
    4. No Research Training Scheme places for PhD programs
       While it is clearly not within the power of the NSW Education Committee to address Federal inequities, there are policy settings within NSW that could be adjusted to encourage a larger contribution from independent providers and the innovation that such a contribution would bring.

62. AC recommends the NSW parliament ensure fairer market conditions across the NSW tertiary sector, as well as improving communication lines and assessment for independent innovation.

(I)   The recent experience with online learning and lessons for the further development of alternative models of tertiary education service delivery

The shift away from centralised sandstone

63. The crisis impacting the NSW tertiary sector due to massive loss in revenues, combined with high cost bases, is partly due to an entrenched structural image of universities as needing to be grand, old and elite. Up until now, problems remained largely concealed behind high international student intakes, and heavy Government subsidies.[28]

64. COVID-19 however has shone a light on the challenges of this outdated model and forced a review of the very way we think about tertiary education. Those institutions who can adapt to decentralised, innovative and flexible modes of delivering tertiary education, while maintaining high academic standards and positive student experiences, should be provided with Government incentive and support, despite any constructed semantic public/private divide.

The alternative Hub model delivery

65. Alternative models of tertiary education delivery need to be seriously explored and assessed if successful reform is to be undertaken. As indicated above, Alphacrucis College (AC) and St. Philip's Christian College (SPCC) have spent the last few years developing a unique approach to service delivery that provides a multi-faceted solution to a number of challenges in the Australian educational context.

66. The 'AC Hub model' is the development of what can be called 'locally-embedded, ethos-driven learning ecologies' (or Hubs) which overcome the inequalities in regional post-secondary VET and tertiary access by harnessing the energies and needs of networks of like-minded local schools through partnerships with dual sector institutions and industry to provide high quality teachers and continuous, vertically integrated training across all AQF bands. The Hub model flips the conventional model of tertiary education and training, bringing exceptional higher education entirely onsite to local school clusters.

67. The Hub model involves:
    a. A cluster / consortium of schools (connected through geographical proximity and ethos) of between 3000 and 10000 school student enrolments;
    b. A bonded, long-term MOU between the Tertiary/VET provider and the school cluster to deliver Cert II to PhD courses onsite by tertiary faculty through a blended model of intensives and online learning;
    c. A large-scale VETiS program which maps VET curriculum and establishes individualized education pathways for the students. This provides early trade qualifications, alternative University entry opportunities and direct industry experience;
    d. An ITE program with between 8-30 positions with candidates screened by both the tertiary provider and the local schools at programme entry level based on quality (IQ and EQ),

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[28] "Competition Policy in Higher Education" by Paul Oslington in *The Australian University in Crisis* edited by William Coleman. Connor Court. 2019.

proven and locally vouchsafed volunteerism, local diversity needs, future HR needs and ethos alignment;

e. A commitment by the school cluster in sponsoring at least 50% of the clinical teaching training costs and providing at least 1 day of paid placement as a teaching assistant for the ITE students Cadetship;

f. Higher degree opportunities (MLead, MEd, PhD) for senior teachers within the cluster, as well as ongoing professional development;

g. Employment of a designated regional director provided by the tertiary partner to manage integration in the school, VET oversight, coordination of Clinical Teaching cadetship placement, ongoing support of students, and support to key school staff and local business networks;

h. The assignment of an external research team from an external tertiary institution for each teaching school Hub to provide a longitudinal programme evaluation for an improvement spiral;

i. The development of the cluster into a learning ecology which can provide VET certificates to the surrounding community through the utilisation of existing infrastructure;

j. The establishment of Hub business partnership networks which facilitate work placements, connect entrepreneurs, and allow input from the industry into the local training requirements.

68. The approach originally commenced at SPCC sites in the Hunter Region in 2018 and have now extended to Sydney within the Teaching School Alliance,[29] and in 2021 will commence in a cluster in regional Tasmania. AC are currently in negotiation with over 50 schools who are seeking to implement the model, which can be implemented across the Public, Catholic and Independent education sectors.

69. AC recommends that the Hub model of school/tertiary/VET/industry partnerships become a key aspect of the future development of the NSW tertiary sector. We estimate that up to 32% of all teacher training could be delivered through a Hub-style model. The CBA benefit ratio for the model is 7 generally, and 12 for regional Australia. At this scale, we calculate that if rolled out nationally, the net benefit for the model is $1,280,514,291 across all jurisdictions; and $746,397,172 for regional Australia in particular. This does not include a number of potential value-add measures including educational export, regionalisation, private partnerships and broader educational impact within the Hubs. For many regional areas however, such a model is not able to be implemented without initial government support. For more information, the *AC Hub business plan (Dec 2018)* can be made available upon request.

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[29] https://www.teachingschoolalliancesydney.org/

Recommendations

70. In summary, AC thanks the committee for the opportunity to contribute to the vision for the future development of the NSW tertiary sector. Our recommendations raised above can be summarised as follows:

   1. **AC recommends that the NSW Parliament commission an 'independent regional education advisory workgroup' to assist with exploring linkages between tertiary, industry, schools and regional communities.**

   2. **AC recommends that the Education committee commissions political representatives to physically observe alternative models of teacher training (such as at SPCC) and assess the impact on educational and economic development in regional communities.**

   3. **AC recommends that the NSW Education Minister explore a new set of grants, partnered with the Federal Government, tailored to cross-sector innovations across tertiary and VET which are accessible to independent providers.**

   4. **AC recommends that the Hub model of school/tertiary/VET/industry partnerships become a key aspect of the future development of the NSW tertiary sector.**

   5. **AC recommends that the NSW governments develop a forum for Pacific education ministers, Pacific church networks, and Australia's faith-based VET and tertiary bodies to evaluate the key opportunities for educational resources, research, local tertiary delivery and training partnerships in South Pacific countries.**

   6. **AC recommends that the NSW Parliament ensure that 'HSC VET curriculum mapping' is enabled for Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas in NSW by education standard bodies such as NESA.**

   7. **AC urges the Education Committee to consider the importance of religious freedom and freedom of expression to the future of the NSW tertiary sector and recommend further religious freedom legislation.**

   8. **AC encourages broader NSW Parliament support for the facilitation of new universities as well as public university accountability, takeovers and exits.**

   9. **AC recommends the NSW parliament ensure fairer market conditions across the NSW tertiary sector, as well as improving communication lines and assessment for independent innovation.**

For further inquiries regarding this submission, please contact:

Nick Jensen
Alphacrucis Political Liaison