

At the Senate Inquiry into Regional Development and Decentralisation, on Thursday 12th October 2017, I took two questions on notice and agreed to provide answers by 20th October 2017.

Question one asked me to identify the areas of duplication between offerings at Wodonga TAFE and Albury TAFE.

Response:

It is difficult to compare the offerings between Wodonga TAFE and Albury TAFE as we are not comparing 'apples with apples'. Victoria runs a decentralised TAFE model, where Wodonga is run as a separate independent business with a locally engaged board of directors. This provides our region with a local context and an agility to change delivery options to meet local needs quickly. Wodonga makes independent business and community decisions around what we put on our scope of registration. Our key strengths are aligned to community and local industry needs such as Nursing, community services, engineering, agriculture, carpentry, logistics, allied health, hospitality etc.

Albury TAFE doesn't really exist as an entity, rather it is a regional campus of a centralised TAFE New South Wales (NSW) model and, as such, the scope of registration covers the entire state. This means that Albury's offerings are potentially very broad but delivery may not be local, students may have to travel to Wagga Wagga for example.

The two TAFEs have historically negotiated shared delivery solutions for some offerings in order to best manage the delivery of thin market courses – avoiding duplication. Where market demand can cope with delivery by both organisations this occurs – such as cookery, hairdressing, hospitality, nursing, allied health etc. This does create some degree of duplication and inefficiency but it also allows for choice based upon quality and access. The mechanisms to allow this are clunky and inefficient on both sides of the border and this impacts on both students and industry.

Cross border challenges around access to state subsidies means that students and industries are often not afforded the access to a free choice to study where they choose, based upon quality. There are many examples, but Riverlea is a good case study where the company has locations on both sides of the border but would like to deal with only one TAFE, under current state guidelines this is not possible as neither TAFE can cater (with the government subsidies) for staff on both sides of the border.

The combined populations of Albury and Wodonga would be better served by one TAFE operating under guidelines that catered freely and fairly for students and industries, irrespective of which side of the river they lived or worked on. This would create the most efficient and effective service.

Noting the vastly different State models, such a solution could be achieved in one of two ways:

1. An agreement by VIC and NSW govts to create a 'post code' zone around Albury and Wodonga (out to say 30 kms). Within that agreed zone, students, industry and businesses could be afforded the opportunity to study at either TAFE based upon offering, quality and access. Any individual or business would be supported by both state governments in terms of access to government training subsidies, based upon educational choice.
2. The model of Albury Wodonga Health be applied to education, with one state allowing the other to take a lead role in providing a quality tertiary education provision for the Albury Wodonga combined region.

Question two asked me to highlight areas where the inquiry could recommend improvements to address free, fair and equitable access to education and training within the context of the cross border environment.

Response:

The combined populations of Albury and Wodonga would be better served by one TAFE operating under guidelines that catered freely and fairly for students and industries, irrespective of which side of the river they lived or worked on. This would create the most efficient and effective service avoiding duplication and maximising the available economies of scale within a regional setting.

Noting the vastly different State models, such a solution could be achieved in one of three ways:

1. Ongoing local MOU's between the two TAFEs to manage thin markets.
2. An agreement by VIC and NSW govts to create a 'post code' zone around Albury and Wodonga (out to say 30 kms). Within that agreed zone, students, industry and businesses could be afforded the opportunity to study at either TAFE based upon offering, quality and access. Any individual or business would be supported by both state governments in terms of access to government training subsidies, based upon educational choice and quality.
3. The model of Albury Wodonga Health be applied to education, with one state allowing the other to take a lead role in providing a quality tertiary vocational educational provision for the Albury Wodonga combined region. I would prefer this to operate under the decentralised model, with a local regional board of directors, because I think this would be better able to meet local demands and remain agile to regional challenges.