YOUR INDUSTRY
OUR VOCATION
ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH INDUSTRY
“RMIT’s strengths in education, training and research can reinforce industry capability to achieve its strategic and operational goals.”

— PROFESSOR MARGARET GARDNER AO
VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT

MESSAGE FROM THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

RMIT University puts energy into active partnerships with industry. As a global university of technology and design and Australia’s largest tertiary institution, for us an industry partnership is a valued mechanism for exchanging ideas and insights, both at home and overseas.

Forward-looking partnerships deepen our understanding of how RMIT’s strengths in education, training and research can reinforce industry capability to achieve its strategic and operational goals.

RMIT’s applied learning community is diverse and inclusive. It invites participation from the public, private, not-for-profit and government sectors. It involves RMIT’s teachers and researchers learning and working alongside industry and community leaders, tradespeople, the professions and enterprise managers.

The case studies in this booklet showcase a sample of RMIT’s innovative approaches to vocational education and training. They demonstrate our resolve to develop skills, knowledge and attitudes that are immediately useful in the workplace. That resolve is a hallmark of RMIT University’s unique and sustained relationship with industry since the late 1880s, when we opened our doors as the Working Men’s College.

I welcome your interest in how RMIT deploys its expertise in customising vocational education and training services for industry. We recognise that our students and staff are, and will be, key contributors to your workforce.

Professor Margaret Gardner AO
Vice-Chancellor and President
RMIT University
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A field officer’s job is complex and GTAV wanted a field officer qualification that recognised the breadth of its professional work and advanced high-quality service provisions. No existing qualification met those objectives.

“A field officer role has many moving parts—human resource management, workforce planning, customer service, accessing incentive funding for businesses. The group training organisation actually employs the apprentices and trainees, so field officers manage training contracts and monitor OHS,” explained Gary Workman, GTAV Executive Director.

A customised solution was sought from RMIT. A Certificate IV in Business for group training field officers was developed through a partnership with GTAV and RMIT’s Business TAFE School.

“We have expertise in frontline management, human resources and business administration, which all relate to a field officer’s role,” says Sylvia Baroutis, a teacher in RMIT’s Business TAFE School. “But we recognised the best outcome would emerge by involving from the start people who understood a field officer’s job in detail.”

Group training organisations played a key role in shaping qualification content. RMIT also engaged Peter Waterhouse, Managing Director of Workplace Learning Initiatives, who had worked with the GTAV for several years in designing and delivering professional development for field officers.

“My task,” Peter says, “is to contextualise the training program—to design training materials, activities and assessments based directly on a field officer’s day-to-day tasks and responsibilities. That magnifies the workplace impact of training.”

In June 2010, a pilot group of 14 field officers enrolled in the new Certificate IV. Feedback is enthusiastic. Field officers valued structured opportunities to learn from each other, enlarge their professional networks, and share good practice and new ideas.

“The partnership with RMIT is a boon for field officers, and for our member group training organisations through improved productivity, skills and knowledge,” says Gary Workman.

“We believe the qualification will become the standard for working in the industry—we think it will be attractive across Australia.”

The Group Training Association of Victoria (GTAV) represents more than 20 group training organisations whose field officers are the critical link connecting over 9000 Victorian apprentices and trainees to their 5000 host employers and training providers.
In 2009, Tom Killen, Simon Joslin and Matthew Clark, moved to Melbourne intent on establishing an indie studio that develops games for mobile devices like iPhone. With industry experience behind them, acquired with game development companies in Brisbane, they established The Voxel Agents.

“We knew the technical side. We understood how to tell stories in a gaming context,” says Tom. “But we didn’t have a business plan.”

Enter Pamela Hanney and her team from RMIT’s Business TAFE School. Pamela manages the School’s delivery of the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS), which is funded by the Commonwealth Government. NEIS supports unemployed people with the ideas and the drive to set up sustainable small businesses.

“We help establish about 200 small businesses every year, and around 170 continue to trade successfully after 15 months,” says Pamela. “The first thing we often hear from a program participant is, “you’ve probably never heard of a business idea like this one”. But we probably have. We’ve worked with all kinds of business ideas – logistics, home maintenance, catteries, services for deaf people, game development.”

Successful applicants to RMIT’s NEIS program complete the Certificate IV in Small Business Management over an intensive eight-week period. The centrepiece of the qualification is a detailed, well-researched, realistic business plan. This business plan is also the assessment tool for final approval to receive a Government funded NEIS allowance, one-to-one mentoring, monitoring of financial performance and ongoing guidance from the Business TAFE School NEIS Program team throughout the critical first 12 months of business operation.

“...you’ve probably never heard of a business idea like this one...”

Tom believes Pamela Hanney’s team was instrumental in their success. “We couldn’t have made our business work without their guidance. Two years on, we are paying our way, including bringing new people into our team. Our experience with NEIS at RMIT is just incredibly positive.”

In 2010, The Voxel Agents was named Best New Business in the National NEIS Association Awards. Train Conductor 2 was named Best Mobile Game at the Game Developers’ Conference China 2010.
Robyn Lyons wants to dissolve the boundaries between training and industry for students in RMIT’s Associate Degree in Fashion and Textiles Merchandising. Her extensive fashion industry experience and wealth of industry networks help to bring her students together with industry insiders, for mutual benefit. The Young Essentials Project, or YEP, is one element of that blend.

Through YEP in 2010, Country Road, Sportsgirl and Target detailed separate commercial briefs which tasked RMIT students to develop detailed product portfolios. Each year in YEP, students undertake market research, relating consumer preference and fashion trends to the brand they are working with. They then go on to create designs, source fabrics, determine production arrangements and develop merchandising strategies—while keeping a close eye on costs. At the projects mid-point, industry partners offer feedback on progress.

‘...it’s great that RMIT encourages... industry partners to have high expectations of the students.’

‘At the same time, YEP requires attention to detail, all the way from concept to store,’ Paul says. ‘And it’s great that RMIT encourages me and other industry partners to have high expectations of the students. We’re encouraged to use the industry standard as our guide when we assess the final presentations with their teachers.’

Robyn Lyons has coordinated YEP for half its 11 year history. There’s joy in the work. ‘Through YEP I see the development of work ready graduates, eagerly sought by my industry,’ she says. ‘Older graduates seek out our new graduates. That tells me our program is helping shape the industry. Partners like Country Road, Sportsgirl and Target are helping us keep the fashion industry in skilled hands.’

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‘It’s important to give feedback from both creative and commercial perspectives,’ says Kerrin Schuppan, Country Road’s Menswear Design Manager. ‘I look for a point of difference in what they create, and I’m interested in whether they respond to the realities—will their ideas translate into sales?’

In small groups, students develop portfolios for presentation to one of the retailers. They are allocated roles and responsibilities, from CEO to buyer to marketing manager. The virtual company environment develops teamwork skills and encourages initiative.

The company may be virtual, but the work is real. Companies involved in YEP use the market intelligence students collect. Some student product lines make it to stores. Participating companies recruit students who demonstrate the necessary skills and talent.

Paul Casey, Buying Manager at Sportsgirl, praises YEP for providing an integrated understanding of the industry.

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Tony Graham, RMIT’s Program Manager for Community Services, says it’s a privilege to work closely with agencies focused on meeting that challenge. “We collaborate with our partners to build the capability of frontline managers. That boosts high quality, person-centred services which are the measure of our industry’s success.” With 950 staff, 300 volunteers and 42 service locations, Villa Maria is a large Victorian aged, disability and education services provider. Villa Maria’s commitment to staff training development was recognised in 2009 and 2010 by Victorian Government Fair and Flexible Employer Recognition Awards. Almost 40 Villa Maria managers have completed the Diploma of Management with RMIT. “RMIT is a valued partner,” explains Darren Mannix, Villa Maria’s Human Resources Manager. “The trainers have a strong community services background and know how to work effectively with learners of all ages. They embed training in the work of our frontline managers, and they create a flexible, supportive learning environment.” Darren Mannix highlights the work-based projects presented to a forum attended by Villa Maria’s senior managers. “The initiatives they implement as part of the Diploma become part of our service delivery, and can impact across our organisation.”

The hallmarks of RMIT’s approach are also apparent in the design and delivery of the Advanced Diploma of Disability Work for Sunnyfield Independence. Across New South Wales, Sunnyfield’s 800 staff provide services like respite care, employment options and supported accommodation. Cathy Commins, Sunnyfield’s General Manager of Community Services, praises RMIT’s Community Services team for putting Sunnyfield’s strategic, leadership and operational objectives at the centre of the training. “They also put our staff at the centre, visiting them in their workplaces.” Cathy believes these visits meant her managers felt well-supported. The visits also meant RMIT’s trainers understood each manager’s work role and circumstances, leading to relevant, credible and immediately useful training. “And while we’re in Sydney and RMIT is in Melbourne, distance wasn’t an issue,” Cathy says. “RMIT uses learning technologies very effectively.” Tony Graham believes tangible workplace outcomes characterise great training. “Training should release energy, ideas, dynamism,” he says. “Our students are the experts. Our job is to help them improve their practice—nationally accredited qualifications give them, and us, a benchmark to work with.”
Facilities managers make sure buildings work, be they hospitals, office towers, apartment blocks or shopping malls. They ensure the lifts run, air conditioning works, floors shine, occupants are safe and property is secure. They oversee renovations and replacement of plant. Facilities managers implement sustainable practices to minimise environmental impacts. They manage staff, budgets and contracts with suppliers of goods and services.

In 2006, more than 110,000 Australians were estimated to work in jobs directly generated by facilities management.

Sam Greer is responsible for Technical Learning at Transfield Services, an Australian company with international reach and more than 28,000 employees. Property and facilities management is a core business and Transfield Services’ success relies on its skilled workforce responding quickly and effectively with solutions tailored to client needs.

In 2009, selected Transfield Services employees completed the Certificate IV in Property Services (Operations). Each of them enrolled in the Diploma in 2010. Sam Greer believes the training is affirming for Transfield Services employees—their existing skills are recognised and their confidence and capability is enriched by targeted training. The training assists them to take advantage of career paths within the broader business and enables them to more readily transfer their skills and knowledge across the company’s client base.

‘Transfield Services always looks for opportunities to add value to our clients’ businesses. We want our facilities managers to make ongoing contributions to our culture of continuous improvement,’ Sam says. ‘RMIT’s programs give them a real edge in doing both.’

In 2009, RMIT’s School of Engineering (TAFE) launched Australia’s first Certificate IV in Property Services (Operations), specifically developed for facilities managers. Its success led RMIT to extend its offerings in 2010 with a traineeship linked to the Certificate IV, and a Diploma of Property Services (Asset and Facility Management).
Driving a sustainable business over the long haul relies heavily on the skills and knowledge of the company’s workforce, so it’s no surprise that TNT Express makes strategic investments in training and development. And no surprise that those efforts are widely recognised—in the 2010 Human Resources Leader Compass Awards, organised by HR Leader magazine, TNT Express won the Award for Best Learning and Development Strategy.

Robert Adams, National People and Organisational Development Manager for TNT Express, says it’s not just about providing training. ‘You have to go another step—you have to make sure the skills and knowledge you build are used effectively in the business. It’s skills utilisation that counts most.’

RMIT’s Business TAFE School understood the importance of making direct links between training, day-to-day business practice and company strategy and objectives. David Graham is the RMIT industry trainer who developed the Diploma of Logistics program for TNT Express frontline managers. With considerable experience in commercial logistics operations, including at senior management level, David devised a delivery model that included on-site training at TNT Express depots around Australia. He and fellow trainer Steve Kern wanted to maximise training benefits by integrating training into the work of the participants.

David’s delivery model followed up group training sessions with on-the-job coaching which assisted participants to apply their learning on the spot. ‘We also inducted company managers as mentors who were then matched with frontline managers in the Diploma program,’ David explains. ‘That gave participants access to an informed company perspective about how to apply their expanding skills and knowledge in ways that furthered company aims. Involving mentors also strengthens the company’s existing internal networks.’

Diploma participants undertook four work-based action learning projects as part of the program. The projects were designed in consultation with RMIT’s industry trainers.

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‘David’s capabilities in both areas allowed him to build credibility and rapport with our frontline managers because he understood their work,’ Robert says. ‘He could call on examples and anecdotes that resonated with TNT Express people. He could problem-solve with them in meaningful ways. He knew instinctively how to make the training relevant.’
Apprentices spend four weeks on site, return to Melbourne for a week’s training, followed by a week’s leave. Their week of training is spent on-campus at RMIT where they are exposed to both commercial and domestic electrical skills.

“We’re asking young people to work on a construction site, a long way from home, in demanding jobs,” says Brendan Rowe, Suzlon’s Assistant Installation Manager and apprenticeship program coordinator. “It’s a new environment for them. We team them up with an on-site mentor who is there to support them on and off the job.”

Suzlon’s apprentices are exposed to an array of skills and knowledge. Emergency heights training, mechanical trade skills, logistics and supply chains are all part of the mix. “We respect them as an essential part of our workforce,” Brendan says.

Working with Suzlon has advantages for RMIT’s trainers, too. “An effective trade teacher understands new technologies,” Ron Barrow says. “Our partnership with Suzlon expands our horizons just as much as it gives Suzlon’s apprentices an exciting start in a growing industry.”

Suzlon began working with RMIT in 2008 on a training solution that would also serve as a recruitment strategy. “Innovation in industry means innovation in TAFE,” says Ron Barrow, Divisional Manager for Trades in RMIT’s School of Engineering (TAFE). “Our approach to skills formation and our delivery models have to be at the frontiers with our industry partners.”

Joachim Schalck is Suzlon Energy Australia’s General Manager of Operations, Maintenance and Service. One of his challenges is to recruit and retain a skilled workforce. “It’s not surprising we encountered a skills shortage—we’re doing something new in Australia, and on a large scale,” says Joachim. “Our sites are remote, and we need people with hand skills and knowledge that take in aspects of electrical and mechanical trades. Our recruitment and our training strategies have to be as innovative as our technologies.”

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As the world’s third largest wind turbine manufacturer, Suzlon is an innovation leader in renewable energy. Suzlon Energy Australia supplies turbines, constructs wind farms and provides plant maintenance. It has been contracted to deliver nine wind power plants in Australia, and more are planned.

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In May 2008, the Army opened discussions with RMIT about how best to build and maintain the extensive skills and knowledge medics require. There was another pressing need. It took three years to train a medic, yet most enlist for 4-6 years. The return on training investment might be just a year. A shorter, but still comprehensive, training program was necessary. Could it be done?

RMIT’s answer was ‘yes’. By February 2009, RMIT began delivering the first part of the new, 18 month training course for Army Medical Technicians, completing a Certificate IV in Defence Health, and a Certificate IV in Nursing which secures registration as an enrolled nurse. From there, medics complete a five month hospital placement prior to the pre-hospital critical care phase.

‘So many intricate tasks were completed in the seven months before the program started,’ says Cheryl Underwood, Head of RMIT’s School of Life and Physical Sciences. ‘We called on an extraordinary range of expertise, in the School and across RMIT, to make things happen. Delivering training is only part of our brief.’

That list of intricate tasks included: preparing a detailed submission to the nursing registration authority for approval to deliver the Certificate IV in Nursing at the Army School of Health; developing online training modules; building a customised database to track student progress; developing lesson plans, materials and assessments aligned to Army needs and Australian Quality Training Framework standards.

Jim Krause is RMIT’s Medical Technician Training Program Manager. A former Air Force medic of 26 years, Jim helped promote the new program to medics and their commanding officers. ‘Change is never simple—you have to go the extra yard and explain the benefits to the people on the ground,’ Jim says. ‘We did a road show with the Army at Darwin, Townsville and Sydney bases, and presented our program at the 2009 Australian Military Medicine Association Conference.’

More than 180 medics have embarked on the Medical Technician Training journey, and student satisfaction is high. The Medical Technician Training Continuum initiative was named RMIT’s Outstanding Training Initiative of the Year for 2010, with enthusiastic support from the Army School of Health.

The work of an Australian Army medic is diverse. Civilians and military personnel rely on them. Medics serve in deployable field hospitals, provide care under fire, operate with peacekeeping units, participate in disaster relief and humanitarian missions, and apply paramedical skills in evacuations.
RMIT University is proud of the strong industry links it has forged and would like to thank the following enterprises for their valuable contribution to this publication:

» Transfield Services  
» Villa Maria  
» Sunnyfield Independence  
» The Voxel Agents Group  
» Training Association of Victoria  
» Country Road  
» Sportsgirl  
» Army School of Health  
» TNT Express  
» Suzlon Energy Australia