Premier’s TAFE Scholarships

How businesses are meeting the challenges of sustainability, and how local councils and TAFE NSW can support them

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[](https://www.tafensw.edu.au/index.htm)Introduction

There is a simple one sentence summary to the questions posed by this study tour. That sentence is: *There must be a business case for sustainability.* Whether investing in technological solutions, behaviour change or training, business is driven by survival and profit. The motivation for and approaches to improving sustainable operations vary enormously, but the need for a business case remains the one constant. The interpretation of what makes a business case also varies greatly, from a narrow view of economic efficiencies through to a desire to be a market leader and recognition that the leadership role is good business.

Businesses visited as part of the Premier’s TAFE Scholarship varied from micro tourism and hospitality ventures through to large organisations. Training venues included TAFEs, universities, government funded programs, adult community colleges and not for profit training organisations. Combined with the [3rd National Behaviour Change for Sustainability Conference](http://www.3pillarsnetwork.com.au/p3_Events-Resources.html?&event=84), 2012 a broad range of views and approaches were seen.

In every instance the organisations visited were grappling with how to be a more sustainable organisation, and/ or how to train or support others towards more sustainable approaches in their businesses. This report summarises the range of approaches taken, lessons learnt, and identifies key and recurring themes.

An ambitious proposal and itinerary, combined with additional study along the way leads to a change in emphasis

This was an ambitious proposal. How can TAFE NSW better support businesses to meet the challenges of sustainability? And what role is there for local government? As the study was refined, it became apparent that the local government component was too much to cover. It is important for TAFE to know what local government is doing, so that programs are not duplicated, so we can meet their training needs, and there is potential for partnerships, but there was enough material to focus on within business and training without adding the additional layer of local government.

And if the proposal was ambitious, so was the itinerary: three countries, 19 colleges, businesses and organisations, all in five weeks. This broad brush survey definitely had advantages, enabling me to see a wide range of approaches. Perhaps a little more immersion in one or more places would have deepened some learning. The list of experiences is briefly described, then highlights and key learning is explored in greater detail.

Simultaneously studying the Graduate Vocational Certificate in Education and Training for Sustainability (Swinburne National Centre for Sustainability) has also influence the emphasis of this study. Education for Sustainability (EfS) principles were at the heart of every good training program I visited. Seeing EfS in action in multiple contexts, including with big business, has helped me to understand the power of EfS principles and practice. In particular, seeing organisations that have embraced a learning culture had a profound impact.

**Summary of organisations visited and lessons learnt**

* [The Eden Project](http://www.edenproject.com/whats-it-all-about), Cornwall, UK: An extraordinary place and organisation. With a profoundly embedded learning culture, and an explicit focus on sustainability, the Eden Project rightly holds a position as world leader in training for and about sustainability. The week spent here, and at some of the businesses that have been through the Green Foundation program remains the highlight of the study tour.
* [Lost Gardens of Heligan](http://www.heligan.com/), Cornwall, UK: You can take the girl out of the garden, but not the gardener out of the girl. As a Landscape Architect and horticulturist, this garden was inspirational. With a broader lens of sustainability, the messages of vegetable production, intensive community involvement and engagement, and partnerships with local businesses, training organisations and research institutions made this a powerful site to visit and learn from.
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* [Coast](http://www.coastproject.co.uk/about), UK (Cornwall association of sustainable tourism): CoaST is an inspirational collective. With some 2000 members, and run on the smell of an oily rag, this organisation uses ‘Ambassador’ and ‘Champion’ programs to engage the broader Cornish tourism community. A vibrant website and communications network allows for a low cost/broad reach. With over 85% of Cornish businesses employing less than five people, this collaborative communications approach is fundamental for time and resource poor businesses.
* [Schumacher College](http://www.schumachercollege.org.uk), Totnes, Devon, UK: Running programs ranging from Short courses, vocational certificates (Horticulture and natural building) through to Postgraduate qualifications (such as Holistic Science and Economics for Transition), it was impossible to do Schumacher justice in the short visit. The college takes a holistic and immersive approach to education, which is profoundly transformative for participants, but has limited immediate application in the VET sector in Australia. Schumacher College has had an international impact, and I was surprised to see that this influence has come from such a small and humble college. It embodies Schumacher’s belief that ‘small is beautiful’
* [Walsall Adult Community College (WACC),](http://www.wacc.ac.uk/about-us.php?title=sustainability&id=18) Midlands, UK: This adult community college has an explicit and embedded culture of sustainability. With responsibility for teaching and acting on sustainability written into every single job role, and into the governance structure, this small college in a tough neighbourhood has an admirable approach.
* [Centre for Alternative Technologies (CAT)](http://content.cat.org.uk/index.php/about-cat-what-do-we-do) Wales Welsh institute for sustainable education, UK: The Centre for Alternative Technologies (CAT), located near the remote Welsh town of Machynlleth, was set up in the 1973 with a futuristic vision of showing the world eco-friendly approaches to technology. 40 years on many of the technologies on display are now mainstream not alternative and CAT is struggling. Host to the Welsh Institute of Sustainable Education (WISE), there are a range of short courses, graduate programs and postgraduate programs run at the site. The remoteness of the location is an issue – bus travel for school students is prohibitive and getting the numbers through the gate is increasingly difficult. Short courses vary from general interest (introduction to birding) through to Continuing professional development programs for architects and other design professionals.
* New York University (NYU): Capstone project presentations at NYU were an exciting model. Students, working in groups, developed a project over a semester. Each group had a real client, and were involved in an experiential learning project. This is a great model for engaging students, industry and educational institutions. The buzz and excitement from all parties was palpable.
* [Central Park Conservancy](http://www.centralparknyc.org/about/), [The Highline](http://www.thehighline.org/about/park-information)  and other public open space, NYC; and [Community Gardens NYC](http://www.greenthumbnyc.org/), USA: Sustainability has many definitions, but most incorporate the concept of the triple bottom line, of people, planet and profit. NYC is all about people, so many people, and definitely about profit. It is a big brash town, barrelling along, and the overwhelming impression is of a place with little regard for the rest of the planet.

Seeing people flock to public open spaces in NYC is a reminder of the essential need to connect with nature in some form, even if that constitutes walking along a disused rail link (the highline).

Time spent with staff at the Highline, Central Park Conservancy and with the community gardeners at Floyd Bennett Field saw differing approaches to how to make each space as sustainable as possible.

* [EcoBizNYC,](http://www.lesecologycenter.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=55&Itemid=60) USA: The Lower East Side Ecology Center has developed a program for small business. Providing a similar service to that of Local Government in NSW, the LESEC EcoBizNYC program focuses on practical, low cost technical solutions, without major shifts in business behaviour. Coordinated by two part time staff, who work with up to eight college interns, this program has worked with hundreds of businesses on the Lower East Side.
* [Empire State Building](http://www.esbnyc.com/sustainability_energy_efficiency.asp), USA: Truly a world-renowned icon, the Empire State Building (ESB) has recently had a retrofit. With a partnership between ESB, Jones Lang La Salle, The Clinton Institute (Clinton Climate Initiative), Johnsons Controls and the Rocky Mountains Institute the ESB has achieved energy efficiency improvements of 38%. The figures are great (cost of $13 million and a payback period of 3 years) but the process was better. Over 60 potential measures were identified and analysed, before reducing this to a short list of 17. Once a detailed business case was developed a final 8 measures were chosen to implement.

The process is rigorous and replicable, and with energy savings of $4.4 million/ annum, it simply makes good business.

* [Patrick Crittenden](http://www.climatechangestrategy.com/www.climatechangestrategy.com/GPT.html) and [GPT group](http://www.gpt.com.au/content.aspx?urlkey=Sustainability), NSW: Working with the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) on an energy efficiency training program, Patrick Crittenden and the GPT group achieved significant gains in energy efficiency in office buildings. The project based approach which fostered a collegial supportive work environment provides a model for working with business, and is discussed in greater detail in the body of this report.
* [La Trobe University](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/sustainability), Victoria: The story of La Trobe University is one of governance. The university has created a pro-vice chancellor (PVC) position of Sustainability, charged with coordinating and embedding sustainability through all courses and in the running of the university. The PVC position is supported through an external sustainability advisory board and with the sustainability working committee, which is the 12 most senior staff in the university. At an operational and teaching level, there is still a way to go.
* [Plumbing Industry Centre for Action on Climate](http://www.picac.com.au/) (PICAC), Victoria: Plumbers in Victoria have taken a front foot approach in developing PICAC. This industry owned and run centre provides training for plumbers in solar, geothermal, trigeneration and other energy efficient technologies. Funded by a training levy from the union, the centre concentrates on people who already have a trade qualification, and are up skilling in specific green skill areas. Their Green Plumber program is now being picked up and delivered in a number of locations, including Western Institute of TAFE, in NSW.

This is classic ‘greening old jobs’, as defined under the green skills agreement (COAG 2009). As a training facility set up by its industry body, PICAC has an advantage, but it is a model that could be very useful for TAFE NSW. The strong industry links mean that the training is really what is needed.

* [Swinburne University and the National Centre for Sustainability](http://www.swin.edu.au/ncs/sustainability.html) (NCS), Victoria: Swinburne University is one of 6 institutions that form the National Centre for Sustainability (NCS). The NCS has been a beacon for sustainability training in Australia for the past decade, developing a range of courses. Policy shifts and VET reform in Victoria, along with budget cuts see this great centre in a challenging environment.
* 3 Pillars Network 3rd National Congress Behaviour Change for Sustainability, Victoria 2012: A highlight of the study tour. Two days of immersion in the world of behaviour change. To summarise the learning - There MUST be a business case for sustainability – Business will make decisions that make sense.

Behaviour change is difficult – it takes time, energy, and creativity. It may not succeed first time. Creating environments where it is ‘safe to fail’ allows people to be more inventive and innovative, and can lead to great results.

Eden Project and Green Foundation

Tim Smit, CEO and founder of The Eden Project states, “Sustainability is not about sandals and nut cutlets, it is about good business practice and the citizenship values of the future” (Eden Project 2011, p 27). An educational charity and social enterprise, in Cornwall in the United Kingdom with over one million visitors a year, 43,000 school visitors, and extension projects that cover schools, partnerships with VET and universities, social inclusion projects and business courses, The Eden Project is an extraordinary organisation, with an embedded culture of sustainability, and Education for Sustainability (EfS). This culture is people centred, underpinned by strong values, commitment to learning for all, allowing and learning from mistakes, and collaborative.

The [Green Foundation](http://www.greenfoundation.org.uk/index.php), sits within Eden Project, and encompasses a range of professional development programmes. Originally funded as a 10 day programme, the courses have now evolved as either a 2 day intensive programme, a 4 day immersive programme (which includes peer to peer business exchange) or a range of enterprise specific training programmes. Since its inception in October 2010 over 280 Cornish businesses have been through the program. While funding was originally tied to only working with Cornish businesses, the Green Foundation is now actively seeking to work with organisations across the UK.

The heart of the Green Foundation Programme mirrors the values of the Eden Project overall. It is a mix of pragmatic common sense, strong communication, people front and centre, and an emphasis on values and behaviour change over high tech solutions. The Foundations’ charter is “to inspire and empower individuals and teams to innovate, collaborate and lead positive change within and beyond their organizations.”

All the Green Foundation courses incorporate the business case for sustainability. Cost savings, long term benefits, market position, intangible benefits, and other aspects are considered. The training is deliberately not linked to any VET or university accredited courses, as the Foundation wanted the flexibility to be able to deliver what is most needed.

I observed a day of training with SEESA (the South Eastern English Electricity Substation Alliance). The Green Foundation facilitators use the entire site of the Eden Project as their classroom. Participants are brought through back room areas, pump rooms and waste sorting areas. Staff from maintenance, housekeeping and construction is part of the training agenda. Eden Project staff willingly describes some of the mistakes they have made, and what they have learnt from those mistakes. The training weaves theory and practice together. Content moves from technical, to systems management, to governance and always back to behaviour and behaviour change. Staff engagement, staff collaboration and communication are recurrent themes.

Visiting businesses that had done the Green Foundation programme and reading the summary evaluation of all businesses that had completed the programme, it is clear why this programme works. There is inspiration and motivation, combined with adequate time and support for people to develop their own plans to change their businesses. The peer-to-peer business exchange allows for mentoring. This is an exciting program.

Colleges and Universities – A variety of approaches

Walsall Adult Community College (WACC) in the West Midlands, UK stands out in the institutions visited. This training facility has sustainability written into every job description, every performance review, and all business performance indicators. Over a period of five years WACC have developed into an organisation where staff have high sustainability literacy levels, and incorporate that into both their teaching and the operation of the college. College Director, Maria Gilling, describes sustainability (economic, environmental and social) as the lens through which she makes every decision (Pers. Comm. May 2012)

Swinburne University of Technology, in Victoria, Australia one of the partners of the National Centre for Sustainability is a large institution. While nationally recognised for their sustainability training, staff acknowledged that challenges of working within such a big organisation. Getting sustainability into all qualifications in the organisation remains one of the great challenges. Swinburne also state that every training decision made should enhance the employability of graduates. Professional development for staff to raise sustainability skills and knowledge is seen as one of the most successful approaches. At a governance level, the sustainability plan is now integrated into the strategic plan, giving strong alignment.

**GPT group**

The Energy Efficiency Training Program, delivered through the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) has delivered targeted training to businesses. The GPT group, a property group, worked with University of Technology Sydney, in particular with a facilitator, Patrick Crittenden, who has a background in organisational change.

What really worked here was the project based approach. This was not off the shelf training; rather the people doing the job (building managers) were in a facilitated group which enabled them to work on a real life problem (reducing energy use in the buildings they manage). An expert sustainability facilitator and an energy efficiency technical expert led the training. This combination is dynamic and powerful, achieving outstanding results. Again, they chose not to link the training to a unit of competence or a training package qualification, as they sought greater flexibility.

Implications and Lessons for TAFE NSW

The successful training colleges and institutions visited were walking the sustainability talk. They were actively and explicitly managing their own performance, and freely shared this with their visitors, staff and students. This explicit commitment and transparency gives these organisations a credibility with those that they train. It is a powerful education tool, and equally a powerful tool for staff engagement. The more that TAFE colleges can actively manage their own environmental performance, and make that performance clearly available for students to see, the more able we will be to train and deliver in the sustainability arena.

Good training does not have to come from a training package, and linking training to a unit of competence can add an unnecessary layer of complexity. Developing a relationship with a business to provide them with the training that they need is often more useful than an ‘off the shelf product’. Businesses repeatedly described the need for specific just in time training targeted at those who need some training

Both the Green Foundation and the GPT group used the model of linking technical/ industry experts with a sustainability facilitator to deliver a customised program. This provides a depth and authenticity to the training, and is an approach worth exploring further.

Education for Sustainability (EfS) encompasses a range of training approaches, all with value for the VET sector and for TAFE NSW. With national and international support, through the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainability, TAFE needs to continue to support professional development in EfS, and incorporate EfS principles into training in all areas.

Visiting some of the great environmental education facilities of the United Kingdom (The Eden Project, Schumacher College and The Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales) has provided a great base by which to judge the work we do here. Each of these institutions are engaged both with traditional education (Vocational, undergraduate and post graduate) as well as finding their way with commercial delivery in a world where funding is a challenge. Every educational institute visited was developing commercial relationships, while also maintaining traditional delivery models. All were finding this challenging. The parallels and lessons for TAFE NSW were valuable.

Resources

[The Green Foundation](http://www.greenfoundation.org.uk/)

[The Eden Project](https://www.edenproject.com/)

[The Lost Gardens of Heligan](http://www.heligan.com/)

[Walsall Adult Community College](http://www.wacc.ac.uk/about-us.php?title=sustainability&id=18)

[Swinburne National Centre for Sustainability](http://www.swinburne.edu.au/ncs/sustainability.html)