

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'**

**TAFE NSW-Hunter Institute**



***Going Global with eLearning  
TAFE NSW-Hunter Institute's Experience***

**29 November 2002**

## 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

Voluntary team members with a similar objective of exploring marketing opportunities for the Institute's eLearning products formed the Australian Flexible Learning (AFL) Framework RTO Case Study project team. The team's marketing experience was very diverse, ranging from limited to very experienced and professionally trained.

Team members identified a gap in the Institute's market planning process: researching a market, identifying the specific and unmet needs of that market and developing strategies to service that need.

The Institute's aim to be responsive to regional needs means that it is committed to building the necessary skills and capabilities of its people, as well as working to increase its experience of competing in the international marketplace. With this purpose as a major driver, the team identified its project objectives:

- *Develop a methodology for positioning the Hunter Institute's eLearning products into the international marketplace*
- *Develop the necessary skills and capability within the team to develop an international marketing plan for Hunter Institute's eLearning products*

Team members reviewed the range of AFL Framework products / services and selected three which would facilitate development of an international marketing plan for the Institute's eLearning products:

- International Education Markets for VET Online Products and Services - A Research Audit
- Marketing eVET eLearning Products Internationally – Pre-Workshop and Workshop Resources
- Marketing Tools and Models for VET Online including Company Database for VET-Online

These tools will help the Institute team focus on the capability and processes needed to identify market opportunities and develop its strategic response.

A project plan was developed with proposed actions, timelines, responsibilities and distributed to each team member.

The team reviewed and worked through the individual products and concluded that these products provided the Institute with a method for developing their people's skills and capabilities in developing an international marketing plan, and would therefore contribute to the development of an international eLearning marketing plan. This would be achieved, by the project team members mentoring other Institute employees and integrating these AFL Framework products into future planning projects.

A number of issues were identified by the team during the process, and these hints to future users are incorporated in the report to assist maximise the benefits they receive.

## 1.0 Flexible learning background

The TAFE NSW-Hunter Institute is the largest regional provider of nationally recognised vocational education and training services in Australia. The Institute provides training programs and services to meet the needs and expectations of our many customers in the community, industry and government. The Institute's training profile reflects this role and demonstrates its strength in the area of industry liaison and regional networks. The Institute, comprising 16 well-equipped campuses spread across the Hunter Valley and Central Coast Region of NSW, enrolled in excess of 53,000 students in 2002.

The Institute has a strategic intent to support regional economic development through the delivery of quality vocational educational training products and services to meet the needs of individuals and enterprises.

The Institute achieves its strategic direction through:

- Accredited programs under the Australian Qualifications Framework including studies at certificate, diploma, advanced diploma and post-graduate certificate levels.
- Partnering with other providers to strengthen provision where appropriate
- Customisation and contextualisation of program delivery to meet specific customer requirements
- On the job development and delivery of training to strengthen and complement workplace skills and work practices.

The Institute's primary goal is to be responsive to the needs of the Region, (a Region which is currently in transition as a result of the closure of BHP and diversification of its industry base). The Institute improves its service to the community through: strategic alliances with industry; partnering with other educational providers; involvement of industry in course development; benchmarking and customer and market research.

The Institute has a culture of continuous quality improvement, with a quality management system structured around the seven categories of the Australian Quality Council's Business Excellence Framework.

The Institute plans for blended learning using new technologies. The Institute has been active in developing a structure to support and facilitate the use of online and flexible learning technologies. It has a well-established Teaching and Learning Innovations Centre (ITALIC), which employs a Manager eLearning (a 2001 Flexible Learning Fellow) and a Manager Flexible Delivery (a 2001 Flexible Learning Leader). Through the leadership of the ITALIC management, the Centre provides a mentoring program, matching funding for external projects and support to Institute staff in the development of their capability and their pursuit of good practice in the flexibility of delivering teaching and learning.

Other proactive support mechanisms established by the Institute include a steering committee of cross-functional senior managers from areas such as Staff Development, Technology and Knowledge Services, Planning, Educational Development and eLearning. Another advisory and reference group made up of teachers and front-line managers provides a forum for communication across the Institute. The Institute has also recently established a Teaching & Learning Fellow position to provide another direct link with the core business of the Institute.

Together with associated initiatives such as:

- development of an Institute eResources Framework
- development of a change management plan for Flexible Learning
- upgrade of Institute network and bandwidth

- development of an Institute Knowledge Services Framework,

these strategies provide a knowledge management structure for developing the Institute's Flexible and eLearning capability, and integrate with the Institute's Strategic Plan.

Initially, a group of volunteers, who each had a similar objective of exploring marketing opportunities for the Institute's eLearning products, came together for discussion. Some of these people then formed the AFL Framework RTO Case Study project team.

Team members identified a gap in the Institute's market planning process – researching a market, identifying the specific and unmet needs of that market and developing strategies to service that need.

The Institute's aim to be responsive to regional needs means that it is committed to building the necessary skills and capabilities of its people, as well as working to increase its experience of competing in the international marketplace. With this purpose as a major driver, the team identified its project objectives:

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Director of TAFE NSW-Hunter Institute Dr. Gaye Hart

## 2.0 Getting started – Selecting the right AFL Framework products and services.

As a result of the team members identifying a gap in the Institute's market planning process and identifying the project objectives for the case study, the range of AFL Framework products and services was reviewed and the following three selected. These products can be viewed on the website <http://discover.flexiblelearning.net.au>. These products would facilitate development of an international marketing plan for the Institute's eLearning products:

- 2.1 International Education Markets for VET Online Products and Services - A Research Audit
- 2.2 Marketing eVET eLearning Products Internationally – Pre-Workshop Resource
- 2.3 Marketing eVET eLearning Products Internationally – Workshop Resource
- 2.4 Marketing Tools and Models for VET Online
- 2.5 Company Database for VET-Online



*The Team with Lindy Smith:* (top row) Jan Dupont, Nick Magriplis, Christine Goldsmith  
Dr. Maggie Haertsch, (bottom row): Lorraine McEwan, Lindy, Donna Hensley



*The Team at Work:* Nick Magriplis, Jan Dupont, Christine Goldsmith, Lorraine McEwan

### **3.0 Putting flexible learning into practice with AFL Framework products and services!**

Hunter Institute continues to work towards achievement of the five goals identified in its Strategic Plan 2001-2003, and specifically the project has assisted the team contribute to goals 1, 2 and 3:

- 3.1 Provide responsive and competitive quality vocational education and training programs, products and services to meet customer's needs.
- 3.2 Position and market the Hunter Institute as the first choice in quality vocational education and training.
- 3.3 Develop and maintain an innovative learning organisation in which individual and team contributions are valued and maximised.

As a result of working through the specific AFL Framework products identified earlier, this project has enabled the team to develop the necessary skills and capability to produce an international marketing plan for eLearning products developed by Hunter Institute. As a result, the team has identified an appropriate methodology for positioning the Institute's eLearning products into the international marketplace.

How did this occur?

- A project plan was developed with proposed actions, timelines, responsibilities and distributed to each team member
- A consultant was engaged to manage the collection of materials (audio and hard copy of meetings, workshops, interviews, individual and team reflections), as well as keep the team focused on the project goals.
- TAFE NSW-Hunter Institute Music Section staff have been engaged to work with our consultant to provide professional advice for editing and producing the final audio tapes
- Meetings and workshops were scheduled for the entire project – a Project and Meeting Schedule booklet was produced for each team member and included preparation notes for each person (relating to each event)
- The first facilitated workshop was held in August 2002 – the group worked through the first half of the product documents, and activities were identified for completion prior to the second workshop.

The team met formally, five times. Two planning meetings occurred prior to participation in two workshops. The first meeting clarified team member's roles and commitment to the project. A workshop review meeting was held in August 2002 – during this meeting the team considered some thought provoking questions to assist analyse and critique the process of using the tools. Team members were asked to identify within the tools the areas of strength and weakness and make recommendations for change, where this is deemed appropriate.

These facilitated workshops enabled the team members to work through the products, reflect on the learning, provide commentary on their usage of the products and develop some feedback for this case study. A final formal meeting clarified issues for the case study report and feedback for other Institute staff to expand their knowledge about the process.

## 4.0 How to get the most out of AFL Framework products and services

The team agreed to individually read each product document to familiarise themselves prior to attending the planned team meetings. The team attended two team meetings for general discussion and critical analysis and review of the products and two facilitated workshops which allowed the team to work through some of the activities in the “*Marketing eVET eLearning Products Internationally-Pre-Workshop Resource*“, “*Marketing eVET eLearning Products Internationally-Workshop Resource*” and “*Marketing Tools and Models for VET Online*”.

### Preplanning and Team meeting 1:

The team found it very useful to review the materials individually before attending the first meeting to maximise the time for critical discussion about each product during the meeting. This meeting also clarified the future timeline and expectations of team members during the life of the project.

### Team meeting 2:

The purpose of this meeting was to review, as a team, the following planning tools –

- “*Marketing eVET eLearning Products Internationally – Pre-Workshop Resource*”
- “*International Education Markets for VET Online Products and Services - A Research Audit*”

To maximise the practical review of these products, the team identified three countries which might offer potential marketing opportunities to Hunter Institute. These countries were Brazil, Thailand and Singapore.

During this team meeting, the team reviewed the document “*Marketing eVET eLearning Products Internationally – Pre-Workshop Resource*”. The research questions posed in the pre-planning checklist were dealt with individually to assess their relevance, and customise where necessary, for the intended target market. Important issues that came to the attention of the team were the necessity to review in-country resources and identify the needs of these markets. The team identified the need for a rigid checklist to guide the research activities. This tool provided the research methodology and a rigour that would enable the team to do this.

During this process, the team also realised the usefulness of the Research Audit (“*International Education Markets for VET Online Products and Services - A Research Audit*”) as an international market planning tool. In our case, two countries (Singapore and Thailand) had been researched and some relevant information was provided in the Audit. The team were able to secure some valuable primary research on the third country of choice (Brazil), as a result of one team member travelling to Brazil during September 2002.

## Workshop 1:

The team worked through some of the activities and reviewed the following products during this workshop:

- Marketing Tools and Models for VET Online
- Marketing eVET eLearning Products Internationally – Workshop Resource

The product “*Marketing Tools and Models for VET Online*” was reviewed during the first workshop. The team were exposed to a number of marketing research tools required to develop a rigorous research process. The major emphasis was placed on Tools 1, 2 and 4 (i.e.: Data collection tasks p:10, Data analysis steps p:17 and How to use research findings to assist planning and implementation p:25). It was during this process that team members began to understand a number of marketing issues which would assist in planning to enter a market:

- The need to identify a need, what (if any) market exists and the limitations of that market
- The need to identify ways to reduce the Institute’s vulnerability through conducting valid research
- The need to identify the capability required to enter the market and the support systems required to deliver
- The need to identify an appropriate target market where competitors are not currently trading
- The need to understand the current market situation – and establish how the Institute can differentiate itself from competitors in that market.
- The importance of undertaking a risk analysis
- The team identified that a lot of research needs to be undertaken. The team felt that this is useful and relevant for both small and large organisations, who often share similar types of problems when entering new international markets

The summary of tools p:7 was very useful to place them in context. It is also recommended to the user that they work through these tools with a person who has marketing research knowledge and experience as some of them are complex to use.

Note: The user would maximise their benefit by actually working through these tools with a real life example. The team’s limited time enabled them to review the tools in a facilitated workshop, but to gain real understanding about these complex tools, it would be worthwhile working through a real example using each tool as appropriate to the situation.

The next stage involved mentoring colleagues from Hunter Institute’s “Team International” reference group, to work on a real project connected to its international marketing strategy.

The team then commenced working through the “*Marketing eVET eLearning Products Internationally – Workshop Resource*” workbook.

While team members generally understood that this was an accepted model for market planning, their range of experiences in using such a model resulted in the team as a whole benefiting from visiting this process. The Workshop Resource also contained a copy of the Preplanning Checklist referred to earlier as a separate product.

The team worked through the Workshop Resource from the “Why bother?” p: 7, “Assessing Potential?” p: 11, “Competitor analysis” p: 13, “Opportunity & Threat Checklist” p: 17, “Your capabilities” p: 21, to “Strengths & Weaknesses Checklist” p: 23.

These sections provided the team members with the opportunity to work thoroughly through the process of environmental analysis. This was a very useful experience, which enabled the team to identify issues that need to be considered in relation to the organisation’s operating environment.

The team then continued to the end of Risk assessment and risk managements (sic) p:34. The section on Risk Assessment and Risk Managements (sic) p:25-34 was considered the most valuable to team members. It was found to be extremely practical and beneficial and highlighted the serious issue of risk assessment when the Institute is considering entering the international marketplace.

Team members then briefly reviewed the “SWOT evaluation steps”, Strategy creation p: 39 and Strategy checklist and guidelines p:49. While the information contained in these sections was not new to team members, it was re-affirmed that international marketing is different to local marketing – the skills required and cultural barriers are quite different.

The process proved that different questions need to be asked when researching an international marketplace. As a result of our primary research undertaken in Brazil, the team discovered that its perception of opportunities that might exist in that country was incorrect.

#### *Company Database for VET-Online*

This product is a “database of companies and information to support VET and marketing of online products and services”<sup>1</sup> The product was very briefly reviewed by the team and will be an excellent future reference for the team.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

The team feels that these products provide a very good systematic approach to international market planning for the user.

The “*Marketing eVET eLearning Products Internationally – Pre-Workshop Resource*” Preplanning Checklist adds whole lists of new questions for consideration and acts as a prompt for the development of very a specific and relevant enquiry for the research activity.

The “*Marketing eVET eLearning Products Internationally – Workshop Resource*” provides a structure which will allow an RTO to work through an international market plan in a thorough, rigorous manner. The contents of the resource could be sorted by the user in a logical order appropriate for their needs. This would be done prior to workshopping the activities and it is recommended that this be done as a team-based activity.

The team purposely did not develop a full international marketing plan for its eLearning products during the review period as the team wanted to address the research questions with a rigour and effort that could not be dedicated to the plan during the project period. However, the team has collaborated with Hunter Institute’s

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<sup>1</sup> Company Database for VET-Online 12 December 2001 <http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au>

Teams International (Executive) and (Operational) and a decision has been made for Team International (Operational) to now use the tools to undertake research projects on identified countries in 2003. The research findings will then be fed into a comprehensive international marketing plan for eLearning by the teams.

Hunter Institute's priority is to increase and share knowledge amongst the various teams. The project team believes that by taking this strategic approach, collaborating and mentoring the Team International team members to complete specific research projects, the knowledge gained from this project will reach a wider Hunter Institute audience.

The team recommends that these products be used together, rather than as "stand-alone" products. As an integrated package, the user will more easily grasp their relationship and enhance the usefulness of the products.

The project was extremely valuable as a networking opportunity, within the team and beyond. This resulted in sharing of many ideas that will lead to enhancing the Institute's international planning capability, but also sharing of knowledge which has contributed to the ongoing skill development of team members.

The team is very mindful that entering a new international marketplace is not easy, or to be taken lightly.

As can be seen, the team has benefited in many ways by participating in the project. It expects that the benefits of increased knowledge, experience and networking will be sustained by integrating this learning and experience into future projects.

## **6.0 Glossary of Terms**

### **AFL Framework**

Australian Flexible Learning Framework

### **ITALIC**

Institute Teaching and Learning Innovations Centre

### **TAFE NSW**

Technical and Further Education New South Wales

## **7.0 Acknowledgements**

The team consisted of:

Donna Hensley (Manager, Flexible Learning),  
Jan Dupont (Program Manager, International),  
Christine Goldsmith (Program Manager, Tendering),  
Dr. Maggie Haertsch (Systabytes and Project Consultant),  
Lorraine McEwan (Business Manager, Faculty of Business Administration),  
Nick Magriplis (Program Manager, Training Partnerships).

In addition, Les Hall and Kevin Meers (Music Teachers, Faculty of Arts and Media),  
worked with the team to produce an audio tape for the case study.