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**Submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee Inquiry into technical and further education in Australia**

Att: Senate Committee Members

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Gippsland Education Precinct is pleased to submit to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee Inquiry into Technical and Further Education.

This submission addresses the Terms of Reference under section a) 'the role played by TAFEs'.

This submission addresses each of the four items i) - iv), providing a recommendation to the Commonwealth government in Section 1 for future Commonwealth funding policy relating to TAFE and Higher Education.

## Section 1: Recommendations

These recommendations are made based on evidence highlighted in Section 2 below and are related to the Terms of Reference as detailed in Section 3.

The Gippsland Education Precinct recommends that the Commonwealth government improve outcomes through TAFE by:

### **1. Funding partnership projects**

The Gippsland Education Precinct recommends that the Commonwealth government fund projects that encourage/foster partnerships between industry, VET and Higher Education organisations.

### **2. Funding initiatives that encourage VET and Higher Education to address industry needs**

The Gippsland Education Precinct recommends that the Commonwealth government fund initiatives that encourage VET and Higher Education providers to address industry needs through innovation and updated models of teaching, learning, enrolment and industry collaboration.

## Section 2: Background and Context

The [Gippsland Education Precinct](#) (GEP) is a multi-sectoral partnership between five regional Gippsland stakeholders with an integral focus on education and training:

- Federation University Australia
- GippsTAFE
- Kurnai College
- Apprenticeship Group Australia
- Latrobe City

The GEP is managing the implementation of a project known as the Gippsland Industry-led Control and Systems Engineering Project (the 'Project'). This Project is an industry-led regional capability development program developed through collaboration between small, medium and large scale value-adding organisations including [Lion](#) and [Safetech Tieman Solutions](#), Federation University, GippsTAFE and the Regional Industry Skills Alliance (a business unit of the GEP).

The Project is [recognised](#) as addressing regional development needs.

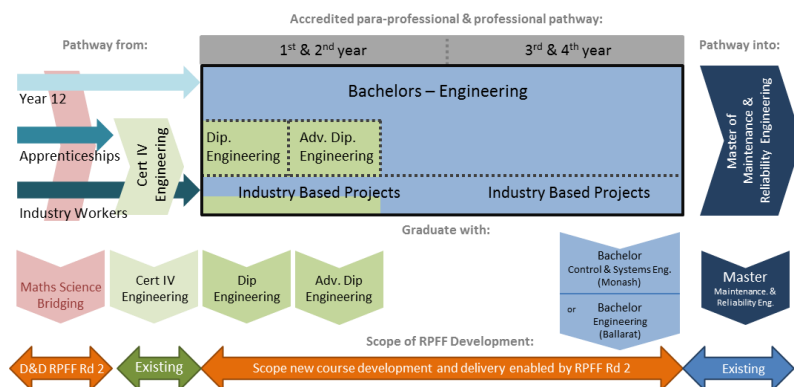
Australian industry are facing the challenge of falling productivity (as a ratio of US productivity as an international measure), which is adversely affecting the international competitiveness of products and services that are value added in Australia. Manufacturing and value adding stakeholders, acknowledge that productivity growth and the ongoing sustainability of regional industry is enabled through increased automation and an appropriately skilled workforce.

Increasing automation and productivity measures in value adding industries requires growth in the workforce of workers who hold Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education qualifications (Certificate IV, Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Bachelor & Masters) in Engineering fields directly related to improved productivity in manufacturing industries.

The Project is establishing a pathway that enables individuals to enter and exit vocational and higher education study at any of the pathway's integrated stages in the field of Automation, Control Systems and Mechatronics.

(pathway diagram on next page)

## Gippsland Industry-led Control & Systems Engineering Pathway



The Project has established an industry engagement model that ensures individuals and industry organisations, take a leadership role providing opportunities for Project based learning in the workplace, active input into pathway curriculum and assistance in establishment and operation of laboratories.

Key components contributing to the success of this Project are:

1. A VET to Higher Education articulation pathway based on Australian Quality Training Framework principles
2. Incorporating teaching and learning models that are based on Industry-led objectives for practical, applied skills in both VET and Higher Education courses
3. Addressing an identified regional skills shortage in the area of automation, control systems and mechatronics engineering
4. Enabling three distinct student cohorts access to the pathway program via study modes that suit their individual circumstances:
  - a. High School Leavers
  - b. Apprentices
  - c. Experienced Mature-age Workers

The Project, which has received funding contributions from the Victorian state government, local industry and tertiary education providers, is strongly endorsed and supported by local industry, community and regional organisations as evidenced through 46 individual letters of support.

## Section 3: The Project in relation to the Terms of Reference

The Project is provided as an example of how identified regional needs can be addressed through collaborative partnerships between VET (TAFE), Higher Education and industry with the support of regional stakeholders.

The Project's outcomes address the Terms of Reference through the following examples:

- i. Educational linkages with secondary and higher education:
  - The Project is fostering educational linkages between VET and Higher Education through implementation of a VET to Higher Education pathway with articulation according to Australian Quality Training Framework and includes entry and exit point for students in both VET and Higher Education.
  - The Project is actively providing a VET and Higher Education pathway for an identified cohort of secondary students resident in regional Victoria that would otherwise not aspire to or achieve tertiary education outcomes
- ii. The development of skills in the Australian economy:
  - Through collaboration developed through the Regional Industry Skills Alliance, the Project is directly addressing an identified area of skills shortage in regional Victoria, evidenced through documented financial<sup>1</sup> and in-kind industry support<sup>2</sup> and a range of regional development reports<sup>3</sup>
  - The Project is addressing industry's preference for bridging the gap between trade level skills and professional engineering. Industry has a strong preference for students to be able to achieve tertiary education outcomes through applied learning industry projects.
- iii. The development of opportunities for Australians to improve themselves and increase their life, education and employment prospects:
  - The Project addresses the varying needs of individuals to develop skills and experiences that assist life-long learning through three different student cohorts:
    1. Mature-age students
    2. Apprentices
    3. High-school graduatesIndustry projects and placements facilitated by the Regional Industry Skills Alliance will raise:
    - The employability skills of students during study
    - Opportunities for employment during study and after graduation

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<sup>1</sup> \$5.8m commitment of equipment, services and in-kind support

<sup>2</sup> Letters and commitments of support from 23 industry organisations

<sup>3</sup> DEECD – Vic, Dec 2011, Gippsland Tertiary Education Plan; DEECD – Vic, Mar 2012, State of the Valley Report; DEECD – Vic, 2012, Skills Shortages Report

- iv. The delivery of services and programs to support regions, communities and disadvantaged individuals to access education, training and skills and, through them, a pathway to further education and employment:
- The Project is a place-based, regional industry-led initiative project managed by the Gippsland Education Precinct - a not-for-profit community based collaboration.
  - The Project addresses specific regional issues as identified through the Gippsland Regional Plan and is endorsed and supported by Regional Development Australia – Gippsland and Regional Development Victoria – Gippsland.

In conclusion, the Commonwealth government by funding partnership projects and initiatives that encourage VET and Higher Education to address industry needs, can directly bring about outcomes that meet regional development needs through enhanced collaboration between VET, Higher Education and industry.

The Gippsland Education Precinct and its partners would welcome the opportunity to provide further information, either first-hand or through the submission of additional information to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee inquiry into TAFE.

Our experience through the Project as evidenced in Sections 2 & 3 above, may be of assistance in the development of models that enable VET and Higher Education to achieve desired regional development outcomes.

Regards,

Dr Peter Whitley

Board Chair – Gippsland Education Precinct