



SKILLS

FOR SUSTAINABILITY

TAFE TEACHERS HAVE A CRITICAL ROLE IN COMBATING

by Leslie Loble

Over the past year climate change has dominated the headlines and the airwaves. As both sides of Federal politics debate carbon trading schemes and water policy, it can be easy to forget that climate change was not always such a high-profile issue.

With significant foresight, at the beginning of 2005 the NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training recognised the important role of skills development in responding to climate change. The Board commissioned research to investigate the place of skills in sustainable business development in NSW.

The fruit of that research, *Skills for Sustainability*, establishes an agenda for practical policy action that will equip the training system to meet the challenge of climate change. It is recommended reading for policy agencies and training practitioners seeking to assert their leadership in this field.

The global community has accepted that climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions poses a serious long term threat to the economic and physical wellbeing of all societies.

Given the significance of this threat, our response to climate change will be one of the most important drivers of economic changes during this century. The ability to adapt to these fundamentally changed circumstances will be a central determinant in the success of the NSW and the Australian economies in the foreseeable future.

We all have a personal stake in finding effective answers. Dr Tim Flannery told the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 5 June 2007 that in 20 years Australia will be "hotter, drier and leaner. But just how much hotter, drier and leaner depends very much upon what we do today...right now we're creating our own environmental future".

As the debate on greenhouse gas emissions and climate change has shifted from questioning whether a relationship exists to a broad agreement on the science, the focus on policies and strategies to address the challenge is intensifying.

To date, however, in the emergence of policy, regulatory and market responses, the role of skills has been largely overlooked.

A significant exception is the Board of Vocational Education and Training, which concluded that any solution to climate change must be a skills solution. Policy, regulatory or technological change must all be accompanied by changed workplace behaviour.

The Board commissioned the Workplace Research Centre at the University of Sydney to investigate the nature of the skills changes necessary in the context of the evolving energy policy as well as the implications for industry and innovation policy.

The research highlights the critical role that skills play in driving environmental sustainability through leadership, innovation, process and application. It also identifies where the biggest gains can be made in skilling for new 'green' jobs and through 'greening' old jobs in traditional sectors.

We need to ensure that we are training people for the new green jobs in renewable energy, waste management and recycling, water and waste water treatment and land remediation.

We also need to green many traditional jobs and industries, many of which have substantial potential to employ more environmentally friendly practices.

The energy, built environment, transport and manufacturing sectors should be early focus areas. For the built environment, as an example, new skills are needed for compliance with changing regulations and standards, application of sustainable products and techniques and resource management processes.

The impact of skills depends on the way skills are developed and deployed. It is here that the capability of the training sector to develop workforce skill solutions through industry partnerships and networks will be critical. While an undoubted challenge, it provides TAFE and its teachers with the opportunity to make a real and substantial contribution to environmental sustainability by leading new practice, increasing industry intelligence and supporting new networks and partnerships that target innovation and improvement in sustainable practises.

The report lays down a challenge for TAFE to embed skills for sustainability throughout its programs and services. Similarly, it seeks national commitment to incorporate industry-specific sustainability skills as core competencies within all industry training packages.

EDUCATING FOR SUSTAINABILITY



Pictured attending the launch of the Hopetoun Community Sustainable Energy Initiative are (L-R) Robert Irvine - Head of Western Campuses University of Ballarat, Craig Hurley, Terry Lloyd - Deputy Vice Chancellor (TAFE) UB and Dennis Olmstead - Manager, National Centre for Sustainability UB.

CLIMATE CHANGE

TAFE systems and their teachers are no strangers to such challenges, leading practice which contributes so markedly to the strength of the economy and the lives of Australians.

The report also recommends national action to appropriately focus and resource skills development for sustainable development within the national training system.

The BVET report *Skills for Sustainability* can be viewed at www.bvet.nsw.gov.au. Also available is the commissioned research paper produced by a consortium led by the Workplace Research Centre at the University of Sydney. ❖

Background notes on the author

Leslie Loble is a Deputy Director-General of the NSW Department of Education and Training. She is responsible for leading policy development and innovation across schooling, vocational education and training and higher education. She manages the Department's external relations including Commonwealth and state negotiations and external reporting on performance and achievements.

Previously Ms Loble served in President Bill Clinton's Administration as part of the top management team at the U.S. Department of Labor and as Chief of Staff to former Secretary of Labor Robert B. Reich.

by Craig Hurley

Sustainability is a concept that has been around for a long time, but it is only recently that it has emerged again in Victoria's TAFE programs. Communities in Australia and overseas are becoming increasingly concerned about the environment and are looking for leadership on sustainability issues. In the lead-up to the Federal Election this year, sustainability themes such as climate change, water scarcity and carbon trading are looming as central issues. Industry, government bodies, business and individuals have recognised the need for immediate action to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, use natural resources more efficiently, and to reduce the 'footprint' of human activity on the ecological systems that support us. The National Centre for Sustainability at the University of Ballarat (NCS:UB) is playing a role in providing this leadership for a more sustainable future

‘All TAFE programs have a role to play in making sure our graduates are eco-literate...’

In 2004, the Victorian Government's Office of Training and Tertiary Education (OTTE) provided seed funding for the establishment of 19 Specialist Centres; one being the National Centre for Sustainability. This Specialist Centre is a collaboration involving Swinburne University of Technology, TAFE Division (lead agency), Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, South West Institute of TAFE and University of Ballarat (TAFE Division). The National Centre for Sustainability provides educational leadership and works in partnership with industry, government and the community to undertake program delivery, resource development, project work and applied resources, to support the development of sustainable practices.

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