

AUSTRALIAN *FLEXIBLE LEARNING* FRAMEWORK

Managed by the Flexible Learning Advisory Group on behalf of all States and Territories in conjunction with ANTA

2002 RTO Case Study Project  
'Flexible learning in practice'

Institute of TAFE Tasmania



A Tasmanian Learning Partnership

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## RTO Case Study Foreword

The following case study is one of 18 case studies that document the use and application of Australian Flexible Learning (AFL) Framework products and services by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). The case studies are an initiative of the AFL Framework for the National Vocational Education and Training System 2000 – 2004 as a means of offering ‘real-life’ examples of how RTOs are implementing elearning strategies with the assistance of AFL Framework products and services. Each participating RTO has documented their experiences over a six month period (June 2002 to November 2002) and have been selected from each State and Territory representing the TAFE, Private Provider, Enterprise and VET in Schools sectors.

**Each case study will provide you with an insight into how RTOs are implementing flexible learning and is critical reading if:**

- You are interested in finding out about the possibilities of flexible learning
- You are currently implementing flexible learning within your organisation
- You are looking to extend your flexible learning delivery capabilities

**Each case study covers areas such as;**

- How to implement AFL Framework products and services
- Change management practices
- Customisation of flexible learning products and services
- Professional development
- Access and equity considerations
- Flexible learning strategic planning
- Blended learning techniques
- Marketing and much more.

Each case study highlights the various ways in which AFL Framework products and services can be applied to the learning environment to enhance client delivery and service.

For further information pertaining to AFL Framework products and services or to access other case studies visit [discover.flexiblelearning.net.au](http://discover.flexiblelearning.net.au) or phone 07 3234 1852.

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## Executive Summary

It is common for flexible delivery initiatives to focus on skills and product development, with marketing and deployment occurring later, often as an afterthought. Such projects often founder after the initial burst of activity because of a failure to consider the needs and readiness of potential markets.

The partnership between the Institute of TAFE Tasmania (Automotive) and North East Education and Training Incorporated (NEET), a Tasmanian Rural Skills Centre, took a different approach, in that it grew from a collaborative project which uniquely linked provider and customer in the development phase. While most projects focus on planning for delivery, this venture also encompassed flexible learning.

The project arose from several key factors:

- TAFE Automotive teachers were looking for a new way, conscious that traditional methods of teacher-focused instruction could not keep up with rapid changes in the industry, or deliver the thinking skills that will be needed by mechanics of the future.
- VET in Schools providers in Tasmania's remote north-east were struggling against limited resources and expertise, and were keen to partner with a large VET provider in order to achieve consistency and quality in delivery and assessment.
- the north-east Rural Skills Centre was seeking imaginative approaches to stimulate young people's interest in continuing education and skill development, seeing a commitment to lifelong learning as a key to the future prosperity of the region.

Developing a partnership focused on VET in Schools was a master stroke. It enabled TAFE Tasmania to target an important market segment, while at the same time supporting a delivery partner. At the same time, it prompted TAFE Automotive to reform its delivery strategy, leading to:

- a flexible learning model aligned to the national training package
- a blended learning approach, combining physical learning resources, with online assessment and communication through WebCT, and learning support through the local Skills Centre.

The partnership has now been cemented in a Memorandum of Understanding which formalises the commitment of both parties to the long term continuation of the initiative.

Australian Flexible Learning (AFL) Framework products and services played a key role in the development of the partnership. The idea was conceived, and participants' skills developed through two LearnScope projects in 2000 and 2001. Guidance and support from Flexible Learning Leaders was also critical during this phase. Finally, in 2002, the Flexible Delivery Business Planning Framework was used to review the partnership from a strategic perspective. This case study documents the Institute of TAFE Tasmania's experiences in the implementation and application of AFL Framework products and services and how it has assisted in fostering the partnership with NEET.

## 1.0 Background

This project rested on a unique strategic alliance, built over three years, between the Institute of TAFE Tasmania and a Tasmanian Rural Skills Centre, North East Education and Training Incorporated (NEET).

On a national scale, TAFE Tasmania is one of the smaller public training organisations, yet it has twice won ANTA's national training provider of the year award, in 2000 and 2002. The efforts of staff in the Automotive Centre of Excellence, based in Launceston, Tasmania, have contributed significantly to the Institute's national profile.

While TAFE Tasmania enjoys a monopoly over publicly funded automotive training in Tasmania, State Manager Terry Powell acknowledges 'a responsibility to our stakeholders and clients to maintain continuous improvement in training and assessment, including promoting lifelong learning in the Automotive industry.'

The Automotive program employs 44 staff state-wide, serving approximately 700 clients per annum, including 550 apprentices and 75 trainees. The Automotive team's business plan includes a four year strategy to enhance their use of technology, to improve flexible learning options, and to build the industry's profile, with the Launceston campus developing as a centre of excellence in resource-based learning.

North East Education and Training Incorporated (NEET) is one of several Year 11 and 12 Rural Skill Centres in Tasmania. Established in 1999, the St Helens Centre provides access to VET for district high school students, as well as community and industry groups in Tasmania's northeast.

The area served by NEET faces particular difficulties. Although only two hours from Launceston or Hobart, locals perceive themselves as living in a remote area, cut off from mainstream activity. It is also a region which has faced long term economic hardship. NEET staff are critically aware of the importance of education and skill development to the prosperity of its local communities, and the life chances of young people in the region. Equally they are determined that life-long learning should not become an opportunity reserved only for those living in metropolitan areas. As program coordinator, Alan Beach comments:

*A less educated rural community will only expand the divide between the technologically rich and the technologically poor. So our primary purpose is to provide access to education and training options that extend the lifelong learning opportunities within the local region.*

A critical priority for NEET from 2001-2003 has been to increase post compulsory provision with particular emphasis on expanding arrangements for flexible and online learning.

The alliance between TAFE and NEET is underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding which was formalised in 2002. This agreement defines two key partnerships:

- a) a flexible learning partnership, in which NEET delivers Certificate 1 training from the Automotive (Retail Service and Repair) National Training Package, using learning and assessment resources developed by TAFE Tasmania Automotive
- b) an AQTF partnership, where NEET is included within TAFE Tasmania's 'Quality Assured Assessment System' for Automotive Training Package qualifications.

This means that TAFE Tasmania provides NEET with:

- online access to learning and assessment resources for VET in Schools students and adult clients
- professional development and support for NEET facilitators in new learning technologies
- involvement in state-wide validation/moderation processes
- management of enrolments and issuing of qualifications
- a pathway into the industry and/or further training for young people from Tasmania's north east.

In turn, NEET provides:

- delivery and management of the training program at the local level
- learning facilities and resources
- duty of care and learning support
- monitoring and coordination of work placements
- induction to training for local employers
- feedback and evaluation for TAFE Tasmania.

The partnership has been valuable for both TAFE Tasmania and NEET, bringing a range of benefits, including:

- increased flexibility and access to training for both metropolitan and remote learners
- greater consistency and quality assurance of assessment
- continuous improvement of learning and assessment resources
- wider opportunities for workplace learning
- an enhanced profile for careers in the Automotive industry.

Participants believe the TAFE-NEET partnership is a collaborative model that could be replicated around the country. As Alan Beach says,

*The links to this project and other products and services available through TAFE will provide the opportunity for all remote Skill Centres to access programs that could not be offered to rural students previously. The pilot program has been watched with interest and envy from other rural Skill Centres.*

At the same time, for TAFE Automotive the partnership has stimulated internal reforms which have brought about major changes in delivery strategy. Conscious of the advanced computing skills required by the mechanic of the future, TAFE staff have pursued the development of 'transportable' learning resources which emphasise the learner's responsibility for learning, and allow the teacher to become a coach and mentor rather than an instructor. As teacher Rob Prior explains:

*With the rapid changes in automotive technology, trainers can no longer expect to provide students with information about how something works, we need to teach them to be lifelong learners so they are comfortable with learning new skills in the workplace.*

## 2.0 The role of AFL Framework products and services

AFL Framework products and services played a critical role in the development of the TAFE-NEET partnership.

### **LearnScope:**

LearnScope is a team-based professional development program. Each year RTOs are funded nationally by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework to develop the skills and capabilities of teams, to enable more flexible delivery of services and products to clients, using new learning technologies.

LearnScope funding in 2000 and 2001 provided the impetus for the TAFE Automotive teachers to explore models of online assessment using WebCT, and to establish a collaborative relationship with VET in Schools teachers from Tasmania's East Coast.

### **Business Planning Framework:**

The Flexible Delivery Business Planning Framework is designed to facilitate the effective development and delivery of sustainable flexible delivery solutions. The Framework assists organisations to plan for any change-management associated with the implementation of flexible learning.

In 2002, the Flexible Delivery Business Planning Framework was used to take the TAFE-NEET partnership to a more mature level, and to assist TAFE Tasmania (Automotive) to continue the implementation of flexible learning on a proper business footing. Working through the framework enabled a comprehensive and strategic approach to planning for flexible delivery.

### **Flexible Learning Leaders:**

'Flexible Learning Leaders' is a national professional development program that provides development opportunities for VET managers, leaders or champions in order to increase their effectiveness in implementing flexible learning.

Throughout the development of the TAFE-NEET partnership, TAFE Tasmania's two Flexible Learning Leaders (Helen Houston – 2001, Peter Higgs – 2002) have provided expert advice to support both the further development of the online assessment program, and the business planning process.

## 3.0 Implementation

### LearnScope 2000 and 2001

For the TAFE Automotive teachers, the key focus of the LearnScope projects was learning to develop, deliver and manage flexible learning. For their VET in Schools partners, the focus was on learning to receive and manage flexible learning.

The 2000 project allowed staff to explore potential innovations in delivery. A learning set was established, with participants attending workshops and training programs, engaging in discussion groups and research forums, undertaking self-directed study, and using TAFE Tasmania's Flexible Learning Leaders as mentors.

Through a small scale pilot, participants identified significant potential in using WebCT to manage and distribute assessment online, within both campus-based and external programs. The pilot whetted the teachers' appetite for learning about technology-enhanced training delivery, and provided the direction for a follow-up project in 2001, where the emphasis was much more on application and strategic development.

What emerged was a blended learning approach, combining workbooks, videos, CD ROMs and practical experience, with assessment and communication managed through the WebCT platform. Team member, Greg Webb commented:

*We feel that we have taken some giant steps in training and learning ... The blended learning approach helped confirm our suspicion that just a purely online format may not be the 'be all and end all' to flexible learning.*

The outcomes from the two projects are notable. The TAFE participants:

- developed considerable expertise in WebCT
- confirmed a demand for online VET training in remote areas of Tasmania
- established a very effective working relationship with remote VET in Schools teachers
- developed skills in servicing and supporting distance learning initiatives
- established a flexible learning model aligned to the national training package
- enhanced their understanding of what works best online, and other modes which can be blended with online delivery.

The LearnScope process played an essential role in helping participants to achieve their core objective:

- to test the feasibility of providing competencies from the national Automotive Training Package
- across rural and remote Tasmania to VET in Schools clients
- through online delivery using local Rural Skill Centres for learning support.

In the words of Ian Summers, the automotive teacher at St Marys District High School:

*It's as if the TAFE teachers in Launceston have developed these very long arms, and the fingers can point to what they want to do a hundred kilometres away – I just happen to be at the end of the line. I'm the one who's doing the pointing, on their behalf.*

But there were other, equally significant achievements. At a deeper level, the project team questioned their existing approach to learning and assessment. The focus on technology led to a comprehensive review of current delivery models, and the development of sophisticated understandings about learning and assessment issues. Project facilitator, Bruce Vickery, observed that:

*The further the project progressed, the less the journey became about technology, and the more it became about teaching and learning.*

Ian Summers described the action learning process prompted by LearnScope:

*I was very pleased in the middle of the year to find that it wasn't three experts in town struggling with a duffer like me at the end of the line; they were struggling too ... Everyone put their heads down and just bashed away at it to see what could be done. It was learning all the way up the line.*

For the TAFE teachers involved, the project journey represented significant paradigm shifts. Where traditional methodologies in the area have focused very much on teacher-centred approaches, exposure to online facilitation and interactivity has prompted a shift towards learner-centeredness. Where the emphasis in the past has been on information delivery and technical instruction in the finer points of the automotive trade, the teachers now focus more on building strategies for lifelong learning, with an emphasis on diagnostic and thinking skills.

Team member, Greg Webb, commented:

*The biggest thing about the LearnScope program was that not only did we develop IT and online skills, but also a far greater appreciation of the need to facilitate and nurture the learning process. This allows us to identify the type of media to help provide a learner with better problem solving and diagnostic skills for the automotive industry of tomorrow.*

The project had a similar impact on Ian Summers at St Marys District High School:

*My whole style of teaching is different ... my students now find that there's lots of things I don't know. Instead of saying, 'this is how you do undo that' ... now I say, 'Oh gosh, how are we going to get that undone?' I help them, but I get them to solve the problem.*

These result of these insights can be seen in particular in the development of online questioning using WebCT's quiz format. The TAFE team saw great potential in the online quiz as a more efficient, fairer means of conducting traditional terminal testing.

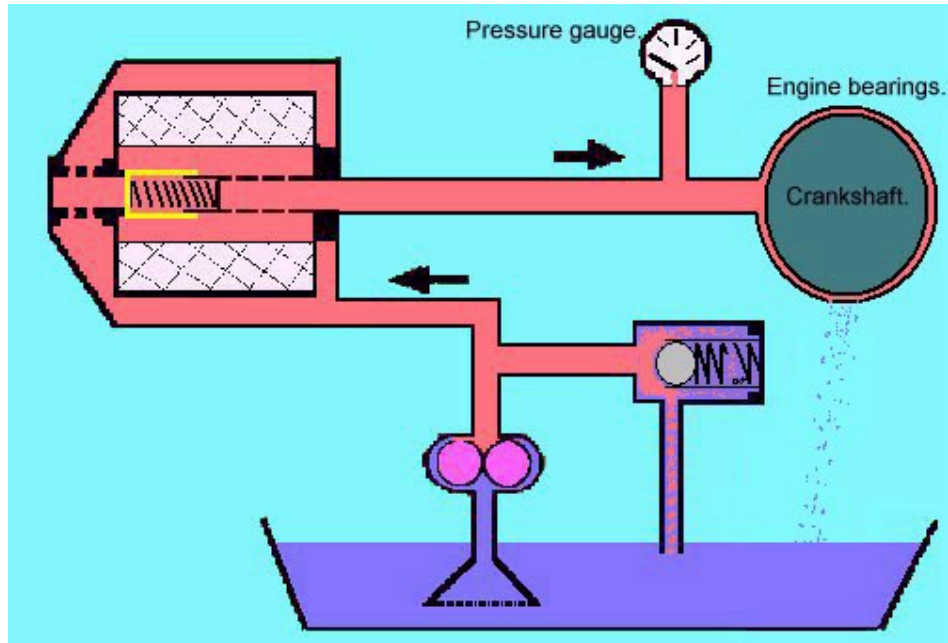
Greg Webb explained that:

*We began to see that the quiz format of WebCT had far more to offer than just marking questions at the end of a test ... we discovered that we could [also] use this as a learning tool. With the feedback facility of WebCT we can direct and guide the learner to discover for themselves what the answer to the question might be ... We have found they become more eager to learn and discover, and therefore more self-reliant.*

The following example deals with the diagnosis of problems in a lubrication system, and illustrates the new approach to questioning developed through the project:

### Question

What would you do to correct the problem with this lube system?



- ▶ 1. Change engine oil and filter.

**This would not do any harm but would not fix the problem. Look again. There is something causing low oil pressure.**

- 2. Replace oil pump
- 3. Replace oil pressure gauge.
- 4. Replace relief valve assembly
- 5. There is no problem. Do nothing.
- 6. Replace engine bearings.

**General feedback:** Simple things first.

As shown in the example, the Automotive teachers have learned to use WebCT's feedback facility to prompt students to think for themselves, rather than simply supplying correct answers. A simple multiple choice question focusing on a specific technical issue thus becomes an effective device for developing more generic diagnostic skills. According to project coordinator, Rob Prior, this strategy promotes the development of broader learning skills, an essential capability for the mechanic of the future:

*The nature of the industry is that you are not going to teach students about every single possible car that is around ... What you've got to teach them is how to think.*

The LearnScope project also impacted on students. Graduates from the 2001 program were very successful in achieving traineeships with automotive employers in Launceston, an outcome which Ian Summers attributed to higher levels of motivation:

*The change in those kids from the end of Year 10 to the end of Year 11 is remarkable. Basically they didn't want to be at school, and now we're giving them something relevant to do ... they come out at the end of Year 11 and they have an IT award, an English award, a Maths award, and as well as that they'll have an automotive certificate as well. That gives them a pretty good opportunity to go out into the marketplace and pick up work.*

### **Flexible Delivery Business Planning Framework**

Following two years of development activity facilitated by LearnScope, in 2002 the project team attended a workshop where they used the Flexible Delivery Business Planning Framework to help them 'take stock'.

The main purpose of the Flexible Delivery Business Planning Framework is to support training organisations in:

- a) determining the viability of a flexible delivery initiative by
  - assessing the needs and readiness of the market
  - assessing the capability of the provider(s) to meet the market's needs
  - developing a business case for a flexible delivery solution.
- b) planning for implementation.

It has a major focus on careful planning to ensure the viability and sustainability of flexible delivery, and in particular emphasises:

- the importance of focusing on the needs and expectations of the market (rather than just what the provider can deliver)
- the need to apply a rigorous business discipline to flexible delivery planning.

Some adaptation was required to make the Framework fit the needs of the Automotive project. While the main focus of the Framework is on start-up initiatives, the TAFE-NEET partnership was already well 'down the track'. Therefore the workshop focused more on implementation issues than feasibility.

Nevertheless the major issues of viability and sustainability were still seen as very important. Therefore, although the first three sections of the Business Planning Framework mainly focus on assessing the needs of the market, and determining a flexible delivery solution, the workshop began by using some elements from these sections:

- to review the progress of the TAFE-NEET partnership, and
- to identify any issues that needed to be considered in ongoing planning.

Participants completed the following Review Questionnaire, derived from the first three sections of the Framework.

## REVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Who are your clients?
2. What are their needs?
3. What benefits has the project brought:
  - to your clients?
  - to your organisation?
4. What benefits do you want the project to bring:
  - to your clients?
  - to your organisation?
5. What staff capability do you require for this project to remain/become viable and sustainable?
6. To what extent does your organisation have the required staff capability?
7. What infrastructure and resources do you require for this project to remain/become viable and sustainable?
8. To what extent does your organisation have the required infrastructure and resources?
9. To what extent are your clients ready for a flexible delivery solution?
10. What are the main barriers faced by your organisation in this project?  
Can they be overcome?
11. What are the main barriers faced by your clients in this project?  
Can they be overcome?
12. What are the main risks faced by your organisation in this project?  
Are they manageable?
13. What are the short and long term costs faced by your organisation in this project?  
Are they affordable?

By discussing the results, participants:

- identified those areas of the partnership with which they were most satisfied, and those areas where more work needed to be done
- noted the issues arising from the discussion, and considered whether these had any implications for the viability and sustainability of the partnership.

Issues were rated according to their criticality, and a consolidated list of agreed strengths, weaknesses and issues was developed.

Significantly, the major strengths of the partnership were seen as the collaboration that had developed between the TAFE and School sectors, the pathways that had been established for rural students, the enhanced quality and consistency in delivery and assessment, and the impetus given to more innovative approaches to teaching.

The list of weaknesses was much shorter, and mainly concerned resource and marketing issues.

The group then identified the issues that needed to be addressed in order to move the partnership forward, and strengthen its viability and sustainability. The key issues for sustainability of the partnership included:

- continuing access to human, physical and financial resources
- the need to bring a wider range of staff on board, and to support them with appropriate professional development
- the need to clarify the project's marketing strategies, particularly with a view to involving more enterprises.

A planning chart was used to develop detailed action plans to address the identified issues. Finally, to close the workshop a 'Reality Check Questionnaire' was used to review the planning exercise, and check that critical aspects had been properly considered:

#### **REALITY CHECK QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. Can the project be implemented within the required financial parameters?
2. Have milestones, timelines and responsibilities been articulated and understood?
3. Is the projected timeline sufficient to deliver the planned developments?
4. Does the project plan have a quality assurance methodology?
5. Does the project have a strategy for managing the changes associated with the flexible delivery solution?
6. Do you have access to the necessary skills and knowledge?
7. Have you identified the most likely risks, and planned strategies to prevent them, or deal with them if they arise?
8. Have you devised a strategy for ongoing monitoring, review and improvement of the partnership?

The Business Planning workshop achieved a dual purpose. First there was the practical task of undertaking a strategic planning exercise for the TAFE-NEET partnership. The outcome was a detailed plan to take the partnership into its next phase, based on a formalised Memorandum of Understanding.

A second purpose was to test the partnership model with a view to applying it in other regions of Tasmania. Current indications suggest there is significant interest from District High Schools in many other parts of the state.

#### **Flexible Learning Leaders**

The involvement of TAFE Tasmania's two Flexible Learning Leaders was also an important ingredient in the project's success.

The 2002 Leader is Peter Higgs, manager of TAFE Tasmania's 'Learning and Business Technologies' unit. By organising WebCT workshops and online teaching and learning tools during the LearnScope projects, Peter played an important role in participants' skill development. Drawing on his experience as a Flexible Learning Leader Peter was also able to ensure that the Automotive developments were consistent with broader organisational approaches to the implementation of WebCT and online learning.

His continued involvement in 2002 has seen extensive support for the deployment of the Automotive approach through the WebCT platform.

The 2001 Flexible Learning Leader, Helen Houston, was also active in supporting the project, and played a key role in the Business Planning workshop by assisting participants to work through complex strategic planning issues, as well as addressing technical questions related to the future development of the project.

The continued involvement of the Flexible Learning Leaders through TAFE Tasmania's 'Learning and Business Technologies' unit will provide an important, ongoing source of expertise and guidance, adding considerable value to the TAFE-NEET business strategy.

## **4.0 Key lessons for AFL Framework products and services**

### **LearnScope**

Participants agreed strongly about the importance of an effective facilitator, with a sound understanding of action learning for the success of the two LearnScope projects. The project facilitator's use of a rigorous action learning strategy, underpinned by a questioning approach, forced the team to continually clarify the real purposes and objectives of their project. As team member, Greg Webb commented:

*We were constantly questioned by one another and by our facilitator, Bruce Vickery, who could have written the book on challenging people's thoughts and ideas.*

As a result of this strategy the team refused to become seduced by the technology. Above all, teaching and learning considerations were uppermost in participants' attention, and became the yardstick by which any potential innovation was measured. This focus also led to an important re-examination of existing procedures:

*We identified a significant number of shortfalls and inadequacies within our existing assessment and learning packages ... The development of online assessment tools provided the opportunity to inspect and validate existing processes and procedures with a view of not only converting assessments to online but also improve the overall quality of assessment activities.*

(Greg Webb)

### **Flexible Learning Leaders**

Participants also agreed on the value of recruiting expert advice and guidance from people who have experienced the intensive professional development of the Flexible Learning Leader program. While the action learning approach of the LearnScope projects ensured that the program focused closely on the needs and concerns of participants, accessing the experience of the Flexible Learning Leaders kept participants 'on track', and contributed to more efficient use of resources. Their involvement meant that time was used effectively, and not wasted on fruitless blind alleys, or impractical experiments.

### **Flexible Delivery Business Planning Framework**

The Flexible Delivery Business Planning Framework is a key resource. It signals the critical importance of bringing a business discipline to the implementation of flexible delivery. It also brings an important emphasis on client focus, by helping users to segment their market, and realistically assess the market's needs and readiness for flexible delivery. Effective use of the Framework will promote demand, rather than supply-driven solutions.

However, the Framework is a necessary generic skeleton. It does not in itself provide specific detail about the costs, benefits and pitfalls of particular flexible delivery solutions. To derive full value from the business planning exercise, the document needs to be customised to suit particular contexts, and should be used in tandem with area specialists who can provide specific advice about particular flexible delivery scenarios. Referring to the Flexible Learning Leaders for advice while using the Business Planning Framework proved to be an effective strategy.

## 5.0 Conclusion

The Automotive story illustrates the use of complementary AFL Framework products and services to support key phases in project development.

At the outset of the project, LearnScope enabled team members to question current practice, and identify opportunities for improvement and increased flexibility through technology. The action learning process involved experimentation and learning through trial and error – but was guided by expert advice from Flexible Learning Leaders, particularly in relation to the implementation of WebCT.

Following the initial phase of experimentation and risk taking, the Business Planning Framework brought a more strategic focus, and an emphasis on sustainability of the initiative into the future.

Based on the successful outcomes from the projects sponsored under the AFL Framework, the Institute of TAFE Tasmania has continued to resource the Automotive team's learning initiatives with a substantial, two-year allocation of development funding. This signals an ongoing commitment to the development of 'transportable learning resources', and the establishment of TAFE Tasmania's Launceston Automotive campus as a resource-based learning centre.

It also points to an organisational commitment to flexible learning and collaborative partnership models, in the interests of students in remote regions. For TAFE Tasmania's NEET partners, the project represented a first step towards a seamless transition from school to post-compulsory education and training. As Ian Summers put it:

*I think as time goes on, we'll see a growth in TAFE getting closer to schools ... within time it will all become interconnected.*

## **6.0 Acknowledgements**

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Kerry Garwood  
Simon Waters (Assessor Specialist)

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Helen Houston

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Ian Summers (Teacher Automotive Studies, St Marys and St Helens)  
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