

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

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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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In the past, sustainability has been something of a peripheral issue that many people confused with environmentalism; if they thought about it at all. The UN’s ‘Our Common Future’ defined sustainable development as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’; to be achieved by balancing our social, economic and environmental needs — our Triple Bottom Lines.

However, in 2006 and early 2007 there has been a shift in the Australian community and sustainability has become a more mainstream issue. In the space of a few months, Sir Nicholas Stern handed down his report on the economic impacts of climate change to the British Government, Al Gore released his documentary film ‘An Inconvenient Truth’, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its fourth report, petrol prices had continued to rise and the severe drought in South Eastern Australia continued to bite.

People began talking about changing weather patterns, carbon emissions, renewable energy, hybrid cars, energy and water efficiency and the media picked up on these issues. This change in the community’s attitudes to sustainability has also been reflected in both the public and private sectors, with business, industry and government departments seeking to train their staff in sustainability concepts and practices.

At the NCS:UB I have been involved in some interesting projects that have aimed to help people develop the skills, attitudes and knowledge to consider sustainability issues in their day to day decision-making processes. For the last three years I have coordinated the Sustainable Energy Information Partnership activities in the North-West Victoria; activities which aim to provide practical information on saving energy at home and in the workplace, how to cut electricity and gas bills, creating a more comfortable living and working

environment and helping to cut greenhouse pollution. This has involved attending home shows, business expos etc. and discussing sustainable energy concepts with visitors, running workshops on energy efficient building design and other sustainable energy topics. While talking with these rural communities, I have sensed a real frustration that not enough has been done to address sustainability issues and that these communities require more leadership to help them achieve a more sustainable future.

I also coordinate and deliver the Diploma of Sustainability. This is a new program in only its second year, and it is quite different to any other TAFE program. Some people assume that the Diploma of Sustainability is an environmental program, but this is not necessarily the case. While this program certainly contains background information on our ecological systems and environmental challenges, it also explores in some depth the interrelationship between the economy, society and the natural environment. The Diploma of Sustainability’s core units discuss the background to sustainability and its main themes, the theory of sustainable behaviour change, applying sustainability concepts in a business environment, Triple Bottom Line reporting and the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development.

This course was designed to be studied concurrently with another diploma program, but we have been surprised by how many people already in the workforce are returning to study to join our Diploma of Sustainability groups. At the NCS:UB, students working in a diverse range of areas such as building and construction, waste management, conservation and land management, farming, local government, education, telecommunications and retail have studied this program, which is a significant trend.

For more than thirty years, education has been hailed as the key to a sustainable future, but many

of the environmental education programs we have implemented have tended to be aimed at primary and secondary school levels; to children who will be the decision-makers of tomorrow. However, if we are to change to more sustainable practices today (and there is plenty of evidence to suggest this is what we need to be doing), we need to be also reaching today’s decision-makers.

Today’s decision-makers are adults in our businesses, industries, government departments, education institutions, hospitals, community organisations and our homes right now. The National Centre for Sustainability is making a significant contribution to training these decisions-makers in sustainability and I find being part of this incredibly stimulating and rewarding. All TAFE programs have a role to play in making sure our graduates are ‘eco-literate’, so that we might be able to meet our needs, without compromising the ability of our children to meet their needs, in the future. ❖



Craig Hurley is the Project Coordinator of the National Centre for Sustainability - University of Ballarat in Horsham and teaches in the Centre’s Diploma of Sustainability program.