This paper examines the metamorphosis of technical and further education (TAFE) by tracing the genealogy of TAFE institutes in Victoria and analysing the changing size, structure and organisation of the technical education system in Victoria. On the basis of this analysis, the nature of tradition and identity in TAFE is examined in an attempt to understand the forces which have shaped and redefined TAFE as a tertiary education sector up to the present day. Against the background of the dissolution of the binary system of higher education in Australia, and in the light of TAFE’s history and current policy trends and developments, future prospects for TAFE are then considered. It is argued that a new set of institutional discourses and practices are reshaping TAFE and higher education in the transition to a post-technocratic settlement. The paper speculates on the potential re-emergence of a binary system of higher education and training comprising TAFE institutes and universities. In conclusion, it argues that the traditions which to date have threatened TAFE’s survival as a distinct sector of education and training may, in fact, be the source of its salvation in a radically restructured tertiary education environment.

Introduction

The development of tertiary education and training in Australia, particularly since the Second World War, has been characterised by dramatic and increasingly rapid change. Among the most significant of these changes has been the construction of a national sector of technical and further education (TAFE) since the mid-1970s. This development has occurred parallel to the emergence and subsequent dissolution of a binary system of higher education. However, the creation of a unified national system (UNS) of higher education in Australia following the release of the Green and White Papers on higher education (Dawkins 1987, 1988) has largely overshadowed the successive waves of restructuring and reorganisation in the TAFE sector at the systemic and provider levels. The mergers of colleges of advanced education (CAEs) in the early 1980s, and between CAEs and universities during the late 1980s and early 1990s, have been documented and analysed fairly extensively (e.g. Gamage 1992; Harman & Meek 1988a,b; Meek &
Processes of institutional redesign in the TAFE sector have been subject to much less research and analysis.

The creation of a unitary system of higher education in Australia has left a considerable vacuum in its wake. As a consequence of the most recent round of institutional amalgamations in the higher education sector, the distinctive role and identity of CAEs has been virtually erased. The significant contribution which they made to the teaching of advanced technical and vocational programs has been largely submerged in the race by the 'new' universities to establish their credentials as academic research institutions (Moses 1993). Simultaneously, TAFE institutes have been moving slowly, but surely, 'up market' to fill the gap left by the CAEs through the provision of an increasing number of diploma-level courses in vocational areas (Anderson 1994). Factors such as unmet demand for tertiary qualifications, reverse student transfer from university to TAFE, and academic creep have combined to push TAFE along the path trod by the former CAEs (Powles & Anderson 1996). With increasing intensity, turf disputes have broken out between universities and TAFE over sectoral boundaries, most recently in relation to the delivery of sub-degree and degree-level courses (Osmond 1997a; Rushbrook 1997). At the lower end of the tertiary education and training market, private and community providers have been progressively moving into the gaps left by TAFE institutes as they migrate upwards in the tertiary sector (Anderson 1994).

Other political forces now at work appear likely to alter the size, structure and composition of the TAFE sector, thereby potentially fuelling the recreation of a binary system of higher education in Australia. In May 1997, for instance, the Victorian Minister for Tertiary Education and Training initiated a Review of TAFE Provision in the Melbourne Metropolitan Area. The stated purposes of this review are to:

- consider the nature and extent of the provision of vocational education and training in the Melbourne metropolitan area by TAFE institutes, and the likely effect on these institutes of the development of an open training market and associated public policy changes
advise on appropriate structural arrangements for TAFE institutes in the Melbourne metropolitan area, including the desirable number and scope of these institutes and appropriate linkages with Victorian universities

As Fooks (1997, p.8) points out, the media release accompanying the terms of reference for the Victorian Ministerial Review of TAFE Provision referred to the need to consider ‘the feasibility of merging TAFEs with existing universities’. According to Fooks (1997, p.8), this signalled the minister’s ‘grand plans for rationalising Melbourne metropolitan TAFE institutes, mainly by ... subsuming them within universities’.

In the course of undertaking the review, the ministerial committee commissioned a research project to examine the changing size, structure and composition of the Victorian TAFE system since its inception. It considered that such work would improve its understanding of the nature and development of the system. In undertaking this research, however, it was found that a significant gap existed in the knowledge and information base about the institutional development of the TAFE system, in this case in Victoria (Anderson 1997a).

Until relatively recent times, the history of TAFE in Australia has been much neglected. The most notable exception is the work by Murray-Smith (1966). But his seminal thesis focusses on the development of technical education in Australia prior to the establishment of TAFE as a formal education sector. The three most recent contributions to the history of TAFE are Rushbrook (1995a), Goozee (1993) and Batrouney (1985). Following Murray-Smith, Rushbrook (1995a) locates his authoritative history of TAFE in Victoria within the changing political, social and economic context, and analyses the ideological forces which have shaped the course of TAFE’s development. The history by Goozee (1993) concentrates primarily on the development of TAFE at a systemic level with special emphasis on the federal structure of the TAFE system in Australia. As a result, Goozee’s treatment of intra-state trends and developments tends to be rather cursory. Batrouney (1985) analyses the traditions which have shaped the development of TAFE in Australia, and charts the emergence of a national approach to TAFE administration and co-ordination. Batrouney’s work also tends to focus on the development of TAFE in Australia at a national rather than a State level.
All four historical works have made important contributions to our understanding of the complex jigsaw of TAFE's evolution as a major sector of tertiary education and training in Australia. But none have traced in any detail the institutional evolution of the TAFE system except at a relatively high level of generality. As Goozee (1993, p.1) notes, 'despite the growth of TAFE in both size and importance over the past two decades, there has been very little material published documenting the significant changes that have occurred'. This observation applies as much to the genealogy of TAFE institutions as it does to policy formation and systems development at a State or national level. Some research on the development of individual TAFE institutions has been undertaken, such as the history of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) by Murray-Smith and Dare (1987). But overall, the changing institutional size, structure and composition of the State-based TAFE systems has been poorly documented and under-researched.

Based in part on the work undertaken for the Victorian ministerial review, this article documents and analyses key changes in the size, structure and organisation of the TAFE system in Victoria up to the present day. Special emphasis is placed on changes in the Victorian TAFE system since 1974 when the sector was first formally established. The data on which the article is based were derived from several primary sources and supplemented with secondary information provided in academic texts, government reports, newspapers and by TAFE personnel. The various forces that have shaped the sectoral identity of TAFE since its genesis are examined on the basis of this analysis, and with special reference to Batrouney (1985) and Rushbrook (1997).

In the light of TAFE's history and current policy trends and developments, the future prospects and options for TAFE with respect to its institutional structure and identity are discussed. It is argued that a new set of institutional discourses and practices are reshaping TAFE and higher education in the transition to a post-technocratic settlement. The article speculates on the potential re-emergence of a binary system of higher education comprising TAFE institutes and universities and concludes by arguing that the traditions which to date have threatened TAFE's survival may, in fact, be the source of its salvation in a radically
restructured tertiary environment. In these ways, the article aims to contribute to the development of a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the changing nature and organisation of an important sector of tertiary education and training.

At the outset, it should be noted that considerable variation exists between the history of TAFE in each State and Territory in Australia, due to the fact that TAFE has evolved as a loose collection of separate State-based systems (Batrouney 1985; Goozee 1993). Nevertheless, an examination of the metamorphosis of the Victorian TAFE system provides some valuable insights into tradition and identity in TAFE as a whole, and sheds light on possible future developments elsewhere. The nature and development of TAFE is also highly complex because of its diverse and ever-changing roles and composition. This article focusses primarily on the trade and technical component of TAFE, rather than on further education. The nature and development of the two components are closely intertwined but the changing structure and organisation of further education requires, and deserves, a separate study.

Throughout this article, the term ‘tertiary’ is used synonymously with ‘post-secondary’ to denote phases of education and training, including entry-level training such as apprenticeships, which take place after secondary schooling. Providers of tertiary education and training include universities, the former CAEs and non-university institutions such as TAFE institutes and other vocational education and training (VET) providers in the private and community sectors. ‘Higher education’ is used to refer to educational provision at a degree level or above most of which almost exclusively occurs at present in universities. One of the difficulties with writing about the topic is that the use of these terms has varied over time, reflecting the unstable and historically constituted nature of sectoral boundaries and definitions.

**The origins of technical education in Victoria**

From its genesis in mechanics institutes in the Colony of Victoria during the late 1830s and 1840s, technical education expanded and diversified with the establishment of schools of mines in Ballarat and Bendigo in
1870 and 1871 respectively, followed by the Working Men's College (later renamed the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) in 1882, and Gordon Technical College in 1885 (Freeman & Herrick 1992). Compared to the technical education system in New South Wales, technical education in Victoria was much less centralised and subject to less government control (Batrouney 1985; Goozee 1993; Murray-Smith 1966). By 1892-93, for instance, there were still 24 technical schools in Victoria which were State-subsidised but not State-controlled. Murray-Smith (1966, p.343) notes that in the 19th century, 'Victoria ... experienced a wasteful and confusing proliferation of ad hoc organisations, largely based on philanthropic and voluntary support, independent of each other ... and all holding separate examinations'.

During the period from 1890 to 1914, government increasingly assumed responsibility for technical education and initiated a phase of expansion (Murray-Smith 1966; Batrouney 1985). A large number of technical schools were established in areas of population growth in Victoria between 1885 and 1910. This development was accompanied by the opening of both woodwork and cookery centres, together with a number of domestic arts schools for girls during the early 1900s. However, as Rushbrook notes, 'in the early 20th century technical educators observed [that] a “vocational gap” had emerged between elementary education and the level of competence required for entry to technical college' (1995b, p.4). Although such perceptions led to the creation of junior technical schools in Victoria, popular preference continued to favour liberal arts programs in high schools from which most technical college students were drawn (Rushbrook 1995b). Nevertheless, by 1922 there were 25 technical colleges, 20 junior technical schools and 65 cookery centres operating throughout Victoria (Freeman & Herrick 1992).

In response to growing community and industry demand over the following decade, there was a significant increase in the number of providers of technical education in Victoria. This growth in technical education was in part fuelled by the creation of the Apprenticeship Commission in 1928 which required apprentices to undertake off-the-job training in technical institutions as part of their indentures (Murray-Smith 1966). It was during this period that the traditional manual/mental division became institutionalised through the structural and curricular
separation of educational provision along the class divide. High schools and universities offered liberal academic studies for professional and white-collar workers, whereas technical schools and colleges catered for the vocational education needs of tradespeople, technicians and para-professionals (Rushbrook 1995a,b; Seddon 1992/3). Despite a major hiatus during the Depression years of the early 1930s, the technical education sector continued to grow in size. By 1935, there were 25 junior technical schools, 27 senior technical schools and 12 girls’ schools and schools of domestic art operating throughout Victoria (Freeman & Herrick 1992).

The national mobilisation that occurred with the onset of the Second World War followed by post-war reconstruction instigated a new, but short-lived, era of consolidation for technical colleges (Murray-Smith 1966; Rushbrook 1995a,b). Substantial Commonwealth funds were injected into technical education for capital development and skills training programs. But after the early 1950s, technical education subsided into a chronic state of neglect and under-funding, a condition which persisted into the mid-1970s (Goozee 1993; Rushbrook 1995a,b). Nevertheless, the steady expansion of secondary education, including the technical schools sector, had generated significant demand for qualified teachers. Consequently, the period between 1945 and 1961 saw the establishment of ten new teachers’ colleges. In 1952, the Technical Teachers’ Training Centre (later renamed the Technical Teachers’ College) was established (Freeman & Herrick 1992). These teachers’ colleges offered two-year certificate courses which were eventually upgraded to three-year diploma-level courses.

By the end of the 1950s, tertiary technical education in Victoria comprised an amorphous collection of non-degree conferring institutions including schools of mines and industries, institutes of technology, horticultural colleges, teachers’ colleges and other specialised vocational institutions, such as technical colleges. As Jakupec and Roantree note:

> these institutions were generally considered different from universities with inferior prestige. Yet despite the differences between universities and technical colleges, there was no clear definition of what constituted on the one hand tertiary education and on the other hand post-secondary education.

(Jakupec & Roantree 1993, p.151)
At the secondary level, technical education comprised an array of junior technical schools and senior technical schools which essentially operated as feeder institutions for tertiary providers of vocational education.

**Technical education in the 1960s and early 1970s**

From the 1960s onwards, technical education in Victoria underwent some major reorganisations at the systemic and provider levels. At this time, technical colleges in Victoria offered around 63 different diploma-level courses in a variety of fields including the sciences, architecture and engineering, in addition to art and design (Williams 1965). Students who performed well in their engineering diploma-level courses were granted exemptions from the first two years of the four-year degree-level courses at universities. Despite the comparatively high level of course articulation that existed, the State Advisory Council on Technical Education in Victoria, which was established in 1961, advocated the concept of an Institute of Colleges which was the forerunner of CAEs. By 1964, the State government had proposed that eight technical colleges be given responsibility to conduct degree-level courses under the auspices of a central committee. In 1965, the Victorian Institute of Colleges (VIC) was established with responsibility for tertiary technical courses.

Much of the impetus for the dramatic changes during the latter half of the 1960s came from the *Report of the Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia to the Australian Universities Commission* (hereafter referred to as the Martin report 1964). The Martin report recommended that trade, certificate-level technician, and recreational courses should remain the preserve of technical colleges, but that technology and general education courses should be conducted by the proposed Institute of Colleges, eventually renamed CAEs. In effect, this report laid the foundations for the development of the binary system of higher education in Australia. As Jakupec and Roantree observe, the Martin report started from the proposition that:

... universities were concerned with higher education for the specially gifted; the Institute of Colleges ... should provide alternative facilities for the large number of school leavers who have the ability to study at tertiary
level but are unable to gain university places. By default this inferred that TAFE should provide recreational, trade, post-trade and other occupational courses which no other educational sector was interested in providing . . . In conclusion it could be said that an existing binary system of universities and technical colleges was, according to Martin (1964), to be substituted by another binary system [which] effectively excluded TAFE from significant higher education involvement.

(Jakupec & Roantree 1993, p.154)

Although technical colleges were denied a clear and autonomous role in the tertiary sector, the Martin report recommended that they should nevertheless receive additional support to assist them to raise their educational status and standards.

The diversification and expansion of tertiary education following the Martin report had major consequences for the role and structure of technical education in Victoria. Prior to the Martin report, technical colleges had responsibility for delivering: vocational education and training programs for professionals and para-professionals in a range of disciplines, particularly those which contributed to the needs and demands of industry, commerce and the community; trade and post-trade training for specific occupations; courses for personal development, enrichment and recreation; and post-compulsory, remedial and further education courses for adults in the form of ‘evening colleges’. In the period following the implementation of the Martin report, however, ‘the technical education sector . . . relinquished a major component of its technology courses partially to the universities and later to the colleges of advanced education and institutes of technology’ (Jakupec & Roantree 1993, p.155).

During the latter part of the 1960s, technical education in Victoria was delivered through an increasingly fragmented and poorly co-ordinated system comprising: two entirely self-governing technical colleges; a number of self-governing institutions combining advanced education and TAFE components; and technical colleges and technical secondary schools under the tight control of the ‘chronically under-financed’ Technical Schools Division (TSD) of the Education Department (Rushbrook 1995b). Despite severe funding constraints, individual technical schools were expanding at a considerable rate. For instance,
the Box Hill Technical School, first established in 1941, had become a ‘sea of portable classrooms’ by 1967 which catered for a population of 630 secondary students, 305 apprentices and 399 evening students (Box Hill TAFE, p.2).

In 1970, the Victorian director of the Technical Schools Division released *The future role and operation of technical schools and colleges* (Jackson 1970) which proposed that post-compulsory technical education should be separated from junior technical schools and divided into preparatory, basic vocational, middle-level vocational, special purpose vocational, and adult extension programs. In addition, it was proposed that colleges, which until then had terminated at Year 11, would assume responsibility for delivering a new Year 12 program to prepare technical school graduates for tertiary or advanced vocational education. The providers of such programs were to be redesignated as ‘technical colleges’ under the control of the Technical Schools Division or council-controlled college. As Rushbrook (1995a,b) notes, the Jackson proposals in many respects prefigured recommendations in the Kangan report (ACOTAFE 1974). In 1972, the State Council for Technical Education was established with responsibility for a range of matters including the provision of courses, finance and facilities in technical schools and colleges in Victoria.

**Kangan and TAFE in Victoria**

Released in 1974, the Kangan report by the Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education (ACOTAFE 1974) provided the philosophical and policy basis for the development of a distinctive sector of technical and further education in Australia. It was through this report that the acronym ‘TAFE’ was adopted. The Kangan report was the first official policy document at a national level to link trade and technical education with adult and further education in a systematic and integrated manner. ACOTAFE eschewed artificial distinctions between general and vocational education, and argued that ‘the scope of technical and further education is much wider than courses of instruction in technical colleges, agricultural schools and like institutions’ (1974, p.5). In its view, the considerable overlap between the roles, responsibilities and, above all, the needs of clients highlighted the
importance of adopting an integrated approach to TAFE based on the principles of universal access and lifelong education.

The Kangan report noted that technical colleges attracted the largest number of people pursuing tertiary studies in government administered and maintained educational institutions in Australia, totalling around 430,000 students in 1973. It considered that technical college education is essentially vocationally-oriented and that 'its institutions exist for knowledge users, as distinct from the universities which exist traditionally also for knowledge innovators whose functions include basic research' (p.45). Thus, in spite of its rejection of the separation of general from vocational education, ACOTAFE maintained and reaffirmed the technical/skills and academic/knowledge distinction.

The perception that 'troublesome' distinctions existed between CAEs, technical colleges and technical schools was noted by ACOTAFE. In its view, however, there was no need for clear and fixed boundaries between institutions. Overlap between courses provided by technical schools, technical colleges and CAEs 'could be beneficial. Such overlapping could allow adults greater access to recurrent education' (ACOTAFE 1974, p.5). In other words, the needs of learners rather than formal sectoral boundaries should determine the structure and organisation of tertiary education and training institutions. Moreover, the rapidly changing nature of social and economic demands suggested to ACOTAFE that 'it is beyond human capacity to devise a precise definition of technical and further education that would stand the test of time' (p.6). Instead of demarcating a definitive institutional category for TAFE, ACOTAFE preferred to 'simply describe the activities of technical and further education as presently practised in Australia' (p.6).

The Kangan report observed that the organisation of TAFE in Victoria was very complex, diverse and substantially different from that in other States and Territories. It reported that in Victoria:

[A] large proportion of secondary education is conducted in technical schools administered by the Technical Schools Division. Post-secondary technical education is conducted in both technical schools and technical colleges, the latter having a major emphasis on post-secondary studies. In addition, nearly 40 per cent of post-secondary education takes place
alongside advanced education in technical college divisions of institutes of technology, managed by incorporated councils. Some non-advanced education courses in agricultural colleges are funded by the State government.

(ACOTAFE p.49)

The Kangan report recorded that, in 1973, TAFE courses were provided in Victoria by:

- 20 technical colleges (mono and multi-purpose)
- ten institutes of technology (multi-sectoral)
- 74 junior technical colleges
- two high school annexes

Enrolments in tertiary technical education totalled 81,700 students (including 6000 full-time and 7200 correspondence students), over 35 per cent of whom were enrolled in trades-based courses, 25 per cent in para-professional courses, and 15 per cent each in preparatory and adult education (excluding students at the Council of Adult Education, learning centres, and agricultural colleges).

The Kangan report highlighted flexibility and responsiveness to individual, industry and community needs as the hallmarks of TAFE provision. This notion of flexibility extended to the institutional structure and organisation of TAFE. For instance, ACOTAFE proposed that the concept of 'community colleges' should be developed in large non-metropolitan areas to provide 'opportunities for adults to satisfy their educational needs. These needs may be met by normal technical courses, courses to remedy deficiencies in their initial education, or courses extending into streams of advanced education where the number of local students justifies it' (p.5). While ACOTAFE insisted that needs should determine institutional forms in TAFE, it also acknowledged the importance of structural efficiency and cost-effectiveness considerations. For example, in view of the increasing expansion and diversification of needs in TAFE, ACOTAFE recommended that TAFE authorities should experiment with different
organisational techniques 'that aim at more economic usage of capital than is currently achieved, including new patterns of attendance' (p.xliv).

The Kangan report inaugurated a significant new phase in the development of TAFE in Victoria, primarily as a consequence of the Commonwealth funding for capital development and recurrent program provision that flowed to the formerly resource-poor sector. As Rushbrook notes:

... armed with legitimacy, status and funding, the fledgling TAFE system in Victoria embarked on a frenzied decade of system building ... the most obvious demonstration of TAFE's new presence was the suburban raising of 'Taj Mahals'—new colleges and buildings funded by States' grants for capital works. Less obvious but of greater significance were changes mooted to administrative structures generated by an all-embracing federal definition of TAFE which transcended the boundaries of the Victorian system.

(Rushbrook 1995b, p.15)

Despite their new-found identity and legitimacy as recognised providers of tertiary education and training, Victorian TAFE providers continued to be subject to high levels of centralised bureaucratic control under TAFE Services within the Planning Division of the Education Department and the Curriculum Board of the State Council for Technical Education.

The first phase of TAFE reorganisation: Late 1970s and early 1980s

The latter part of the 1970s and early 1980s saw a major phase of structural reorganisation in the Victorian tertiary education sector, including TAFE, at both the systemic and provider levels. Following the recommendations of the Partridge Committee of Inquiry into Post-secondary Education in 1978, the Victorian Post-secondary Education Commission (VPSEC) was established to absorb the functions of the
Victoria Institute of Colleges and the State College of Victoria. The Partridge report noted that the technical education system in Victoria at that time was comprised of a secondary technical school system and a TAFE system which provided 'a wide range of courses of a post-school vocational character' (1978, p.4). The secondary technical school system included: 79 secondary technical schools; six high schools with technical components providing TAFE classes; and 107 high schools with TAFE evening classes. The TAFE system included: eight departmental colleges with tertiary (mono-purpose) programs only; 13 departmental colleges with secondary and TAFE programs; nine VIC colleges with TAFE divisions; and two council-controlled technical colleges.

Reflecting the intentions of the Partridge report, a Board of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) was established in 1980 with responsibility for policy and planning in the Victorian TAFE system. In the same year, the TAFE board prepared a strategy for the development of TAFE colleges which recommended that TAFE administration be separated from the Education Department, and that regional boards of TAFE be established throughout Victoria 'to make decisions and recommendations regarding the most rational use of regional resources within the framework of TAFE board and government policy' (cited in Goozee 1993, p.59). In addition, it recommended that all providers of TAFE should be responsible for administering their own programs within the context of State and regional policy decisions. This signalled the first significant step towards the policy of devolving responsibility to TAFE institutes, a distinctive feature of TAFE provision in Victoria that persists to the present day.

With the implementation of the TAFE board recommendations in 1981, the Victorian TAFE system underwent its first major reorganisation. Regional TAFE boards were established in ten country regions and five metropolitan regions. Three organisations enjoyed dual status as both a region and a provider. Regional TAFE boards assumed responsibility for policy and planning at a regional level within the framework of TAFE board policy and guidelines.

In September 1981, 20 colleges of TAFE (COTs) were incorporated under the Post-secondary Education Act 1978. Eight COTs and TAFE divisions in CAEs also related to the TAFE board. In addition, there was a range of other recognised TAFE providers including: the Council of Adult
Education; local advisory committees; Education Department Central TAFE Operation (including TAFE and community education activities); schools with TAFE activities; Department of Agriculture colleges with TAFE activities; and other bodies funded by, and acting as agencies of, regional TAFE boards (TAFE board 1982). As Rushbrook notes:

_TAFE, after struggling for nearly two decades following the creation of colleges of advanced education and the Victoria Institute of Colleges, finally became an autonomous organisation with its own administrative, curriculum and financial structures, answerable directly to the minister with VPSEC occupying a co-ordinating role only. However, unlike the largely federally funded CAEs and universities, TAFE clearly was a State-funded operation with significant federal funding for capital works. And, in spite of gaining autonomy, TAFE still provided the breadth of programs offered by its 19th century forbears._

(Rushbrook 1995b, p.19)

Despite its new-found status and identity as a tertiary education sector, the stability of the Victorian TAFE system was short-lived. From 1983 onwards, the size, structure and composition of the Victorian TAFE system was altered in significant ways via processes of institutional separation from CAEs and intra-sectoral amalgamation. Bendigo Technical College separated from the Bendigo College of Advanced Education in 1983 to form the Bendigo College of TAFE. The TAFE Division of the Warrnambool Institute of Advanced Education was separated to create the Warrnambool College of TAFE in 1984, and was renamed South West College of TAFE in 1987. In the first major institutional amalgamation in the Victorian TAFE college system, the Whitehorse College of TAFE merged with the Box Hill College of TAFE in 1984 to form a single multi-campus institution. Several new TAFE college facilities were built and existing colleges were expanded in response to growing demand.

Changes in TAFE were also driven by the reorganisation of the post-compulsory level of secondary schooling following the release of the Blackburn report (1985). In December 1985, the Minister for Education announced the decision to transfer all TAFE provision from schools to the direct control of TAFE colleges. It was planned that by 1987, the
schools in which TAFE programs were conducted should relate to the TAFE board in one of two ways. The first of these was the ‘college campus’ model which was to be used where the TAFE provision in a school was substantial and where the facilities used for TAFE purposes could be separately identified. The second model was the ‘college cluster’ which would allow school-based TAFE programs to be delivered on an agency basis for the relevant TAFE college. The decision was significant not only because the Schools Division was no longer recognised as a provider of TAFE in Victoria, but also because the 113 year old Education Department was abolished and replaced by a new Ministry of Education (Goozee 1993).

As a result of this reorganisation, several new colleges were opened and others underwent considerable expansion and became multi-campus operations. Broadmeadows College of TAFE was established as a feeder college in 1986 through a rationalisation of TAFE provision in local technical schools, and was renamed the Kangan Institute of TAFE in 1995. Bendigo College of TAFE (subsequently renamed Loddon Campaspe College of TAFE and later Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE) assumed control of secondary technical school campuses at Maryborough, Kerang, Echuca, Castlemaine and Charlton in 1986. Wimmera Community College of TAFE commenced operations in 1986. East Gippsland Community College was created in 1987 through a rationalisation of the TAFE components of Sale and Bairnsdale technical schools. Wodonga College of TAFE was established in 1987 as a result of a rationalisation of TAFE provision at Wodonga Technical School. By 1987 therefore, an identifiable TAFE system had been fully established in Victoria comprising a total of 34 colleges of TAFE.

The second phase of TAFE reorganisation: Late 1980s and early 1990s

The second major phase of organisational restructures in the Victorian TAFE system commenced in the late 1980s. After only seven years in operation, the TAFE board was replaced by the State Training Board (STB) in 1987, and the administration of the TAFE college system was merged with the training responsibilities of the Department of Labour
and the Industrial Training Commission of Victoria. One of the primary responsibilities of the STB was to review and rationalise the overly complex industry advisory structure in Victoria. By 1990, the existing 100 separate industry training sub-committees were merged into 15 industry training bodies with another four being created in 1991 (STB 1992).

Subsequently, under the auspices of the *Vocational Education and Training Act 1990*, the STB also subsumed the trade and technical training responsibilities of the regional TAFE boards which then became Regional Councils of Further Education under the control of the Division of Further Education, a newly created unit within the Ministry of Education. The arrival of the STB effectively signalled the end of the close relationship between technical and further education that had been established by the Kangan report. Moreover, as increasing numbers of non-TAFE providers of VET were recognised by the STB under the aforementioned Act, the notion of a public ‘TAFE’ system was supplanted by the term ‘State training system’ to denote the incorporation of both public and private providers within the scope of STB policy and planning.

The bifurcation and reconfiguration of TAFE reflected a major ideological shift in government policy settings from the mid-1980s onwards. Under the influence of economic rationalism, government set about promoting the development of an industry-driven training system to meet the human capital requirements of employers. As Rushbrook (1995b, p.27) notes, ‘after 120 years as the multi-functional sector of public education . . . technical and further education was pared to reveal its animus: the effacement of the barriers between it and the labour market needs of Victorian capital’. In effect, the notion of TAFE as a social service was marginalised and emphasis was placed on serving the demands of industry and private enterprise rather than those of the wider community (Powles & Anderson 1996).

Reforms at the systemic level in TAFE were accompanied by a major phase of rationalisation and reorganisation at the provider level to reflect the new government priorities and emerging industry demands. Having reached a total of 34 colleges by 1987, a figure which remained steady until 1989, TAFE colleges then embarked on a phase of *ad hoc*
amalgamations. In 1989, the Preston College of TAFE and the Collingwood College of TAFE merged to form the first large multi-campus metropolitan TAFE college, the Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE. In the same year, the minister responsible for post-secondary education requested the STB to provide advice ‘regarding the means by which the TAFE college system might be most appropriately organised and configured to bring about a more effective management and planning environment in which higher quality programs can be delivered’ (cited in STB 1991, p.23).

In March 1992, the STB proposed a policy to guide the reorganisation of TAFE colleges and to produce ‘a stronger TAFE college network’. It specified: desirable characteristics for TAFE colleges in the future; avenues for action on reorganisation; criteria for evaluating reorganisation proposals; and consultative processes. Amalgamation was identified as only one option for reorganisation which was to occur on a voluntary basis only. The STB reported that ‘there have been a significant number of reorganisations of TAFE colleges in the past that have proved successful, and several colleges have commenced action consistent with the policy to address the quality of services they offer their clients’ (1992, p.51). In 1993, the Western Metropolitan College of TAFE underwent a major expansion when it merged with sections of the Melbourne College of Decoration (painting and decorating, signs production programs) and the Flagstaff College of TAFE (hair, beauty, modelling and retail programs).

The reorganisation of the TAFE college system in Victoria from 1990 onwards was a more gradual process than that which occurred in the higher education system in the late 1980s. Following the release of the Green and White Papers on higher education by the federal Government in 1987 and 1988 respectively, the higher education system was radically restructured through the wholesale amalgamation of CAEs with universities. The principal rationale for this process was that institutional mergers would enhance efficiency and effectiveness through greater economies of scale and program diversity (Dawkins 1987, 1988).

At the same time as the TAFE college network in Victoria was undergoing consolidation through amalgamation, the number and type
of recognised non-TAFE providers was expanding in the wake of the *Vocational Education and Training Act 1990*. From a total of 61 private providers in 1992, the State training system had incorporated over 600 private providers by 1996 (STB 1996). As Rushbrook notes, the technocratic settlement that emerged in the period following 1987 'challenged Kangan's tenuous claims to legitimacy and reversed its philosophical emphases ... TAFE was transformed institutionally to reflect this; it became part of a wider VET network which included former programs located with departments of labour, industry, education, and immigration, and private sector provision' (1995b, p.34).

Thus while the period up to 1987 had been characterised by a significant expansion in the number of TAFE institutes which integrated technical and further education, the subsequent period saw contraction in the number of TAFE institutes, a simultaneous proliferation of recognised private providers, and the separation of technical from further education.

**The third phase of TAFE reorganisation: 1997 onwards**

After a short period of relative stability in the number of TAFE institutes, the Victorian State training system entered another significant phase of reorganisation at the provider level in 1997. Following a review of TAFE provision in north-east Victoria in 1996, the Goulburn Valley Institute of TAFE merged with Wangaratta Institute of TAFE to form the Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE. Having affiliated with the University of Melbourne in 1992, the Victorian College of Agriculture and Horticulture finally underwent a full merger but retained its status as a separate school within the university. On the recommendation of a review of TAFE provision in the north-west region of Melbourne, Kangan Institute of TAFE merged with the John Batman Institute of TAFE in early 1997 to form the Kangan Batman Institute of TAFE. By mid-1997 therefore, there were 25 institutes of TAFE in Victoria.

As stated earlier, the Victorian Minister for Tertiary Education and Training initiated a Review of the Provision of TAFE in the Melbourne Metropolitan Area in May 1997. One of the organisational strategies under consideration involves cross-sectoral mergers between TAFE
institutes and universities. In what may be a signpost for future developments in the Victorian TAFE system, it was announced in June 1997 that the School of Mines and Industries, Ballarat and the Wimmera Institute of TAFE are to merge with the University of Ballarat from the beginning of 1998. The merger will create one of Australia’s largest multi-sectoral institutions with a $48 million budget and more than 18,000 students (Healy 1997a).

Reflecting the fluidity of current structural arrangements in post-compulsory education and training in Victoria, it was announced in August 1997 that the Ararat Secondary College would merge with the Ararat campus of the School of Mines and Industries, Ballarat in early 1998 to form the Ararat Community College. This merger follows the amalgamation of the Ararat High School and Ararat Technical School in 1991. Modelled along the lines of community colleges in the United States of America, the Ararat Community College will offer the Year 12 Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), TAFE and other adult and community education courses all on the one site. In addition to providing VCE night courses for adult students, the new college will give secondary school students increased access to TAFE vocational courses in areas such as hospitality, automotive, viticulture, engineering and electrical trades (O’Donoghue 1997).

Overview of change in the Victorian TAFE system

After many decades of growth and change, technical and further education in Victoria began to crystallise into an identifiable sector of tertiary education and training from the mid-1970s onwards. Over the past two decades, the evolution of the TAFE system in Victoria has been characterised by constant review and reorganisation at both the system and institutional levels. At the system level, responsibility for the policy, planning and administration of TAFE was transferred from the State Council for Technical Education to VPSEC in 1978, from VPSEC to the TAFE board in 1980, and from the TAFE board to the State Training Board in 1987. Other complementary changes occurred in the industry advisory and regional planning structures of the Victorian TAFE system during this period.
At the provider level, the development of TAFE has been an equally dynamic and complex process. In 1973, recognised vocational courses in Victoria were delivered by a total of 106 institutions, only ten of which were separate technical colleges. By 1996, however, recognised vocational courses were being delivered by a total of 627 separate institutions comprising 27 TAFE institutes and multi-sector TAFE providers, and 600 registered private providers (STB 1996). During the period between 1973 and 1996, therefore, the number of TAFE institutes increased almost three-fold, and following the promulgation of the Vocational Education and Training Act 1990, there was a six-fold increase in the number of recognised private providers.

Coinciding with these structural changes in the Victorian TAFE system has been a dramatic five-fold increase in enrolments from around 81 700 students in 1973 to 396 000 students in 1996 (ACOTAFE 1974; NCVER 1997). The size of enrolments at individual institutions has also increased significantly. For instance, enrolments in vocational courses at RMIT have grown steadily from a total of 3390 in 1900, to 9446 (plus 4940 off-campus students) in 1973, and to 18 059 in 1996 (Murray-Smith & Dare 1987; OTFE 1997). The dimensions of growth in the Victorian TAFE system between 1973 and 1997 are reflected in table 1.

Table 1: Systemic growth in the Victorian State Training System 1973–1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Enrolments</th>
<th>TAFE institutes</th>
<th>Non-TAFE providers</th>
<th>Total providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>81 700</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>396 000</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>627</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: ACOTAFE (1974); NCVER (1997); and STB (1996)

The number of TAFE colleges in Victoria reached its highest watermark in 1987–89 when there were 34 in total. Most of these TAFE colleges were formed either through the redesignation of large technical schools or through the merger of smaller, separate technical schools. As a result of amalgamations between TAFE institutes, however, there were 25 institutes of TAFE in Victoria by mid-1997. In effect, the number of TAFE institutes declined by 26 per cent in the ten year period after 1987. In spite of these changes, many of the original technical colleges still operate as part of the present network of TAFE institutes. Although they
have undergone changes in name, size and status, RMIT, Swinburne University of Technology and Gordon Institute of Technology have a long history as TAFE providers.

Structural reorganisation at the system and provider levels in the late 1980s and early 1990s affected staff numbers and responsibilities in different ways. The STB (1992) reported that from 1988 to 1991/92, the number of full-time teaching staff in TAFE grew slightly to almost 4500. Over the same period, the number of full-time equivalent non-teaching staff in TAFE colleges also increased to just over 3500. As the STB (1992, p.25) notes, 'the overall picture was of stable staffing levels in TAFE colleges'. In head office, however, staff numbers decreased from 373 in 1987 to 186 in 1992, representing a 50 per cent reduction in the staffing level. Thus, while TAFE institute staff numbers have remained relatively constant, head office numbers have decreased dramatically in recent years.

During the past two decades, two major trends are evident in the reorganisation of the Victorian TAFE system at the provider level. The first is that smaller, mono-purpose providers have amalgamated into larger, multi-purpose institutes, usually comprising a wide geographical network of campuses. In two notable cases, namely Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE and Western Melbourne Institute of TAFE, the amalgamated institutions have assumed responsibility for providing TAFE programs on a regional basis in the Melbourne metropolitan area. In 1996, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE had 15 campuses, and Western Melbourne Institute of TAFE had 11 campuses (NCVER 1997).

The second notable feature of the development of TAFE provision in Victoria has been an increase in the number of multi-sectoral institutions. By 1997, there were four multi-sectoral institutions with TAFE divisions, namely RMIT, Swinburne University of Technology, Victoria University of Technology and the University of Melbourne. The merger of School of Mines and Industries, Ballarat and Wimmera Institute of TAFE with the University of Ballarat, to take effect from January 1998, is another manifestation of the trend for TAFE providers to migrate upwards in the tertiary education sector through amalgamations with universities. No other State or Territory currently
has a comparable range of tertiary education institutions which combine both higher education and TAFE elements (Goozee 1993).

**Tradition and identity in TAFE**

The ongoing institutional transformation of TAFE, together with the development of multi-sectoral institutions, reflects the tradition of eclecticism in TAFE. As Batrouney (1985) observes, the eclectic tradition finds its roots in the legacy of local initiative in TAFE, a legacy which he notes is 'unusual in Australian education and revealed most strongly in Victoria' (p.132). Eclecticism represents a tradition 'in which technical institutions revealed their flexibility and adaptability by assuming functions which went well beyond their original stated aims but which met the needs of students and the community' (pp.132–133). Batrouney cites the example of the schools of mines which responded to the increasing demand for some kind of post-primary education by offering general studies subjects to bridge the gap between secondary and tertiary-level studies. He notes that the tradition of eclecticism, which can be found in both the predecessors and successors of the schools of mines, has led technical institutes to provide continuing education for those aspiring to further study. According to Batrouney, eclecticism in TAFE was in part:

> . . . a strategy of survival in the face of a lack of status and resources and, in part, a consequence of the indeterminate relationship between technical education and industry. But it was more than this. It revealed a strong commitment to the rights of individuals, whatever their social background, to determine what it was they wanted to learn.

(Batrouney 1985, p.133)

In Batrouney’s view, it is the tradition of eclecticism in TAFE that, to a large extent, resulted in ‘the endemic diversity of technical education (and later TAFE)’ and ‘also led to the complementary nature of technical education in which technical education is defined in terms of filling in the gaps or complementing the provisions of other sectors of education’ (1985, p.134).
The tradition of eclecticism, expressed as organisational flexibility and responsiveness, has continued to shape and redefine TAFE in Victoria in recent years. Throughout all the successive phases of restructuring and reorganisation over the past two decades, TAFE has consistently adapted to the changing needs and demands of industry, government and the community. Jakupec and Roantree (1993) attribute the chameleon-like quality of TAFE to its composition as a fragmented collection of State-based systems, and its close association with industry and government which has required it to continually respond to changing political and economic imperatives. They also argue that, in spite of the attempts by Kangan and subsequent reports to define TAFE's identity and establish it as a legitimate part of the tertiary education sector, the persistence of the funding nexus between the States and Commonwealth has continued to separate TAFE from other tertiary education sectors.

Rushbrook (1997) focusses attention on the ideological and cultural factors which have shaped TAFE's adaptive identity. His analysis of the processes through which TAFE in Victoria has been progressively reconstituted since the Second World War suggests that TAFE itself has been an unwitting agent in its exclusion from the tertiary sector. In particular, he highlights the significance of the definitional and funding struggle by the Technical Schools Division (TSD) to gain formal recognition for its role within the high school-dominated Education Department, together with TAFE's quest for private sector legitimacy and patronage, as the main factors which influenced TAFE's emergent role and identity. At the same time as sectoral boundaries were identified and measured against the larger primary and secondary school divisions up to the mid-1960s, 'barriers were put in place by the post-primary divisions and universities to limit cross-sectoral student transfers' (Rushbrook 1997, p.106). Drawing on Seddon (1992/3), Rushbrook contends that such divisions were shaped by the persistence of the liberal-meritocratic settlement that first emerged in early 20th century Australia. Rushbrook defines the liberal-meritocratic settlement as the:

... de facto agreement between education authorities, the professions and skilled labour elites to protect skill and consequent labour market advantage through the restriction and channelling of access to education
pathways characterised as secondary-university-professional or junior technical school-technical college trade/middle level/applied professional. Articulated rarely but practised often, it is an arrangement which persists in spite of contemporary contestation and the institutionalised association of entry to vocational education and training with 'failure' to enter the professional stream.

(Rushbrook 1997, p.106)

Rushbrook argues that, in the wake of recent attempts by government to remove protective barriers and reconstruct TAFE as an 'open' sector of tertiary education and training via cross-sectoral 'pathways', TAFE has attempted to preserve its sectoral boundaries by 'negotiating a myriad of gated "pathways" between secondary schools and universities, and the sectoral protagonists entering into a public discourse on the positioning of TAFE-university boundaries' (1997, p.108).

Such strategies are indicative of the historical pattern of TAFE renegotiating a distinctive role and separate identity for itself in response to changing circumstances. Rather than remain a relatively inert structural and cultural artefact, TAFE instead has constantly reinvented and relegitimised itself through selective appropriation of emergent institutional discourses and practices and accommodation to shifting ideological imperatives. As Rushbrook observes, TAFE's identity has always been 'the product of agency and organisational culture rather than an abstracted institutional teleology' (1997, p.104).

Together with the foregoing overview of the changing structural dimensions of TAFE in Victoria, the work by Rushbrook (1995a,b) and Jakupec and Roantree (1993) highlights the extent to which TAFE has been shaped and reshaped as an educational institution through the contestation and renegotiation of sectoral boundaries. Having emerged during the latter half of the 19th century as a tertiary sector of adult education, technical education was reorganised into a hierarchy of junior and senior technical schools and post-secondary technical colleges during the first half of the 20th century. With the advent of the Martin report in 1965, advanced technical education was redefined as the preserve of CAEs with the result that tertiary technical colleges shrunk in size and status. The Kangan report (1974) laid the
foundations for the reconstitution of a separate tertiary sector of TAFE. Following the establishment of the TAFE board in 1980, several TAFE institutes were created through the separation of trade and technical provision from host CAEs. Implementation of the Blackburn report (1985) initiated a process of rationalisation of post-compulsory school education which involved the dissolution of secondary technical schools and the relocation of trade and technical programs in TAFE institutes. The reorganisation of the higher education sector in the late 1980s and early 1990s, combined with internal processes of restructuring in the TAFE system through institutional amalgamation has, in turn, instigated a new phase of sectoral renegotiation which is yet to reach its conclusion. In effect, the frequent reconfiguration of sectoral boundaries at the secondary and tertiary levels has triggered successive phases of expansion and contraction in the scale and scope of TAFE institutes.

Since its inception, therefore, the structure and organisation of the TAFE system has undergone continuous expansion and transformation in response to social, economic and technological change. As a consequence of its close links with the local community, including industry, technical education 'perhaps more than any other form of education, has grown organically over the years' (Batrouney 1985, p.125). In part, TAFE's constant focus on the needs of its key clients—individual students, industry and the wider community—helps to explain why it has managed to survive in spite of many changes in name, structure and organisation over the decades. It is precisely TAFE's capacity to adapt in a flexible and responsive manner to diverse needs and changing demands that both defines its essence and identity, and sets it apart from other sectors of tertiary education and training.

By the same token, however, TAFE has at various times been a victim of the shifting boundaries and territorial aspirations of its tertiary counterparts, due at least in part to its intrinsic adaptability. In the absence of a well-established 'audience' like those claimed by schools and universities, TAFE, in its latest manifestation as part of the VET sector, 'has to mark, capture and defend its audience' (Rushbrook 1997, p.104). Moreover, in spite of the many (short-lived) attempts to join the elite club of tertiary educators, and notwithstanding its frequent co-habitation with institutions of advanced education, TAFE has
remained the 'Cinderella' of the tertiary education and training system. As Jakupec and Roantree observe:

... despite being the longest established sector of Australian post-secondary schooling, TAFE is still regarded by many as a relatively recent player in higher education. This may be due to the adaptable nature which TAFE has adopted over the years for, like the chameleon, survival has depended on subtle and occasionally dramatic changes to its identity by continually adapting to the prevailing environment.

(Jakupec & Roantree 1993, p.154)

Paradoxically, it would appear therefore that the strong tradition of eclecticism and local initiative in TAFE, together with the consequent lack of a formal sectoral identity, are the very characteristics that have until now guaranteed TAFE's survival but denied it a place in the tertiary sun. The persistence of what Murray-Smith (1966) refers to as the 'mutation gene' in TAFE and the sector's pursuit of private sector legitimacy has in turn allowed universities to marginalise TAFE in the tertiary education sector on the grounds of academic credibility, and enabled government to progressively colonise TAFE, divert it from its traditional social and educational roles, and transform it into an instrument of economic and labour market policy.

**Future prospects for TAFE**

The potential recreation of a binary system of higher education as a consequence of the establishment of the UNS was noted by Jakupec and Roantree (1993). They speculated that 'the recent amalgamations of universities and colleges of advanced education... may establish the appropriate environment for the emergence of a new "binary system" consisting of universities and TAFE colleges' (1993, p.151). They observed that with the dissolution of CAEs, a gap had emerged at the lower levels of technical and further education in the form of associate diploma and diploma courses. Given the level of student and industry demand for such courses, they suggested that this gap would need to be filled in coming years. In spite of TAFE's subsequent expansion into diploma-level courses, however, a significant gap still remains.
Three possible policy responses are identified by Jakupec and Roantree (1993). The first involves joint course delivery by universities and TAFE institutes in which physical and human resources are shared, and for which separate federal funding allocations for Equivalent Full-Time Student Units are provided. This option resurfaced recently in a proposal by the Victoria University of Technology (VUT) to the Commonwealth Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy, chaired by Roderick West (Osmond 1997a). Arguing that significant economies of scale exist in dual-sector institutions, the VUT submission proposed that a pilot program should be established whereby dual-sector institutions are funded through a common administrative system. According to Osmond (1997a, p.1), ‘in an era of declining federal funding, many industry observers predict increasing pressure, perhaps through the recommendations of the West review next year, for greater sharing of resources between the VET and higher education sectors’.

The second option proposed by Jakupec and Roantree (1993) involves the inclusion of TAFE institutes in the UNS via amalgamations with universities. In their view, such an approach would exploit the virtues of both competency-based training and liberal education within a single educational framework similar to the concept of Gesamthochschule in Germany. As indicated already, this option appears to be favoured by the current Victorian Minister for Tertiary Education and Training. Either way, whether the Victorian State Government decides to create mega-institutes of TAFE or to merge some with universities, it seems likely that the ministerial review will have a major impact on the structure and composition of the Victorian TAFE system, and possibly alter the tertiary education sector in fundamental ways.

The third option involves the development of TAFE institutes as new polytechnics or institutes of technology. Such institutions ‘could embrace the training orientation of TAFE as a separately identifiable function articulating directly with a legitimately founded higher education activity within the same institution’ (Jakupec & Roantree 1993, p.163). This approach has been adopted over the past decade in both Finland and the Netherlands which have undertaken large-scale amalgamations of their vocational education institutions to form separate and distinct systems of higher vocational education which
operate parallel to, and in competition with, universities (CEDEFOP 1994; OECD 1995). As Jakupec and Roantree note, adoption of such an option would bring 'tertiary education in Australia full circle to an almost identical position as existed prior to the implementation of recommendations by the Martin committee report' (1993, p.163).

At this stage, it remains unclear which of these three options is likely to emerge in Victoria. At the time of writing, the ministerial review committee had not delivered its final report. Irrespective of the eventual outcome, however, it seems difficult to dispute the conclusion reached by Jakupec and Roantree:

*It is inevitable that a new binary system will emerge because the universities within [the] UNS will . . . pursue the role of universities as it is understood in the international forum, and the gaps left behind by the CAEs will have to be filled. It remains to be seen if the new binary system will be comprised of universities and TAFE, or universities and a new breed of institutions such as (pre-Martin) institutes of technology or as yet to be established polytechnics, with TAFE confirming its identity as a market-specific skill provider.*

(Jakupec & Roantree 1993, p.163)

What is clear at this stage, however, is the need for considerably more debate about the relative merits of the various options for TAFE’s future role and organisation. In its report on the VET system in Finland, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 1995) identifies several advantages of moving towards a national higher education model which incorporates separate systems of university and non-university institutions offering academic and vocational education respectively. In particular, it highlights the increased diversity, flexibility and responsiveness to changing industry and community needs that a dual system potentially offers. Conversely, equally strong arguments could be mounted on social and educational grounds for developing an integrated system of higher education in which the distinction between academic and vocational education is blurred.
Towards a post-technocratic settlement

The debate about TAFE's future structure, organisation and functions vis a vis higher education has commenced both at the State level in Victoria as a consequence of the ministerial review, and at the national level in the course of the West review of higher education. The border disputes which have flared in the context of these reviews reflect the persistence of the tradition of 'eclecticism' in TAFE (Batrouney 1985), and TAFE's new-found reliance on 'gated boundaries' rather than intersectoral barriers as a strategy for negotiating sectoral identity and ensuring institutional survival (Rushbrook 1997). Yet again, the lines of battle have been drawn around the mental/manual divide and the contested boundaries between 'academic' and 'vocational' education.

But in contrast to prior boundary skirmishes which, to a large extent, were driven by territorial imperatives within the framework of the liberal-meritocratic/techno-liberal/technocratic settlements (Rushbrook 1997), it can be argued that the present struggle for sectoral identity is occurring on radically new ideological terrain within the context of an historic transition to a post-technocratic settlement. At the heart of this transition is the penetration and reconstruction of education and training by neo-liberal market discourse and practices, a process which commenced under the technocratic settlement with the inception of the national training reform agenda (NTRA) in the late 1980s. This post-technocratic settlement is based on a post-Fordist consensus, albeit fragile, between capital and labour on the need for greater workforce flexibility and international competitiveness in Australian industry (Seddon 1992/3). In order to understand the nature and dynamics of this transition, it is necessary to briefly examine the changing context within which TAFE's identity was constructed during the preceding two decades.

Rushbrook (1997) suggests that it was primarily through the application of the principles and practices of scientific management or Taylorism to curriculum design and delivery in the form of the Instructional Systems Model (ISM) that technical education (and later TAFE) succeeded in establishing a clear sectoral identity in Victoria. The adoption of the ISM enabled the Technical Schools Division (TSD) to differentiate TAFE from
the dominant academic curriculum of secondary schooling without challenging the cultural and social assumptions that underpinned the pre-Kangan liberal-meritocratic and post-Kangan techno-liberal settlements. TAFE was unproblematically identified with ‘doing’ not ‘thinking’, which remained the exclusive preserve of high schools and universities. In this regard, the ISM was utilised as a defensive strategy for establishing a separate and distinctive identity for TAFE aligned to industry needs within a highly stratified and hierarchical system of post-compulsory education and training dominated by tertiary entrance requirements. As Rushbrook argues, ‘the infusion of scientific management discourse into vocational education curriculum was adopted . . . as both sectoral identity and private sector legitimation strategies’ (1997, p.107).

Although the ISM and competency-based training (CBT) share a common lineage which is instrumentalist, reductionist and behaviourist in orientation, the nature and intent of CBT is qualitatively different. Influenced by post-Fordist thought and developed in the context of award restructuring, CBT was conceived primarily as a strategy for achieving industrial and workplace reform. Unlike the ISM which legitimised and reproduced the distinction between thinking and doing, CBT aimed to collapse the dichotomy between conception and execution, thereby transforming and modernising the Taylorist division of labour. In doing so, CBT directly challenged the hegemonic couplets of ‘academic/knowledge’ versus ‘technical/skills’ on which universities have traditionally relied to maintain their pre-eminent position in the educational hierarchy.

Moreover unlike the ISM, which was essentially viewed as a discrete model of curriculum development and implementation, CBT became the linchpin in a more comprehensive set of institutional redesign strategies. By reducing all forms and levels of knowledge and skills to standard measures of competence, CBT—in conjunction with the new skills recognition framework and the ‘pathways’ concept—became the means by which policy-makers sought to remove sectoral barriers and establish a commodified education and training market based on choice, diversity and competition (Anderson 1995, 1997b). Reconstituted as competencies, knowledge and skills could theoretically be packaged

Chameleon or phoenix
into modularised curriculum for delivery on a commercial basis through any recognised supplier regardless of its formal sectoral identity—public or private; and TAFE/VET or higher education. As a senior Commonwealth bureaucrat argued, 'the determinant of a credential in future will be the demonstration of competence, rather than where or how it has been undertaken' (Johnston cited in Trinca 1992a, p.22).

Although initially confined to the TAFE/VET sector, the 'open training market' framework was clearly intended to subsume both school and university education over time (Anderson 1995). As the standardised 'currency' within the new credit exchange system, competency standards were designed to be the principal vehicle for promoting markets across all sectors of education and training. As one of the principal architects of the NTRA observed:

... while distinctions between schools, TAFE and universities will obviously continue, inconsistent approaches by government to the use of the market as a means of both funding the provision of education and training and of driving reform make no sense ... [CBT] will act as a powerful integrating force across the training market [and] has the potential to more effectively link the different sectors of education and training including the public and private elements of the training market.

(Noonan 1992, pp.2-4)

Although the scope of CBT was initially confined to Levels 1–6 of the Australian Standards Framework (ASF), which covered the range of credentials customarily awarded by TAFE, the logic employed by the Employment and Skills Formation Council (ESFC 1992, 1993) suggested that the reach of CBT should be extended upwards into higher education (ASF Levels 7–8). For instance, the ESFC chair, Laurie Carmichael, argued that around 70 per cent of university courses, including engineering, medicine and law, are vocational in content and intent, and should therefore be subsumed within the realm of CBT. With this goal in mind, Carmichael launched several media attacks on what he perceived to be the elitist and anachronistic distinction between mental and manual labour. In his view, CBT would eradicate the artificial sectoral barriers maintained by:
...my mystical academic friends, who believe you can only learn to think in a way bestowed by them in universities. There'll be a convergence of work and learning, and the convergence of the workplace into both a work and learning place will have developed to such a degree that academic witchcraft will finally disappear.

(The Australian, 2 June 1992)

With the backing of organised labour and big business, the redesigned VET sector went on the attack and universities were forced to adopt a defensive posture which rejected CBT in higher education on the grounds of 'academic excellence' and professional standards (see, for example, Trinca 1992b, p.22).

In these critical respects, the institutional re-engineering of TAFE and the VET sector through CBT reform has repositioned TAFE/VET as a key instrument of ideological contestation in the arena of post-compulsory education and training. While CBT and the pathways concept undoubtedly challenged techno-liberal (i.e. Kangan) notions of TAFE and induced a reactive renegotiation of sectoral boundaries (Rushbrook 1997), the reconfiguration of VET has repositioned TAFE institutes as potential competitors with universities. Following the release of the Carmichael report on the CBT-based Australian Vocational Certificate Training System (ESFC 1992), Professor Kenneth Wiltshire, then chairman of Queensland's Tertiary Procedures Authority, declared that:

*I'm terrified that we might drift back into a binary system where TAFEs become de facto CAEs. The role of TAFE has to be made clear because universities are starting to see them as competitors. TAFEs are pathways to university and are a great way for people to become skilled... universities and TAFEs] are basically different and shouldn't be competing... It's about time we had a really good grass-roots debate about the role of TAFE. TAFEs have to be an end in their own right. We don't want them to be CAEs. (The Australian, 5 August 1992, p.20)

To this extent, it could be argued that the analyses by both Jakupec and Roantree (1993) and Rushbrook (1997) give insufficient emphasis to the paradigmatic shift effected through recent institutional reforms in the
tertiary education sector. Restructured around national industry-determined competency standards, TAFE institutes and the VET sector as a whole have become the stalking-horse for a neo-liberal process of institutional redesign which aims to reconstitute all knowledge/skills as competencies, and to reconstruct all institutional sites through which educational credentials are awarded, including those in the higher education sector. Thus, although the development of an open training market through reforms such as CBT, credit transfer and pathways represented a major threat to TAFE, the danger came not from 'above' (i.e. universities), but rather from 'outside' (i.e. private providers). Market reforms in VET, premised as they are on the notion of a convergence between work and learning (Deveson 1990; Finn 1991; ESFC 1992, 1993), were conceived as a strategy for redesigning not only TAFE institutions, but also universities.

Redesigning TAFE and higher education

Since the election of a Federal Coalition Government in May 1996, the pendulum has begun to swing back in the other direction. The universities and professions have attempted to claw back lost ideological ground through the West review of higher education by reasserting the traditional academic/vocational divide. According to West, 'VET courses should teach the competencies and continue the strong focus on skills and higher education can cultivate the attributes' (cited in McDermott 1997, p.9). To illustrate the distinction, West cited a submission by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) which argued that university-level architectural education gave students the ability and value systems to arrange knowledge in the solution of architectural problems. Using the words of the RAIA submission, West stated that 'this should not be confused with the arrangement of lines on a drawing board or a computer screen which is a vocational skill appropriately learnt at a TAFE institute' (cited in McDermott 1997, p.9). Some of the 'new' universities have taken the offensive one step further by advocating the principle of 'vertical integration' between universities and VET institutions, and signalling their intentions to diversify into the provision of associate degrees in VET (Menso 1997). Foreshadowed incursions into TAFE/VET territory therefore amount to a counter-
offensive by universities against the post-Fordist CBT agenda, as does their reassertion of the pre-eminence of the academic curriculum.

VET sector protagonists have reacted to these predatory threats by advancing a rationale based on free market notions of choice, diversity and competition. For instance, in its submission to the West review, the Association of TAFE Institutes in Victoria opposed the proliferation of multi-sectoral institutions and university delivery of associate degrees as this would place 'the identity of VET . . . at risk' (cited in Osmond 1997b, p.7). It suggested that the emergence of autonomous TAFE/VET institutes 'would be lost in a world where universities are seeking to absorb VET within the “academic” culture of their faculties' (cited in Osmond 1997b, p.7). In order to define the distinctive culture of TAFE institutes, the association drew attention to the eclectic tradition of TAFE which combines flexibility, practicality and responsiveness to local and industry needs. By contrast, 'universities could not realistically be thought of as flexible and responsive institutions' (cited in Osmond 1997b, p.7). At the same time, and in a manner reminiscent of the neo-liberal strategy under the NTRA to reform TAFE through the development of an open and competitive training market, the association launched an attack on the privileged market status enjoyed by universities:

*It is clear that universities are turning their attention away from their traditional academic base toward the vocational training market for purely commercial pragmatic reasons . . . They are actively seeking to entice VET students with 'associate degrees' while clinging steadfastly to the belief that universities have an unassailable right to retain intellectual exclusivity to offer 'degree' subjects, notwithstanding the many vocational degree level disciplines being offered through VET.*

(cited in Osmond 1997b, p.7)

The tensions and contradictions which permeate the new policy rhetoric of markets in education and training are being variously exploited by TAFE/VET and universities in an effort to respectively protect and expand their existing market shares. In November 1997, for instance, the director of Western Melbourne Institute of TAFE (WMIT) condemned anoption canvassed by the Victorian ministerial committee that WMIT be merged with the neighbouring Victoria University of Technology.
(VUT), an arrangement which the VUT vice-chancellor argued would 'remove artificial barriers which restrict opportunity' in the disadvantaged western metropolitan region (cited in Healy 1997b, p.37). The WMIT director reacted by invoking the rhetoric of the marketplace: 'where is the choice, where is the diversity and where is the competition that governments are pushing?' (cited in Holroyd 1997, p.32). In his view, such an arrangement would give VUT an unwarranted 'monopoly' on post-school provision in the western metropolitan region of Melbourne (cited in Healy 1997b, p.37).

Reflecting the shifting political dynamics of intersectoral relations, the stance adopted by the TAFE institutes in the context of the Victorian ministerial review has attracted the support of government bureaucrats, employers and the media. The chief executive of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) has criticised vertical integration of higher education and VET institutes on the grounds that it is 'an approach that would subordinate TAFE to the educational imperialism of some universities and distract it from its primary obligations to industry' (cited in Campus Review, 30 July–5 August, 1997, p.7). Similarly, the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry has rejected the concept of cross-sectoral amalgamations on the grounds that TAFE would be 'swamped' by the dominant university sector and 'distracted' from responding to industry needs (cited in Healy 1997c, p.49). The Victorian media has also expressed opposition to any 'downgrading' of technical education through forced mergers with universities (Editorial, The Age, 21 August 1997, p.A16).

Despite earlier pronouncements in support of traditional demarcations between VET and higher education by its chairman, Roderick West, the Commonwealth Higher Education Financing and Policy Review Committee (CHEFPRC) has articulated a distinctively pro-market plan for the future development of the national tertiary education and training sector. In its discussion paper, Learning for life, the CHEFPRC advocates the development of 'a wealth generating, world competitive higher education industry as part of a broader post-secondary education industry' (West 1997, p.1). It casts doubt on the flexibility and responsiveness of public sector universities when it reports that 'there is . . . a feeling of unease about universities in terms of their capacity to meet the needs of business and industry' in an increasingly competitive
global economic context (p.2). At the same time, it suggests that public sector universities are now subject to 'greater national and international competition from other higher education providers, including providers located outside the traditional university sector' (p.2). Precisely the same 'danger-from-within' and 'danger-from-without' discursive strategies were deployed under the NTRA to justify restructuring the public TAFE sector over the past decade. As 'change is unavoidable and urgent', the CHEFPRC argues that deficiencies in the existing national policy framework must be addressed, including the purported mismanagement of the interface between the higher education and VET sectors (p.2).

The CHEFPRC outlines a vision of 'an open, globally competitive and wealth generating post-secondary education industry' in which institutions will become more client-focussed and demand-responsive. In its view, 'there is a need for further freeing up of the higher education sector, with less reliance on centralised administrative planning and an increased reliance on private financing and provision (p.26). In turn, 'the creation of a more competitive market' (p.43) necessitates, among other things, the removal of barriers to market entry for private providers, the development of a common accreditation framework to promote 'fair competition between existing public institutions and other providers' (p.32), and the introduction of more flexible, student-driven funding arrangements, such as vouchers. Reflecting the goal of greater choice and diversity, the CHEFPRC foreshadows the development of learning 'packages' through the application of new information and communication technologies which will enable 'mass customisation and significant re-engineering of production processes' (p.10). Such directions mirror recent market reforms in the VET sector including the introduction of user choice, the Australian Recognition Framework, and training packages.

In the emerging context of a more deregulated and competitive tertiary education and training market, the CHEFPRC argues that traditional boundaries between VET and higher education are blurring. Drawing on the ANTA submission, the CHEFPRC contends that the twin forces of sectoral convergence and divergence are changing sectoral relations and identities in unprecedented ways:
The time has come to consider VET and higher education as part of a post-secondary education continuum. Financing arrangements should facilitate the flow of resources between sectors and the development of pathways and study combinations which make use of the strengths of different institutions and maximise options for students. The alternatives are unproductive 'patch' wars and sterile arguments over the balance of activity between sectors . . . a priority for the medium term must be the rationalisation of arrangements between VET and higher education.

(West 1997, p.22)

From this perspective, the CHEFPRC presages a future in which both universities and VET institutions are competing for students and resources on a 'level playing field' which is both national and global in scale, and on which traditional demarcations between 'public' and 'private' providers have collapsed. In such an environment, 'other things being equal, where the study is undertaken should be irrelevant provided that it meets the educational and other needs of students' (West 1997, pp.31-32, my italics). In effect, the future structure and organisation of tertiary education will be determined not by historical constructions of power and knowledge but by the capacity of individual institutions to respond to and capitalise on consumer demand and market opportunities.

What the CHEFPRC discussion paper leaves unstated are the significant curriculum implications of its arguments in favour of sectoral convergence and marketisation. As noted in the New South Wales Department of Training and Education Co-ordination (DTEC)/New South Wales TAFE submission to the West review, if streamlined recognition and credit transfer arrangements between universities and VET providers are to materialise, 'it is critical . . . that competency-based training be seen by the university sector as a bona fide approach to education and training which ranks equally with other approaches' (NSW DTEC/NSW TAFE 1997, p.15). As an obstacle to the development of a tertiary education and training market, university resistance to CBT is at least as significant as prevailing funding or regulatory arrangements. The proposal for a common accreditation framework for university and VET courses, together with the ambiguous reference to 'other things being equal' in the last cited excerpt from its discussion paper, suggests that the CHEFPRC was not oblivious to the far-reaching ramifications of its reform proposals.
However, unlike financial and regulatory obstacles which are amenable to legislative and administrative reform, university opposition to CBT represents a complex and deeply embedded cultural barrier to full marketisation. As such it is unlikely to be removed other than by resituating universities in a market environment wherein they would have no choice but to grant legitimacy to CBT. In a context of high unemployment and rising fees, student demand for vocational outcomes from tertiary courses is likely to increase, thereby placing universities under greater pressure to tailor their programs to satisfy the needs of potential employers. The older universities with established reputations for academic excellence are likely to be able to resist such pressures due to high levels of unmet demand for their courses. But the newer universities and those in regional areas, particularly if they are struggling to fill courses, will be more vulnerable. The high incidence of reverse transfer from universities to TAFE and unmet demand among TAFE graduates for university places are forces which resource-poor universities would be unable to ignore in a fully developed tertiary education and training market.

Were such pressures and trends to emerge in the context of an increasingly demand-driven tertiary education system, many universities would inevitably be forced to accept CBT qualifications regardless of their concerns about educational quality and credibility. The potential consequences of doing otherwise would be declining enrolments and commercial failure. Thus, CBT reform is the hidden undercurrent in the CHEFPRC’s strategy for institutional redesign in the higher education sector and a fundamental, though unacknowledged, precondition for ‘the growing educational convergence of the various elements of the post-secondary education system’ (West 1997, p.26). A generalised regime of competency-based tertiary education and training would effectively place all but a few select universities on a more level playing field with TAFE institutes. Under these conditions, large TAFE institutes may not only survive but also flourish.

Ironically, the ideological forces which threatened to undermine the sectoral legitimacy of TAFE under the NTRA may in fact be TAFE’s salvation. The historic coincidence of eclecticism in TAFE with the emerging market paradigm in tertiary education may provide TAFE with a new platform on which to renegotiate its sectoral boundaries and
relationships with universities in a more proactive manner. Having secured private sector legitimacy through the adoption of CBT and the rhetoric of ‘industry-responsiveness’, TAFE institutions are in many respects less vulnerable than some of the new and smaller regional universities in a marketised education and training system. Universities will undoubtedly be the target of further accusations of unwarranted market protection, educational elitism and ‘monopolisation’ of the higher education market. Such claims will be difficult to rebut under a Federal Coalition Government committed to market-based choice, diversity and competition. Exactly how these ideological tensions and institutional power struggles ultimately play out is difficult to predict at this juncture, but they seem likely to exert a decisive influence on the future structure and organisation of tertiary education and training in Australia.

Conclusion

Since its inception, the development of TAFE in Victoria has been characterised by two key themes: systemic growth and organisational flux. The TAFE system in Victoria and elsewhere will undoubtedly experience further growth and flux at both the system and provider levels in coming years. The pace of social, economic and technological change will necessitate an ongoing review of structural and curricular arrangements to ensure that TAFE remains attuned to the needs of individual students, industry and the wider community. As the foregoing analysis of the institutional genealogy of TAFE in Victoria reveals, TAFE’s sectoral boundaries and identity are unstable, eclectic and coloured by the fluctuating environment it inhabits. For these reasons it is extremely difficult now, as it was in 1974 when the Kangan report was formulated, to develop a precise definition of TAFE that will stand the test of time.

History also suggests that TAFE is likely to survive and flourish regardless of changes to the institutional framework and organisational arrangements within which it operates. Inevitably gaps will emerge both between secondary and tertiary education and within the latter sector which no providers other than TAFE institutes will be willing or able to fill. Whether over the longer term TAFE remains a separate
sector of tertiary provision with a continuing emphasis on entry-level training, emerges as a distinct sector of higher vocational education alongside universities, or merges fully with the university sector remains a moot point at this stage. But given the conjunction of TAFE’s eclectic nature, growing demand for tertiary qualifications, and the current emphasis on choice, diversity and competition, it seems likely that a binary system of higher education and training will be recreated, albeit one in which institutions are organised around fundamentally new constructions of knowledge and skill.

Should the current trend towards sectoral convergence in the tertiary sphere persist, a major challenge for TAFE will be to continue adapting to the changing needs of its clients to ensure that it remains relevant and distinctive. In the transition to a post-technocratic settlement in which TAFE institutions assume a new role and status alongside universities as providers of advanced and higher vocational education, this challenge will be greater than ever before. TAFE institutes will be required to continually differentiate themselves from their public and private competitors, carve out niche markets and ‘capture’ a loyal clientele if they wish to remain separate and viable organisational entities. Thus, while TAFE may rise like a phoenix from the ashes to assume the mantle once held by CAEs, it seems destined to remain the chameleon of tertiary education and training in Australia.

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