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Learning Through TAFE for Voluntary and Paid Work: A Survey of TAFE Students

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§1. Introduction

Training for volunteer workers has been a significant concern for voluntary organisations in Australia. However, volunteer training is not overtly recognised within national level policy for vocational education and training (VET). For example, the focus of ANTA's *A Bridge to the Future. National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training, 1998-2003* is squarely on the market economy, to strengthen enterprises' competitiveness in the goods and services market and the competitiveness of individuals in the labour market (ANTA, 1998). Such a focus has been viewed as consistent with Australia's macro-economic and equity objectives, although broader perspectives are possible (for example, see the discussion of the changing nature of work in Selby Smith et al., 2001, chapter 2; and Hopkins, 2000).

The inference has clearly been that training for paid work has priority over training for voluntary work in VET. Yet the voluntary sector is significant in Australia, both for volunteers themselves and for the services they provide (Industry Commission, 1995). Demographic changes, the growth of part-time compared with full-time employment, and the continuing difficulties of youth unemployment may imply an increasing role for the voluntary sector, both in enabling those with time and who wish to, to contribute to social capital, and for young people to gain valuable experience. Yet the implications of volunteer activity for VET, such as the training requirements of volunteers, the special training needs of those who manage and work with volunteers, the relative priority given to the training needs of volunteers and paid staff, and the amount of VET resources already devoted to volunteer-related training, have received little research attention. Interestingly, the latest national strategy for VET research, 2000-2003, identifies the training of volunteers, for the first time, as an area warranting research attention (NCVER, 2000). NCVER argued that 'The essential issue here is whether the VET sector is producing learners who have acquired the full range of these skills to the standard that is expected of them in the new world of work – whether that work takes the form of a job, contract work, self-employment or volunteer work.'

Data collected in a survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics suggested that volunteers do not see training for volunteering as a concern (Trewin, 1996). However, since the survey was not primarily about training, the relevant question constituted only a minor part of the overall questionnaire. It remains possible that volunteers share the concerns of volunteering organisations regarding training. Volkoff, Golding and Jenkin (1999) found, in three states, only about 13 per cent of TAFE students working as volunteers. But they did not examine the study patterns of volunteers nor how they applied their learning.

In late 2000 CEET undertook a pilot survey of students in two Victorian TAFE institutes, one in Melbourne and the other in a regional area. Intuitively, and on the basis of earlier studies

* The survey was conducted with Mrs. Sonnie Hopkins from the University of Melbourne, who has now moved to Sydney. The focus groups were conducted subsequently. Her contribution is gratefully acknowledged. The assistance of the Directors, staff and students at the two institutes was greatly appreciated: without their co-operation the study could not have been undertaken.

of volunteering in metropolitan compared with non-metropolitan locations, it appeared that students at regional institutes might tend to be more integrated with their communities than those in metropolitan institutes, and that these differences would be reflected in their contributions to volunteer training. The survey had four main objectives. First, to investigate TAFE's current contribution to volunteer training. Secondly, to investigate whether there were differences between students in the metropolitan and the regional institute. Thirdly, to investigate whether there were differences between students enrolled in various fields of study. Finally, to investigate other factors which might be related to volunteering, such as gender, mode of attendance or English as a first language.

Responses from students to the survey were voluntary and confidential. However, if they wished, respondents could offer to participate in focus groups to explore issues and findings from the survey in greater detail. The focus groups were held in June 2001 for students at both institutes.

The Working Paper is divided into five sections. Following this brief introduction, section two outlines the methods which were used for the survey in late 2000 and the focus groups in mid-2001. The third section presents the survey results, while the fourth section outlines the findings from the focus group discussions. Five conclusions are presented in the final section.

§2 Methods

The Directors of the two TAFE institutes agreed to have some of their students surveyed and appointed an administrative officer to work with the researchers. Five different fields of study common to the two institutes were chosen: art and design; business studies; engineering and related studies; hospitality and tourism; and social and community services and health. In addition, students in natural resource management were included for the regional institute, since activities such as landcare, conservation and wildlife management are major areas of volunteer work, especially in rural areas, and such courses were not delivered by the metropolitan institute. Students doing the Victorian Certificate of Education in the metropolitan institute were also included in order to reveal differences between students in primarily vocational courses and primarily generalist courses. There were no similar students at the regional TAFE.

The questionnaire was developed in consultation with a survey specialist at the University of Melbourne. The questionnaire and support documentation (copy at Attachment 1)were approved by Melbourne University's Human Research Ethics Committee and distributed to students through teaching staff. Responses from all students were voluntary and confidential. Each respondent could either return the completed questionnaire in a sealed envelope through the teacher, or mail it in the postage paid envelope which was provided. The numbers of questionnaires to be provided for distribution were decided in consultation with the administrative liaison officer from the institute concerned. An excess of questionnaires was provided to maximise the response rate. In the event, perhaps because of the time of year, the number of questionnaires passed to teachers for distribution was less than had been planned, except for business studies.

The survey responses from students in the metropolitan institute are summarised at Attachment 2, the responses from students in the regional institute at Attachment 3.

One thousand and seven hundred questionnaires were distributed at the metropolitan institute and 899 were returned, representing a 53% response rate. A further 37 returned questionnaires were excluded from the analysis for a variety of reasons (such as returns which were blank, returns which contained no information on the student's field of study and returns which in other respects were incorrectly completed). At the regional institute, 1008 questionnaires were distributed, of which 297 were returned, a response rate of 29%. This was substantially lower than in the metropolitan institute. A further 14 returned questionnaires were excluded from the analysis for a variety of reasons, such as blank returns, returns which contained no information on the student's field of study or questionnaires which were inadequately completed in other respects. The response rate varied between fields of study, being particularly low in Social and Community Services and Health and in Arts and Design at the regional institute (9% and 16% respectively).

Of the returned questionnaires from students at the metropolitan institute 51% were from women. At the regional institute the equivalent figure was 60%. There were also marked differences, perhaps not surprisingly, between fields of study. For example, there were hardly any responses from female students in Engineering (1% in the metropolitan and none in the regional institute), whereas for Social and Community Services and Health 91% and 93% of the responses respectively were from female students.

There was a spread of students by age. For example, 49% of the respondents in the metropolitan institute and 45% of those in the regional institute were aged 20-39 years. However, there was a larger proportion of older students among the regional institute respondents. Among the respondents from the regional institute 32% were aged 40 years or over, compared with 13% at the metropolitan institute. Conversely, the proportion of respondents who were aged less than 20 years was 38% in the metropolitan institute compared with 22% in the regional institute. The different age profile was influenced by the VCE students being included at the metropolitan institute compared with the Natural Resource Management students at the regional institute, but it remained even if these students were removed from the calculations.

Twenty per cent of the respondents from the metropolitan institute stated that 'English was NOT the first language I spoke', compared with only 8% in the regional institute. There were also substantial differences between fields of study. For example, in the metropolitan institute 51% of respondents in Business Studies and 35% in Arts and Design were non-English speakers, compared with 8% in Engineering and 12% in both VCE studies, and Hospitality and Tourism. In the regional institute there were two fields of study (Natural Resource Management, and Social and Community Services and Health), where all students had English as their first language, and the proportion only fell to 90% in one field (Business Studies).

The material distributed to students emphasised that completion of the questionnaire was voluntary and that each response would be confidential. It also noted that the researchers intended 'to hold some follow-up focus groups to find out more from those who would like to contribute in this extra way'. Each student who indicated their willingness to participate in a focus group was asked to provide their contact details.

In the event, 58 students from the metropolitan institute and 26 from the regional institute, who were volunteers or stated that they would like to be a volunteer, indicated their

willingness to participate in a focus group. However, it proved difficult to involve many students. A focus group discussion was held at each institute during June 2001. There were three students in the focus group at the metropolitan institute and five students in the focus group at the regional institute.

§3 Survey Results

Table 1 shows respondents currently working as a volunteer; secondly, respondents not doing voluntary work, but would like to; and respondents who did not want to work as a volunteer.

- In the regional institute half of the respondents either were working as volunteers (24%) or wanted to do so (26%). This was substantially higher than for students in the metropolitan institute where 10% of respondents were working as volunteers; 19% would like to do so. Put in another way, 50% of the regional respondents, but 71% of the metropolitan respondents, did not want to work as a volunteer, at least at the time of the survey.

- Females were more likely to be volunteers, or to want to do voluntary work, than males in both the metropolitan and the regional institute. For example, in the metropolitan institute 11% of females compared with 10% of male respondents were working as volunteers, while 27% of females compared with only 11% of male respondents were would-be volunteers (28% compared with 19%; and 29% compared with 21% respectively in the regional institute). Conversely, in the metropolitan institute 79% of the male respondents did not want to work as a volunteer compared with 63% of the female respondents. At the regional institute 60% of the male respondents did not want to work as a volunteer, at the time of the survey, compared with 43% of the female respondents.

- Respondents who did not have English as their first language were under-represented in voluntary work at both institutes, but particularly among the respondents from the metropolitan institute. However, there was a large number of would-be volunteers among the respondents who did not have English as their first language, especially in the metropolitan institute, where they represented 39% of would-be volunteers compared with 20% of all respondents. Perhaps students without English as their first language find it difficult to identify suitable voluntary work, and face problems in obtaining it even if they do, compared with English speakers.

- Both the volunteers and the non-volunteers tended to be older in the regional than the metropolitan institute.

Table 2 shows volunteers, would-be volunteers and non-volunteers by field of study. The table reveals substantial differences between fields of study, in both the metropolitan and the regional institute. For example, among the metropolitan respondents 16% of those in Social and Community Services and Health, 11% in the VCE and 13% in Arts and Design were volunteers compared with 5% in Hospitality and Tourism, 8% in Engineering, and 9% in Business. The differences between field of study are even more striking when looking at those who would like to work as a volunteer. For example, 39% of those in Business and 25% in Arts and Design at the metropolitan institute said they would like to work as a volunteer (but were not doing so), compared with 10% in Engineering, 14% in Social and Community Services and Health and 17% in Hospitality and Tourism.

Table 1: Volunteers, Would-be Volunteers and Non-Volunteers in the Metropolitan and the Regional Institute

	% of All Respondents	Gender (Female %)	Age (% of Relevant Respondents)				EFL[(1)] (% of Total Respondents)	
			<20	*20-39*	*40-59*	*>60*	*Yes*	*No*
(1) Volunteers								
(i) Metropolitan	10	53	39	42	19	0	89	11
(ii) Regional	24	69	7	39	49	5	93	7
(2) Would-be Volunteers								
(i) Metropolitan	19	72	31	51	18	0	61	39
(ii) Regional	26	67	20	60	20	0	92	8
(3) Non-Volunteers								
(i) Metropolitan	71	45	35	54	11	>1	83	17
(ii) Regional	50	52	30	42	26	2	92	8

Notes: (1) EFL: English as first language.

Table 2: Volunteers, Would-be Volunteers and Non-Volunteers by Field of Study (% of Respondents)

Field of Study	*Volunteers*	*Would-be Volunteers*	*Non-Volunteers*	*Total*
1. Arts and Design				
(i) Metropolitan institute	13	25	62	100
(ii) Regional institute	46	8	46	100
2. Business				
(i) Metropolitan institute	9	39	52	100
(ii) Regional institute	27	24	49	100
3. Engineering and related				
(i) Metropolitan institute	8	10	82	100
(ii) Regional institute	3	5	92	100
4. Hospitality and Tourism				
(i) Metropolitan institute	5	17	78	100
(ii) Regional institute	20	29	51	100
5. Social and Community Services and Health				
(i) Metropolitan institute	16	14	70	100
(ii) Regional institute	36	28	36	100
6. Other Fields				
(i) Metropolitan: VCE	11	22	67	100
(ii) Regional: Natural Resource Management	26	67	7	100

Substantial differences between fields of study are also evident among the regional institute respondents. For example, 46% of the respondents in Arts and Design, 36% of those in Social and Community Services and Health, 27% in Business and 26% in Natural Resource Management were working as a volunteer, compared with 3% in Engineering. There were also major differences between fields of study for the would-be volunteers. Sixty-seven per cent of those respondents who were enrolled in Natural Resource Management, 29% of those in Hospitality and Tourism, 28% of those in Social and Community Services and Health and 24% of those in Business Studies were not working as volunteers, but said they would like to be, compared with 5% in Engineering and 8% in Arts and Design.

The proportion of non-volunteers also varied sharply between fields of study. For example, of the respondents from the regional institute only 7% in Natural Resource Management did not want to work as a volunteer at the time of the survey, compared with 92% in Engineering. The differences also existed at the metropolitan institute, but the range was smaller. For example, the lowest proportion for non-volunteers was 52% in Business, while the highest proportions were 82% in Engineering and 78% in Hospitality and Tourism. In the regional institute more than half of the respondents in four of the six fields of study were volunteers or

would-be volunteers (and in one of the other two fields of study 49% of the respondents were volunteers or would-be volunteers). The situation was markedly different at the metropolitan institute, where there was no field of study where a majority of respondents were volunteers or would-be volunteers at the time of the survey.

Interestingly, full-time students were more likely to be volunteers and would-be volunteers than part-time students. The difference was particularly marked, at both institutes, for the would-be volunteers. Table 3 shows that this occurred at both the metropolitan and the regional institute. A few respondents ticked both full-time and single module/subject. They were treated as full-time students, on the assumption that their programs were integrated. Returns that indicated attendance at TAFE on a single module or subject basis were treated as part-time. Full-time students were 44% of respondents at the metropolitan institute and 48% at the regional institute. Forty-seven per cent of those who were doing voluntary work at the regional institute were full-time students and 53% at the metropolitan institute. At both institutes, 63% of the would-be volunteers were full-time students.

Overall, Table 3 shows that 79% of part-time student respondents at the metropolitan institute did not want to be a volunteer, compared with 60% of the full-time students. At the regional institute the figures were 58% and 42% respectively. The differences between full-time and part-time respondents were greater for the would-be volunteers (27% compared with 12% at the metropolitan institute; and 35% compared with 18% at the regional institute) than for those who were working as volunteers (12% compared with 9% for the metropolitan respondents and 24% for both full-time and part-time students at the regional institute).

Table 3: Volunteers, Would-be Volunteers and Non-Volunteers by Mode of Attendance at TAFE (% of Respondents to this Question)

	Full-Time Attendees	Part-Time Attendees
(1) Volunteers		
(i) Metropolitan	12	9
(ii) Regional	24	24
(2) Would-be Volunteers		
(i) Metropolitan	27	12
(ii) Regional	35	18
(3) Non-Volunteers		
(i) Metropolitan	60	79
(ii) Regional	42	58

Students were asked whether one of the reasons they were studying at TAFE was 'because it will help me do PAID work', and also 'because it will help me do VOLUNTARY work'. They could tick both boxes (or neither). Failure to tick either option could reflect other reasons, such as seeking enjoyment, making friends or pursuit of a private interest, rather than an ignoring of the question. Indeed, some students annotated their responses to that effect. Overwhelmingly, the responses indicated the former motivation ie. paid work. The proportion was higher among the regional institute respondents (93%) than among the respondents from the metropolitan institute (83%), although when the students doing the

Victorian Certificate of Education were removed the proportion of respondents from the metropolitan institute increased to 89%. Although the differences are small, they are consistent with higher levels of demand for paid employment among those from the regional institute, or lower levels of supply.

Table 4: Reasons for Study in Both Institutes (Actual Numbers)

Field of Study	*(1) To do paid work*	*(2) To do voluntary work*
(1) Arts and Design		
(i) Metropolitan	116	2
(ii) Regional	7	1
(2) Business		
(i) Metropolitan	99	4
(ii) Regional	147	22
(3) Engineering and related		
(i) Metropolitan	228	2
(ii) Regional	28	0
(4) Hospitality and Tourism		
(i) Metropolitan	112	1
(ii) Regional	39	3
(5) Social & Community Services & Health		
(i) Metropolitan	143	9
(ii) Regional	13	1
(6) Other		
(i) Metropolitan: VCE	50	4
(ii) Regional: Natural Resource Management	26	3
TOTAL		
(i) Metropolitan	750	22 (3%)
(ii) Regional	260	30 (10%)

However, there were some students, 3% in the metropolitan institute and 10% in the regional institute, who stated that they were studying in order to do voluntary work. Especially in the regional institute, where paid employment tends to be more difficult to obtain, this is a not insignificant proportion. Perhaps not surprisingly, more volunteers and would-be volunteers than non-volunteers gave this reason as the motivation for their TAFE study (6% and 10% respectively among the metropolitan institute respondents). Among the respondents at the regional institute 20% of those who were doing voluntary work and 13% of those who were would-be volunteers indicated that helping them do voluntary work was a reason for their TAFE study.

There were also some differences between fields of study. At both institutes the proportion of respondents studying Engineering who gave helping to do voluntary work as a reason for their TAFE studies was particularly small (1%), while the proportion of Business respondents from the regional institute was higher than average (13%). However, the overall proportion was relatively low in all fields of study.

Twenty-one per cent of respondents from the metropolitan institute indicated that they wanted paid work, while 76% claimed to have paid work already. Of the respondents at the regional TAFE institute about 55% were in paid work and about 40% wanted to obtain paid work. The number of hours of paid work performed by students varied widely. The questionnaire did not ask whether the student wanted more hours of paid work, whether current paid work was only for the duration of their study (eg. as an indenture) or was expected to continue after their TAFE studies were completed, thus it was not possible to assess the level of security which attached to the paid employment in which students were working. Nevertheless, the results suggest that, overall, paid employment was more difficult for the regional students to obtain and retain than for the respondents at the metropolitan institute.

Table 5 shows that, for respondents in paid work, a substantial proportion (23% in the metropolitan institute and 40% in the regional institute) were volunteers or would-be volunteers. There is a significant overlap between paid employment and volunteer activity. Secondly, the table shows quite substantial differences between fields of study (for both institutes). For example, among the metropolitan respondents in paid work 33% of those in Business compared with 15% of those in Engineering were volunteers or would-be volunteers (42% compared with 9% in the regional institute). Thirdly, the table shows that there was a large number of potential volunteers who were not actually engaged in voluntary work. Of the 217 respondents who were in paid work and were volunteers or would-be volunteers, less than half (47%) were working as volunteers. Among the metropolitan respondents who were volunteers or would-be volunteers only 40% were working as volunteers, compared with 63% of regional respondents. The potential volunteers were well-spread across the various fields of study.

The questionnaire responses also provide information, for students who wanted paid work, on whether they were volunteers or would-be volunteers (see Table 6). Of the 183 metropolitan student responses in this category 12% were volunteers and a further 35% were would-be volunteers. The comparable figures for the regional respondents were even higher, at 22% and 40%. A number of students saw voluntary work as assisting their entry into paid employment. Responses included:

- 'The skills I've learnt in voluntary work have helped get employment at Coles';
- 'Voluntary work gives additional skills which are more visible to employers than a module. It shows that you can do it in practice, not just in theory';
- 'It's giving me the skills to help on the job. It's extended the learning environment';
- 'The voluntary work is providing valuable workplace experience. The more voluntary work I do during this course, the more seriously I will be taken when I start charging people';
- 'Yes, getting ready for work and improving skills with customers; and it helps you to get up on time and be back on time after breaks'; and
- 'TAFE study links directly to a vocation. Voluntary work also offers valuable experience in organisational skills and team membership. Both are valuable for employment'.

And TAFE helps in obtaining voluntary work, as well as paid employment directly, for example:

- 'TAFE has assisted in giving me the background knowledge to assist in working in a voluntary capacity'; and
- 'It was my tutor at TAFE who put me on to this volunteer job. So if I weren't at TAFE I wouldn't have known about it.'

Interestingly, a high proportion of the respondents who were would-be volunteers also wanted paid work. The proportion was 40% at the metropolitan institute and 61% at the regional institute. If volunteer work can facilitate their entry into paid work, especially when combined with TAFE studies, there appeared to be ample student demand for expansion. Many of the responses indicated that both TAFE and voluntary work provide contacts and access to networks, so that each assists in obtaining paid work and voluntary work (or more of either). Voluntary work was seen as especially important in gaining paid work because it 'looks good' in a resume or could provide valuable contacts and referees. TAFE studies were frequently mentioned by respondents as providing the confidence and encouragement to take on voluntary work, as well as providing students with skills to meet specific work demands.

Students were also asked about the nature of the volunteer work they undertook. Responses indicated that they worked as volunteers in a broad range of industries and types of organisation, including: child-care; church; community radio; community arts and theatre; construction of community facilities; emergency services; fire fighting; landcare, conservation and wildlife; lobby groups (eg. farmers); school support; youth activities; health, social and community services (this cluster is very diverse); sport; and tourist railways. Some students claimed to be undertaking volunteer work that did not strictly conform to the Australian Bureau of Statistics definition (volunteers 'willingly give unpaid help in the form of time, service or skills through an organisation or group'). The respondent's claim to be a volunteer has been the criterion in this study for counting a response as from a volunteer.

Dubious claims fell into two groups. The first comprised students undertaking work in voluntary organisations as the practical placement component of their courses. Placement in these circumstances need not involve a voluntary decision to volunteer, so the associated work might not be strictly voluntary. It is possible, however, that some students may already have been volunteering in the organisations before undertaking their TAFE courses, in which circumstances they would properly be considered as volunteers. The second group, although small, raised more concern. It involved three Business Studies students, who worked on an unpaid basis in the private companies of friends or family.

Table 5: TAFE Students in Paid Work who are Volunteers or Would-be Volunteers (by Field of Study and Location; Actual Numbers)

Field of Study	*Number in Paid Work (1)*	*Volunteers (2)*	*Would-be Volunteers (3)*	*(4) = (2) + (3) / (1)*
(1) Arts and Design				
(i) Metropolitan	68	8	14	32%
(ii) Regional	6	2	0	33%
(2) Business				
(i) Metropolitan	57	3	16	33%
(ii) Regional	79	26	7	42%
(3) Engineering and related				
(i) Metropolitan	225	18	16	15%
(ii) Regional	33	1	2	9%
(4) Hospitality and Tourism				
(i) Metropolitan	99	4	13	17%
(ii) Regional	18	2	5	39%
(5) Social & Community Services & Health				
(i) Metropolitan	133	18	17	26%
(ii) Regional	12	5	2	58%
(6) Other				
(i) Metropolitan: VCE	89	10	16	29%
(ii) Regional: Natural Resource Management	12	4	8	100%
TOTAL				
(i) Metropolitan	671	61	92	23%
(ii) Regional	160	40	24	40%

Table 6: TAFE Students who Want Paid Work
(by Location, Field of Study and for Volunteers and Would-be Volunteers: Numbers)

Field of Study	*Total Responses*	*Volunteers*		*Would-be Volunteers*		
(1) Arts and Design						
(i) Metropolitan	47	7		15		
(ii) Regional	4	2		1		
(2) Business						
(i) Metropolitan	39	5		23		
(ii) Regional	68	14		27		
(3) Engineering and related						
(i) Metropolitan	21	2		6		
(ii) Regional	2	-		-		
(4) Hospitality and Tourism						
(i) Metropolitan	13	2		4		
(ii) Regional	22	6		5		
(5) Social & Community Services & Health						
(i) Metropolitan	21	4		4		
(ii) Regional	2	-		2		
(6) Other						
(i) Metropolitan: VCE	42	2		12		
(ii) Regional: Natural Resource Management	13	2		9		
	Total Responses (1)	Volunteers (2)	(2)/(1)	Would-be Volunteers (3)	(3)/(1)	(4) =(2)+(3) (1)
TOTAL						
(i) Metropolitan institute	183	22	12%	64	35%	47%
(ii) Regional institute	111	24	22%	44	40%	61%

Information was obtained on the proportion of those working as volunteers who believed that their voluntary work was related to their field of TAFE study (see Table 7). Since not all responses included sufficient information to enable a satisfactory judgement to be made, the estimates have been expressed only in approximate terms. Students undertaking the Victorian Certificate of Education were not included, given the non-vocational nature of the subjects taken by them. Table 7 shows that the relationship between TAFE enrolment and volunteer work varied quite substantially between the fields of study. It was highest in Business Studies (at both institutes), Natural Resource Management (at the regional institute), and Social and Community Services and Health (at both the metropolitan and the regional institutes). However, in a number of other fields of study the relationship was not particularly strong. For example, in the metropolitan institute, only a few of the Engineering students or those in Hospitality and Tourism believed that their volunteer work was related to their field of study at TAFE. There was some suggestion that the overall link between voluntary work and the field of the student's TAFE studies may be rather closer for the regional than for the metropolitan respondents. A more detailed discussion is at Attachment 4.

Table 7: Proportions of Volunteers for whom Volunteer Work is Related to their Field of TAFE Study

Field of Study	*Metropolitan Institute*	*Regional Institute*
Art and Design	About half	About half
Business	Most	Most
Engineering and related	A few	(1)
Hospitality and Tourism	A few	About half
Social & Community Services & Health	Most	Most
Natural Resource Management	N/A	Most

Notes: (1) There was only one response in this group: it showed some relationship.

§4 Focus Group Discussions

Two focus group discussions were held, one at each institute during June 2001. Despite contacts from the institute and the researchers, by both letter and telephone, only three students participated at the metropolitan institute and five at the regional institute. Of the three students at the metropolitan focus group two were males and one was female, two were enrolled in engineering and one was enrolled in social and community services and health, two had English as their first language and one had English as her second language, two were less than twenty years old and one was aged in her thirties. Of the five students in the regional focus group four were females and one was a male, all were aged at least thirty, one was enrolled in social and community services and health and the other four were enrolled in business studies (mainly information technology certificate courses) and all had English as their first language. The discussion lasted for about an hour at the metropolitan institute and rather longer at the regional institute.

The focus group facilitator concentrated on five main topics:

- Why were students working as a volunteer?
- If they were a would-be volunteer why were they interested in working as a volunteer but not actually doing so at present?
- What reasons might there be for the differences which were found in the survey responses between the different fields of study and how did they see the relationships between the field of study in which they were enrolled at TAFE and the area in which they were undertaking voluntary work (or would like to do so)?
- What were their main reasons for studying at TAFE, especially in relation to paid work or voluntary work and how did they see the relationships between paid employment and volunteer activity?
- Were there significant differences in relation to volunteering between those students enrolled at the metropolitan institute and those at the regional institute?

It was stressed at each focus group discussion that the responses would remain confidential, that there were no right or wrong answers, and that comments on any other matters they felt to be relevant or important to them would be welcome. Tables setting out the main findings from the analysis of the earlier survey responses were distributed for the information of participants.

Two of the three students at the metropolitan focus group classified themselves as volunteers, as did three of the five participants at the regional focus group. Two were volunteers at the time of the focus group discussion and the third at the time of the survey in late 2000. Interestingly, the other two regional institute students, it transpired during the focus group discussions, were also engaged in volunteer activity. One, who had seven children (the eldest of whom was now twenty-three) had been involved for two decades in providing assistance at the school her children were attending. The other participant, who had four children, was involved regularly at the local primary school assisting the teacher with reading activities. In the metropolitan focus group the one participant who was not a volunteer at that time stressed her family responsibilities, combined with her employment and two courses of study. She stated that she would be interested in volunteering at some stage but was fully committed at present and could not currently make time for volunteer activities.

Many of the volunteers stressed their wish to put something back into the community. 'For me it is really ... a wish to contribute to the community', said one male respondent in the metropolitan discussion. And a female student from a non-English speaking background commented that, 'When the people are getting old, they have a lot of grief feelings and a lot of hard feelings. I can volunteer and visit them or help them and cheer them up ... I want to be able to put something back into the community'.

Other comments stressed more personal reasons for participating in volunteer activity. One engineering student who was working as a volunteer on a tourist railway stated that:

> Where I am, back home, most of the people are between thirty and fiftyish sort of thing. I'm the youngest there who's actually a regular. We don't have any other students of any sort ... the areas of expertise that our little group has got is huge. But it's mainly because they're people whose work is highly stressed and they have this huge opportunity every weekend to relax and wind down and not worry about going to work.

This student also commented that he originally became involved because 'my dad was two doors down from the place and I was bored on weekends'.

Another student at the metropolitan TAFE commented that:

> In the last couple of weeks I have offered my help to other students of courses, in subjects that I've already passed. And I've done that because, probably because of the responses I've got back from the lecturers, that what I'm doing is valued. Getting job offers and so forth, I'm obviously doing something right. And I've always, even if I've not acted on it, always liked to give back, you could say.

In a later comment this student stated that:

> You can help, which can be very satisfying, but I don't know, you could almost say it's selfish in that I'm almost doing it for me... That's not the main reason, but it's definitely part of it. You can go to bed knowing that I've helped someone.

Similar reasons also emerged in the responses from the regional focus group discussion. One female student commented that one of her teachers at TAFE drew her attention to the local health service which 'needed office volunteers and I desperately needed work experience, so I rang up and pursued it'. Another commented that 'Yes, I was actually asked if I would be the treasurer and after some consideration I thought I could do that as a contribution, as my contribution towards the kinder'. Another male student said that 'I knew him [the local SES controller] and was a bit interested in what he was doing and he said come along'. Also, he added, 'obligation is not the right word, but a feeling you owe it to the local community'. Another avenue was through the local churches: 'they've got a strong volunteer group within the religion ... and that's another way of getting involved'. A relatively recent arrival in the country area said, 'Well, I look at my partner ... he's now actually the training officer for our [CFA] brigade. So it's given him a purpose in life and a skill he would never have got. ... And he wouldn't be the same person without his volunteer work.'

The distinction between undertaking voluntary work and just contributing one's time to community life was not always drawn clearly. For example, one woman had contributed on an unpaid basis to schools attended by her seven children for twenty years in various capacities. When completing the survey questionnaire in late 2000 she stated that she was not a volunteer. However, when this came up in the focus group the participants were clearly of the view that she had been contributing as a volunteer for many years. She responded that:

> Well, I never considered it as volunteer work. I just considered it as my obligation. It was my turn to give a little bit back. Initially when I had quite a lot of young children I didn't have the time to put in as many hours as I could and my last one's just gone through kindergarten so I had quite a bit of free time, so I actually gave two years of my time to see the enrolment through, because she had two years at kindergarten ... There is a definite trend in people that will volunteer and they're the ones, especially in a small community, of people that are going to see that. I could probably ring up half a dozen people and we could get some sort of volunteer group together to do a particular volunteer group if it was necessary.

In terms of would-be volunteers the dominant point emphasised was the pressure of time and other commitments. Participants noted the pressure of their TAFE studies, family commitments, especially for those with small children, and work demands. However, it was also noted that there can be a threshold to surmount to enter voluntary work. If someone was

part of an existing network, such as a church or community organisation, they were more likely to be approached to act as a volunteer and were also more informed about opportunities to undertake voluntary work in their locality and for people with their particular skills and interests. It was suggested that both opportunities for volunteering and community expectations contribute to higher levels of volunteer activity in the country than the city. Interestingly, the two students in the metropolitan focus group who were engaged in volunteer work both noted the geographical difference. One was undertaking his volunteer work in a country town rather than in Melbourne; and the other commented on the stronger sense of local community he encountered when he visited a relative on a farm some 120 kilometres from Melbourne:

> They don't have the time to do it [ie. volunteer activity]. It's not being selfish, but its simply a matter of practice. The simple thing is that, at the end of the day, you have to have enough money to put food on the table ... There's a fair amount of things you have to do.

This respondent also had a young child:

> Yes, I would like to [undertake volunteer work], but I am studying and I want to get a job. I would see how much time I have. But I am interested in volunteering ... at the moment I'm studying and I want to work in a [paid] job now. I don't have time for volunteer activity as well, at the moment.

> Other priorities ... People have priorities and certain would-be volunteers, if it comes to a time where a space in their life might open up, volunteering would not necessarily always be at the top of the list. It's time to finally play sport, which you've been meaning to do for a little while, or take a holiday. Whatever. Other priorities end up coming into it.

One metropolitan respondent noted that the organisation in which he was undertaking volunteer activities had room for many more: 'We could use another 100. For the stuff we do, we don't have enough people'. For example, they could use someone with hospitality and tourism skills. 'That would be most handy and so forth, but we don't actually ... we don't have people with that particular background'. And a participant in the regional focus group discussion argued: 'That is our problem. There's just not enough volunteers'.

A metropolitan student commented that one of the reasons why some voluntary activities are not as well supported today as in the past is 'partly because there are so many more calls'. In the focus group discussion at the regional institute it was noted that voluntary organisations often have a wide range of roles which are potentially available. 'I mean, if you're not fit you wouldn't be out there fighting fires, but you can have the role back on the radios, or in administration. Or the gofer. Drive down and tell so and so. There's room for everybody and we just wish we could get a few more'.

Another respondent suggested that where there's a will there's a way. 'I think I can manage the time. I just have to arrange the time, for example in relation to my family, but I think I can. Sometimes you can make the time if you really want to'. Another respondent commented, that in his experience, to get something done you ask a busy person:

> The busiest people always make a bit more time, too. Those that aren't so busy, that think they're busy, don't make the time, but those that are always busy, oh yeah, I can do that. And take on that extra thing.

A female respondent studying at the metropolitan institute who did not have English as her first language commented that language can be an additional hurdle to entering volunteer activity. 'Yes, English is my second language. It can make things very difficult. I wasted a lot of time ... when I am in trouble, it is much harder for people to help me'. Relatedly, another student volunteer at the metropolitan institute commented that:

> The guys who are doing our course, the course we did last year, 80% of them are overseas students ... Well, no [they didn't do any volunteering]. Because they're over here for one or two years on their visa. They're, on most occasions, seeking help from English and maths tutors themselves.

The point was strongly argued in the regional group that there is a threshold for people to surmount before participating in volunteer activity. They felt that this threshold was significant in both the country and the city, but that it tended to be easier to surmount in the country.

A woman without children, but actively engaged in volunteer work, said that:

> Kids are the natural way to get people into the community and start helping out at the kinder. So, in the city I couldn't imagine going to up somewhere and being a volunteer. It would be much harder, because I would know anybody. ... In any volunteer group or any activity I do in my town I would know someone who would invite me along. It's a personal thing, not just we need volunteers. It's like, we need you.
>
> Yes, I'm the sort of person that needs a bit of a push before I do something. ... Well at the moment, like I've got four children and I study so that keeps me busy enough. But yeah, if I was approached I would be a volunteer.
>
> I want to go back to that earlier point of people not being invited. It's often hard to imagine. See, I was looking for volunteer work two years ago and people said you could do meals on wheels. They're always needing help. [But] I wanted to do a volunteer job that I really enjoyed. I didn't want it to just be some charity thing ... I just didn't know what was available and what might interest me. ... There was Red Cross. I didn't know what they did. And someone mentioned the [local health service] and said you could be a volunteer driver, but the scope of what was available as a volunteer, I didn't know about it so I couldn't choose. It was easier to choose social events, because at least they're advertised. You can go to this pub or you can go to that movie. But I didn't know what was happening.
>
> It's that initial step. It's so hard.
>
> I wonder if people really understand just how good it is to be a volunteer. They tend to think, as I did, that it might be a nice thing to do for people. They don't realise it can be fantastic for your own life.
>
> I see that it [ie. volunteering activity] really would be an area for people who moved into new areas to find and make friends and make connections and maybe if they just knew more about the type of work ... volunteering, they can sort of get into that work because very often the groups, like SES, ... turn into ... like family.
>
> And with the church communities as well. Like they have big groups that probably ... because it's all knowing people. If I needed to do some volunteer work that way

> I could probably easily say, I've got this weekend next week. They'd take you on board to do some activity.

Even in the country there can be significant differences from place to place and from organisation to organisation. As one parent said:

> My kids have changed schools, a couple of schools in the last twelve months or so, and I've noticed the difference in actual schools. Like whether it's a big school or a little school, to the programmes and the parent involvement and stuff like that. Like I had a fair bit of parent involvement [at the previous school] ... and then we changed to another school ... And, yeah, they have parents come in and help, but it's not ... you know, it's just not as close knit ... I haven't been over here that long. I've only been here three to four months and it could be that I haven't really got into it yet because I'm so busy studying and all that. But the other schools, there was more notices. Sort of let you know more about what was actually on and have you got this deal, or have you got that deal. ... Well, I know when I was at the previous school, you know, it's like the parents are the teachers too, if you know what I mean. But over here it seems, the teacher is the teacher and you are just somebody else ... a bit like a number if you know what I mean.

Finally, a comment was made about the cost of being a volunteer, in terms not only of time but also of money. As a participant in the regional focus group discussion said:

> It costs to be a volunteer. When I was a volunteer on the kindergarten committee I had to get a babysitter every meeting that we had once a month. And doing the enrolments, it was about $200 it cost me to be a volunteer. And by no means is it something that I'm whingeing about. I thoroughly enjoyed it and I'd do it again and again and again. But when the third year came up to say, 'Do you think you could do it again?', I thought I could do it again, but I don't know if my purse will allow me to do it again. ... That was just the babysitting fee that I had to pay, that wasn't anything else.

In terms of the different fields of study the participants in the focus group discussions stressed the very broad range of voluntary work which was available. Studying in a particular field at TAFE was not seen, in any way, as precluding volunteer activity. Some volunteer work was related to TAFE studies, and also, more generally, to the interests, aspirations and aptitudes of particular individuals. For example, one focus group participant, who was trained as an accountant, noted how she had been approached to fill a vacancy in the treasurer position for her local kindergarten. It had been especially important that year to have a treasurer with specialist skills because of the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax.

Other participants emphasised the very wide range of skills which can be relevant to volunteer work, even in what may at first sight appear to be specialised areas. For example, there are highly competent firefighters in the County Fire Authority; but this organisation also has needs for public relations, accounting, record keeping and many other skills. One volunteer at the metropolitan institute who was studying engineering was undertaking volunteer activity in a related field, but had also undertaken other volunteer activity which was in a quite unrelated field at the Red Cross. As he stated:

> People can volunteer or offer their services in fields that they are not necessarily studying in or working in or whatever. You can keep it separate.

A participant in the focus group at the regional institute stated that:

> The volunteers, most of the volunteers are, like, not jack of all trades, but they have got a variety of skills. They've not just got one skill. They're multi-skilled. ... The firefighters or SES have to be multi-skilled.

Three other interesting comments were made. Firstly, one participant in the focus group discussion at the regional institute, noting that in each field of study at the regional institute about half or more of the survey respondents were using their TAFE skills in their volunteer work, whereas in the city the relationship was much more variable, suggested that, in the country people are 'more aware of your trade skills' or perhaps 'people are seeing volunteer work and TAFE as leading to employment more'.

Secondly, a woman in the regional focus group noted that some of the voluntary organisations, such as the CFA, have brought in broader brigade membership, which says you don't have to be a firefighter to be in the fire brigade. 'You can be in the fire brigade because you're really good with media and do public relations work' or have business skills. This has also made such organisations more accessible to female volunteers. Thirdly, it was suggested during the focus group discussion at the regional institute that volunteering 'might be an activity that you do outside of work that isn't related to your work. You use that, like as your hobby. It's not what you do during the day. If you work inside then you recreate outside and vice versa; so same as volunteer work'. Another participant commented that 'some people do treat it [ie. volunteer activity] as a change ... A lot of the time you don't want to do the same thing all week and all weekend as well', but another participant emphasised that 'There'd still be those that link the two together' [ie. paid work and volunteer activity].

Fourthly, in terms of the main reasons for studying at TAFE the focus group participants tended to stress the inter-relationship between the different purposes. Overall, they agreed that most students were studying to help them obtain satisfactory paid work, but this was not the only factor. For example, TAFE studies can be undertaken in order to do voluntary work or to develop one's own skills. Developing oneself is seen as valuable in itself, especially by the women with small children. This was also seen as provided a stronger base from which to seek paid or voluntary work in the future.

As a female student at the metropolitan institute, whose first language was not English, stated: 'I am studying to help me get a job, and I am also studying to develop my own skills as a person, and to be able to put something back into the community'. It was noted that there can be relationships between what has been studied at TAFE and what functions it is possible to perform as a volunteer. 'Yes, that applies in the aged care area. There are some things that only trained staff are allowed to do and that volunteers cannot do. As I get more knowledge [from my TAFE studies] I will be able to do more of these things, either as a paid worker or as a volunteer'. There can be significant variations, of course, between States and Territories, in relevant regulations.

The contribution of voluntary work to personal development was emphasised by a number of the focus group participants. An engineering student at the metropolitan TAFE commented about his work experience as a volunteer:

> Yeah, I'm usually then pretty much, 'how the hell do I solve this?' But the thing is, I always do. Which is fantastic. It's to the stage where you can have a rusty old bit

> of junk, and it is a rusty old bit of junk – rotten wood in it, rusted bolts, seals need replacement. It's incredible. Three years ago I looked at it, and went 'Oh, I wouldn't fancy doing that'. Nowadays I can look at it and fix it. Because people at my work wouldn't have a hope in hell of being able to do that.

And again:

> I've learnt more in that place [ie. where he is undertaking the volunteer activity] than I have at work on the job, which is not how it's supposed to be, but it is how it is. I have one of my projects up there ... It's the only one in the world and I'm fixing it. Pretty cool. But I know more about that thing than anyone else does on the planet.

Other similar comments were made by the participants in the focus group at the regional institute. As one said:

> Well, I had a computer for a while and I sort of learnt myself and I wanted to know if I was doing things right ... So I started the [IT] course [at TAFE] just for my own skill and then as I got further and further into it, I said, well if I end up getting a job that would be nice, you know. But no, that wasn't the reason why I started it. It was for myself.

Another participant said, in relation to undertaking their TAFE studies, that they were 'just developing skills that might come in useful in either paid work or voluntary work.' A third participant stated that they were undertaking their TAFE studies:

> Basically for paid work but I found that it helped me in my voluntary work. ... I think everything makes a difference to your voluntary work. The more you do, the easier volunteer work is. ... The more you learn, the more you've got to offer. I think that's the big thing.

It was argued that many volunteers are 'very tentative to start with, but once they get into the doing of the thing ... they came out of themselves.'

It was also argued strongly that voluntary work can assist considerably in obtaining paid employment. It looks good on the applicant's resume, it provides knowledge, skill and confidence, it helps develop a wider range of contacts and new networks. These aspects were stressed by participants in the city institute discussions. For instance:

> Voluntary work can greatly assist getting a paid job through a broader range of contacts and experience.

An engineering student commented:

> That's one extra thing, that's a big advantage I've got, is that I can draw on the life experience of everyone else I work with [at the volunteer activity]. I know how to access someone who works in banking and all that sort of stuff. I can just ring up one of my friends and say 'hey listen, I've got this problem with the bank'. It is fantastic. Not many people know how to ring up a 100 tonne crane and get it there on Saturday ... how to deal with politicians, that sometimes comes up. Articles in the paper with my name on it ... They'll just tell you a story on how they did whatever, and no ... it's just something I don't get with people my own age.

The female student who did not have English as her first language commented that:

> Yes, that [ie. volunteer activities] can be very helpful in developing one's own skills, in contributing to the community, and in seeking work.

Similar comments were made at the regional institute focus group discussions, where participants stressed the difficulty of obtaining paid work in the non-metropolitan regions of Victoria ('really hard'). 'If you have this [ie. voluntary work] in your resume, you are in' [ie. for paid employment]. As one volunteer said:

> I was looking for paid work. I targeted TAFE and the course I wanted to do and the sort of voluntary work. And I wanted to get casual work to build up to get into full-time work. ... I was actually surprised how much I got out of the voluntary work personally. I did it because I wanted it to be on my resume. That was the only reason ... and I found out that I really loved it. It made a huge difference to my confidence. It made TAFE much more relevant, because I was using the same skills and I ended up being a volunteer ... I quit in the last couple of months. Just because I'm in this really intense time, but I'm looking now for volunteer work that will extend me again. I'm not looking just to – I'm a bit selfish in that way – I'm not looking just to use my skills for the community. I want to extend my skills.

And another volunteer at the regional discussion commented that:

> It seems the volunteer side of it is purely more for the community, but it also helps to get the paid work.

In the regional focus group, one participant noted how not engaging in volunteer activity had subsequently disadvantaged (full-time) students in their applications for employment:

> It's interesting. A lot of students last year in my course only had time to do the course material. These are students without family commitments ... but they say, 'No, I can't cope with TAFE as well as voluntary work' ... I got a job out of it. ... They would be interested to know how much of a personal boost they can get from that ... Employers are impressed, because you go into an interview so desperate for work. Well, big deal. Isn't everyone? But if you can show that you have coached the netball team the last ten years – or done anything – you've shown an ability to be committed to something. An employer says, well I've got a choice of those two, I'll take the committed individual.

Regional group participants also revealed that the volunteer activity can facilitate a wider range of activities than required in a specialised job:

> It opens them up to different training and they gain better skills. They might have had an inkling of the skills to start with, but they get more confidence to use those skills and they have a wider range of knowledge. ... And because they put forward this confidence too, there's more likelihood of gaining that job that they go for.

Also, volunteers may be more likely than those in paid employment to do things rather differently:

> You're not being paid however many dollars an hour, so you don't have to actually contribute really. You know, knuckle down and put your head down and that sort of thing. Maybe because they take that dollar element, it opens up ... Because you're

> not actually being paid ... you can learn as you go, and you're more prepared to take a risk, in a way. Whereas if you were working for somebody you'd probably be forever conscious that oh, I've got to put in a hard day's work and I've been paid and all that sort of thing ... You might be sort of prepared to learn as you go.

As another participant commented: 'The boss wants it done this way. That's the way to do it. There is a better way, but I won't do it'. Another participant commented that:

> Because you might stand and watch somebody doing something or just standing not actually doing anything at all, you don't feel bad about that. Because you're actually learning while you're standing there. Whereas in a paid job, some jobs won't allow you to just do that.

Participants concluded that, as a result, volunteers are more willing to try something new, to learn more, and that in fact they can end up doing a better job.

Participants in the focus groups drew a clear distinction between the situation in the country compared with the city. In discussing whether there was a stronger feeling of responsibility to the local community in the country, one of the students at the metropolitan institute stated: 'That occurs.' He commented that at his volunteer activity, which was in the country not Melbourne, 'we have contractors come in and every now and then they say 'don't worry about payment'. You get grease and stuff, hardware; and you get discounts'. He added that it wouldn't happen to the same degree in the city. Another city student said that:

> You can just see people thinking of 'our town'. I would never talk about [city suburb] as my suburb. Probably only where I live ... Where my parents used to own 87 acres, up past Ballarat, and even though we were up there once a weekend once every fortnight, that was our area. ... We knew our neighbours up there. We've been living in [Melbourne suburb] seven years and I wouldn't have spoken a word to our next door neighbour on one side. It all comes down to the word 'community'. When you're in, like [country town] or wherever, it's a sense of ... when you're doing something you're doing it for the person next to you, for the person you see down the street, part of a whole bonding thing. Whatever it may be, you're doing it as part of your community. You feel a part of it. Simple as that.

The distinction was drawn even more strongly in the focus group discussion at the regional institute:

> I think people are more community minded in the country. They're willing to help out and do their best, whereas I think in the city you don't know your next door neighbour or your one up from that, and you're so busy with your life that you just get caught up. Whereas in the country you really like to form part of a community.

Following on from that, volunteerism in the country is a way of people getting into the community.

> In smaller towns everybody knows you, so you can't hide. They catch you in the supermarket and say 'will you be treasurer'. But in a way you do have that responsibility, too. You know. I think everybody does have a certain amount of responsibility.

As another participant expressed it:

> It's dedication. Doing something really important for the community, because if they don't nobody will. You can't wait for a fire engine or a road rescue crew to come down from Melbourne to help us. And the confidence of being a volunteer, of actually contributing something useful, is huge.

A volunteer who had only come to live in the country district recently commented that:

> I tend to think in the country, and I didn't grow up in the country, volunteerism is a habit you learn quite early, because you've seen your parents go out and volunteer and it's just something you do.

Even long time residents expressed surprise at the strength of community feeling:

> I was directly involved with the kindergarten this year and within a six week period of fundraising, I mean, we had a working group of ten, but we probably had 15 or 16 volunteers and we raised $25,000. I mean, that's an amazing amount of money out of a 4,000 population. And again it's just the strength of the community.

An additional matter raised by the focus group participants, particularly at the regional institute, was the importance of training (and the sensitivity of assessment) for volunteers.

> As a volunteer you're not expected to know everything, are you? You get your CFA training and SES training and whatever. ... Yes, they like to learn different things. ... They get quite upset if you're not teaching them things. ... There's huge training at the CFA.

> I've talked to SES people and when someone talks about having gone to a really bad road accident and how they coped with it, with the mechanics as well as the emotional, there's a huge amount of skill and pride in that. Because I couldn't just walk up and do the jaws of life trick.

Relatedly, there were comments about the greater availability of training programmes for volunteers:

> There are programmes throughout the government schools now, the numeracy and the literacy and the library thing, that you do need some formal basis and they will give you a six weeks course ... with the kindergarten structure now, that the committee of management run, there's bodies that will do training for treasurers and administrators. I mean, it's horrific really what volunteers are expected to do ... and as the population is becoming more and more aware of the work that's involved in running a kindergarten, you cannot get volunteers. ... And the legal ramifications that can come from volunteer work. It has a big impact. People just won't volunteer for that, even though they're probably a great person that you want to have on your committee, you just can't get them. ... And I noticed also at the primary school at the start of the year they were asking for people to go and listen to the reader and children's reading. They were offering a couple of weeks training to teach you how to help the children, and also for library duties. That's a huge difference.

However, the assessment processes can cause considerable angst. For example, 'there's been a lot of resistance. The way it was presented ... It was a shocker.' It was agreed that

substantial improvements had been made and that CFA members, for example, were getting great pride out of their enhanced capabilities following training. 'Now they are. But they did lose members and that was bad.' 'But now that people have done their minimum skills, they're saying 'well, that wasn't hard. I did know what I was doing'. And they've got almost a career path through the CFA.' However, there was considerable criticism of how the introduction of assessments had been handled:

> It was awful. ... It would be like going into a Grade 5 classroom and saying, 'right, you've got a huge test tomorrow, we're not going to teach you anything for it, we're not going to tell you anything about it, but if you fail you're out of school. And how would ... the kids will freak and that's what the brigade members did, they freaked.

They acknowledged that 'there were people who were not competent ... And perhaps it's good to have lost a man like that ... he can't be left on a fire ground if he hasn't got those basic competencies'. However, they argued that this was not the typical situation. Rather, for most brigade members 'who have been told, look, 80% is terrific, we've to do a bit of training here, and they said 'OK, I can handle that'.'

Overall, the focus group discussions were helpful in the context of the total project. Broadly, they confirmed the findings that had been obtained earlier from the survey questionnaire. However, they also emphasised the complexities of the area; the differences, for example between individuals and localities; and the interrelationships between a number of the variables, such as between TAFE study, voluntary work and employment, or between personal competence, ability to contribute to the broader community and the capacity to successfully seek paid work.

§5 Conclusions:

The responses suggest that TAFE students enrolled at a regional institute are more interested in volunteering than students at metropolitan institutes; and that female students are more likely to want to volunteer than male students. Also, full-time students are more likely to be volunteers or would-be volunteers than part-time students. For example, 11% of the responses from females in the metropolitan institute stated that they currently worked as a volunteer and 28% at the regional institute, compared with 10% and 19% respectively for the male respondents. Twenty-seven per cent of the female respondents at the metropolitan institute stated that they would like to work as a volunteer compared with 11% of the male respondents: at the regional institute the figures were 29% and 21% respectively. Looking at the results in another way, 63% of the female respondents stated that they did not want to work as a volunteer, compared with 79% of the male respondents (at the metropolitan institute); and 43% compared with 60% at the regional institute.

Secondly, the survey responses revealed differences between fields of study. For example, the proportion of respondents who did not want to be a volunteer ranged from 7% in Natural Resource Management to 92% in Engineering (at the regional institute) and from 52% in Business Studies to 82% in Engineering (at the metropolitan institute). If volunteers and would-be volunteers are considered, the response also varies markedly between different fields of study (at both the metropolitan and the regional institute). For example, 46% of Arts and Design respondents in the regional institute and 36% in Social and Community Services and Health were volunteers compared with 3% in Engineering; and in the metropolitan institute 39% of Business respondents indicated their willingness to be a volunteer, compared

with 10% in Engineering, 14% in Social and Community Services and Health, and 17% in Hospitality and Tourism.

Thirdly, while the predominant motivation for TAFE study clearly was preparation for paid employment, nevertheless some students were enrolled in order to prepare for volunteer activities. The proportion was higher in the country (10%) than in the city (3%). Also, a number of students saw the combination of voluntary work with TAFE study as likely to increase their chances of success in the labour market. Among the regional respondents 20% of the volunteers and 13% of the would-be volunteers stated that helping to do voluntary work was a reason for their TAFE studies. Relatedly, there was a high proportion of would-be volunteers among students who wanted paid work – 40% among the metropolitan respondents and 61% among the regional respondents. TAFE is contributing to the training of volunteers, and probably through that to success in obtaining paid employment, but without clear overall guidelines or attention to effective implementation.

Fourthly, Table 7 provided information on the extent to which the current studies at TAFE of students working as volunteers bore some reasonable similarity to their volunteer activities, and those for whom they appeared to be quite different. In this case the differences were between fields of study rather than between students in the two institutes. There are three main conclusions: first, in no field were TAFE studies and volunteer work completely related; secondly, in three fields of study (Business Studies; Natural Resource Management; and Social and Community Services and Health) there was a relationship for most students; and thirdly, for the other three fields of study (Art and Design; Tourism and Hospitality; and Engineering) the relationship applied, at most, to about half the respondents and sometimes to only a few students. Interestingly, at the regional institute half or more of the survey respondents were using their TAFE skills in their volunteer work, whereas the relationship was more variable among the metropolitan respondents.

Finally, 50% of the respondents from the regional institute and 29% of those from the metropolitan institute stated that they wanted to undertake voluntary work. However, less than half were actually engaged in volunteer work at the time of the survey. Among the metropolitan respondents only one-third of those willing to be volunteers were actually working as volunteers; and among the regional respondents about half. Thus, there is a significant pool of potential additional volunteers in both locations, but especially in Melbourne. This pool of potential additional volunteers exists across all the fields of study surveyed. The proportion of those who were willing to be volunteers, but were not undertaking voluntary work at the time of the survey, was particularly high among those for whom English was not their first language. This suggests there is potential to involve greater numbers from ethnic communities in volunteering, subject to suitable arrangements and approaches.

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ATTACHMENT 1

QUESTIONNAIRE AND SUPPORT DOCUMENTS

LEARNING THROUGH TAFE FOR VOLUNTEER AND PAID WORK
A SURVEY OF TAFE STUDENTS

SECTION 1

*For **each group**, please tick ☑ the **ONE** statement that is correct for you.*

I am a woman ☐	**I am a man** ☐		
I am **under 20 years old** ☐	**20 to 39** ☐	**40 to 59** ☐	**60 or more** ☐
In a typical week I am in paid work for 35 hours or more ☐	**15-34 hours** ☐	**1-14 hours** ☐	
I am not in paid work but want to get it ☐	**I do not want paid work** ☐		
I work as a volunteer ☐	**I do not work as a volunteer but would like to** ☐		
I do not want to work as a volunteer ☐			
English was the first language I spoke ☐	**English was NOT the first language I spoke** ☐		
I am currently a full time student at TAFE ☐			
I am currently a part time student at TAFE ☐			
I am just doing one module (or subject) at TAFE at present ☐			

SECTION 2

For each group **please tick** ☑ ANY **statement that is correct for you**

I am attending class at the TAFE campus ☐	
I am attending class at an outreach location ☐	
One of the reasons I am studying at TAFE is because it will help me do PAID work ☐	
One of the reasons I am studying at TAFE is because it will help me do VOLUNTARY work ☐	

Now please kindly answer the questions on the other side of this sheet

SECTION 3

Please write your answers to the questions that relate to you in the spaces provided.

What are the courses or modules you are studying at TAFE?

What other formal courses have you studied (at TAFE, university or elsewhere)?

What was the highest level you completed at school (e.g. Year 9, Year 12)?

What sorts of volunteer work do you do? Please name the organisation(s) you work with and indicate what sorts of tasks you do.

What sorts of voluntary work would you like to do?

If you see TAFE as helping you do voluntary work, please tell us a bit about the way you feel it is helping or will help?

If you are working as a volunteer while not in paid employment, but you WANT to get paid employment, do you think your voluntary work together with your TAFE study will help?
If so, in what way?

We thank you very much for your helpful contribution to this important research.
Please consider whether you wish to fill in the box below before folding the questionnaire and placing it in the prepaid envelope provided and sealing it.
You can return it either by giving it to your lecturer who will pass it on to us, or by posting it yourself.

Sonnie Hopkins and Chris Selby Smith

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OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
If you would be happy to talk more about these issues by being part of a focus group please kindly supply us with your name and contact details.

Name ----------
Address----------

Phone or email----------

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

1 September 2000

TO: THE TAFE STUDENT

Professor Chris Selby Smith, at Monash University, and I, at the University of Melbourne, are investigating how training may assist people in voluntary work, and how voluntary work may lead to paid work and vice versa. We are particularly interested in the training provided by TAFE institutes and the views of students regarding what they expect or would like to see in the way of training. So we are asking students to complete a questionnaire. We are also intending to hold some follow-up focus groups to find out more from those who would like to contribute in this extra way.

Whether you are a voluntary worker, a paid worker, both, or not working in either way, we would very much welcome your help through completing the attached questionnaire. **Doing so is, of course, optional. It should take you only a few minutes.**

There is no need to give us your name and contact details. But if you would like to be part of a focus group please fill in the box at the end of the questionnaire with that information so that we can get back to you.

Please note that your responses to the questionnaire are confidential. Also please note that TAFE staff who are helping us with distribution and collection are not involved in the research, and that your assessment will not be affected by whether or not you fill in the questionnaire.

With thanks

Yours sincerely

Sonnie Hopkins

Research Project: VET and the Voluntary Sector

Plain Language Statement

The project, VET and the Voluntary Sector, is part of a large program of research being undertaking by the Centre for the Economics of Education and Training (CEET). CEET funded by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) as a Key Research Centre in Vocational Education and Training. It brings together researchers from Monash University, the Australian Council for Educational Research and the University of Melbourne. Information on CEET and its research program can be found at www.education.monash.edu.au/centres/ceet

The project is the joint responsibility of Mrs Sonnie Hopkins (Principal Researcher), Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, and Professor Chris Selby Smith, CEET, Monash University. It seeks to find out how training may assist people in voluntary work, and how voluntary work may lead to paid work and visa versa. Volunteers work in all sorts of organisations — sports clubs, counselling services, schools, the Country Fire Authority, public radio, museums, the National Trust and many more besides. Governments in Australia are now recognising the value of voluntary work as well as paid work, in terms of economic worth and social benefits. They are seeing too, that both forms of work require skilled and knowledgeable people. What is more, each form of work may provide a pathway into the other. But if governments are to assist these processes they require better information on what is happening now. Training provided by TAFE Institutes and the views of students regarding what they expect or would prefer are important in this context, as are any differences between metropolitan and rural areas.

A study of previous research in the area and a seminar where key people in the voluntary sector spoke about the training of volunteers have provided a basis for this project. Now students in a metropolitan TAFE and a regionally-based TAFE are being asked to complete a questionnaire. Individual responses are confidential and do not require names and contact details to be supplied. However, some follow-up research will bring together interested people in small, focus groups to share their more detailed views. A box has therefore been included at the end of the questionnaire for contact details for anyone who would like to participate in this additional way. But what are needed most are answers to the questions — filling out the questionnaire does not commit anyone to filling in the box. And an offer of additional input may be withdrawn at any time later.

Questionnaires will be stored under lock and key, and any provided names and contact details will be stored separately for organisation of the focus groups. Processed data, held on computer file, will not have any names or contact details. Records of enrolments by either TAFE Institute are not held by the universities; and so it would be almost impossible for any individual to be identified from the computer file. However, confidentiality can only be protected within the limitations of the law — it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professionals.

Any concerns about the project may be conveyed to
Mrs Sonnie Hopkins, Research Fellow, Centre for Human Resource Development and Training, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, 3010, Email s.hopkins@edfac.unimelb.edu.au Phone 8344 7301, Fax 8344 7608,
or
Professor Chris Selby Smith, Centre for the Economics of Education and Training, PO Box 6, Faculty of Education, Monash University, 3800, Email chris.selbysmith@buseco.monash.edu.au Phone 9905 2466, Fax 9905 5412, or, if preferred,
The Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, University of Melbourne 3010.

Attachment 2: Responses from Students in the Metropolitan Institute

	Questionnaire			Gender [1]	Age[2] (% of Returned Q'aires)				EFL[3]	
Field of Study	*Distributed*[4]	*Returned*	*%*	*Females as % of Total respondents*	*<20*	*20-39*	*40-59*	*>60*	*Yes*	*No*
Arts and Design	300	124	41	74	39	51	10	-	64	35
Business	200	112	56	71	23	65	11	-	46	51
Engineering & related	300	251	84	1	43	51	5	1	90	8
Hospitality & Tourism	300	119	40	47	55	41	3	-	84	12
Social & Comm. Services & Health	300	161	54	91	13	50	36	1	80	18
VCE	300	132	44	60	57	36	7	-	86	12
TOTAL	1,700	899[5]	53	51	38	49	12	<1	80	20

Notes:

(1) One response did not provide information on gender in each of Engineering, Social and Community Services and Health, and VCE.
(2) One response in each of Business, Hospitality and VCE did not provide information on age.
(3) Information on English as first language (EFL) was not provided for 21 respondents (2,3,6,5,3 and 2 respectively from the first listed field of study).
(4) Four hundred to teachers per field; distribution to students about 50% for business (cancelled classes) and about 75% for other fields.
(5) Excludes a further 37 returns which were excluded for a variety of reasons, including returns that were blank, returns without any information on the study area of the student or otherwise incorrectly completed.

Attachment 3: Responses from Students in the Regional Institute

	Questionnaire			Gender [1]	Age[1] (% of Returned Q'aires)				EFL[2]	
Field of Study	*Distributed*[3]	*Returned*	*%*	*Females as % of Total respondents*	*<20*	*20-39*	*40-59*	*>60*	*Yes*	*No*
Arts and Design	79	13	16	77	-	38	62	-	92	8
Business	558	164	29	68	12	46	37	4	88	10
Engineering & related	108	38	35	0	61	34	-	-	92	5
Hospitality & Tourism	79	41	52	68	29	47	22	2	86	7
Social & Comm. Services & Health	150	14	9	93	7	57	36	-	100	0
Natural Resource Management	34	27	80	59	30	52	18	-	100	0
TOTAL	1,008	297[4]	29	60	22	45	30	2	92	8

Notes:

(1) Two responses in Engineering and one in Business did not provide information on age, while two responses in Engineering did not provide information about gender.

(2) Information on English as first language (EFL) was not provided for 7 respondents (0, 3, 1, 3, 0 and 0 respectively from the first-listed field of study).

(3) Assumes 75% distribution to students of the questionnaires distributed to teachers.

(4) Excludes a further 14 returns which were excluded for a variety of reasons, including blank returns, returns without any information on the study area of the student or otherwise incorrectly completed.

Attachment 4: The Relationship Between Volunteer Work and Six TAFE Fields of Study

(i) Art and Design

The study areas undertaken by these students were highly diverse. At the metropolitan TAFE, some were undertaking fashion design that, arguably, belongs under textiles, clothing and footwear. Their volunteer work appeared to have little relationship to their studies. On the other hand, those students undertaking theatre training tended to devote considerable time to community theatre activities, and seemingly not just as part of their course. Most of the students at the regional TAFE who were enrolled in professional writing and editing courses appeared to be applying their studies in their volunteer work. However, the latter group conformed to the pattern associated with this course over the years ie. it was conducted with a high proportion of graduates in the class. Not surprisingly, some of them were applying the skills they had gained from earlier studies. Those TAFE students doing visual arts programs typically appeared to volunteer in rather different areas of work from their field of study.

(ii) Business Studies

Most of these students were applying their skills in information technology, bookkeeping, retailing and/or business management to their volunteering activities. The business studies courses appeared to provide students with skills that have considerable application in volunteering.

(iii) Engineering and Related

Predominant areas of volunteer work were physically active ones, such as the provision of youth and sports programs, and operating with the Country Fire Authority or the State Emergency Service. This is consistent with the group being males under forty years of age. These areas of volunteer activity may not appear initially to call much on the engineering skills being developed in the TAFE courses, except, perhaps, for automotive studies. However, one respondent noted that TAFE had taught him much about materials and their flammability, and that he applied this knowledge in dealing with burning buildings.

(iv) Hospitality and Tourism

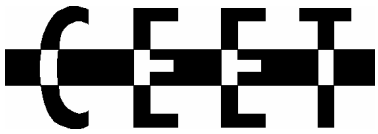
Whilst the areas of voluntary work performed by these students were diverse, some volunteers were applying their catering skills in social and community services, through such activities as canteens and meals on wheels.

(v) Social and Community Services and Health

This is a field with a large demand for volunteers. Not surprisingly, there was a strong relationship between the TAFE studies of these students and the nature of the volunteer work they were undertaking. Amongst students enrolled in this field of study there appeared to be a sizeable number whose voluntary work was a formal part of their course. In these instances the TAFE course and the voluntary work often shared a particular focus, such as disability, aged care or child care.

(vi) Natural Resource Management

This is another field which is heavily reliant on volunteer work. Work with landcare groups featured, as did work in wildlife conservation. One student was assisting with marine surveys.



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