Learning and Teaching Investment Fund 2011

Final Project Report

Submission date: 17 February 2012

Title of project: Developing a pedagogical culture of Associate Degrees at RMIT

Strategic objective(s) addressed:

1. Promote a shared understanding of RMIT Associate Degrees as paraprofessional and pathways qualifications.
2. Establish an ongoing RMIT Associate Degree Network to support Associate Degrees implementation, and develop a Network agenda for 2012.
3. Build a shared capability and engagement across the three Colleges that actively supports Associate Degree development and implementation.
4. Identify emerging issues and needs influencing quality delivery and market positioning of RMIT Associate Degrees, and advise on appropriate leadership strategies and coordination mechanisms.

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1. Executive summary

The LTIF grant enabled leaders and key practitioners to forge a common vision and purpose that advances RMIT’s capability to meet the growing demand for Associate Degree provision through a distinctive RMIT approach to Associate Degree architecture and pedagogy.

The project to establish an RMIT Associate Degree Network was commenced in June 2012, drawing on the success of a small-scale DSC network established in 2010. The original intention was to provide a cross-College professional development network to support the development, delivery and implementation of RMIT Associate Degrees. As the project progressed and Network participation expanded and deepened, a broader set of objectives was embraced, incorporating:

- Creating a shared language to support internal RMIT collaboration on Associate Degrees
- Advancing RMIT’s Associate Degree Strategy
- Establishing leadership capability for Associate Degree development and implementation
- Building shared capability for, and engagement in, Associate Degree development and implementation
- Framing the marketing task for RMIT Associate Degrees.

The Network enthusiastically progressed each objective. In total, 23 staff members from all Colleges participated in the Network. All RMIT Associate Degree programs were represented. The relevance of the Network in purposefully addressing pressing issues is testified through high attendance and participation, and through achieving strategic and operational outcomes/impacts.

At the outset, the Associate Degree Network adopted a strategic approach to disseminating outcomes and outputs. The critical strands in this approach were:

- Inclusiveness. Opportunities were made available for direct involvement in Network activities by leaders, developers, implementers and program managers.
- Relevance. The Network’s agenda targeted the pressing needs of those involved with Associate Degrees.
- Breadth. Network drew on the expertise, experience and perspectives of people external to RMIT in order to pitch a wide frame of reference for internal deliberation and practice.

2. A list of outcomes

A primary outcome from the LTIF grant is that a self-sustaining RMIT Associate Degree Network is now in place. Members of the Network have endorsed the continuation of the Network through the itemisation of a substantive agenda for 2012 that addresses strategic and operational priorities, and professional learning needs.

Other outcomes include:
- Achieving greater clarity about what differentiates our Associate Degrees from those offered by other providers, which informed the collaborative development of a draft statement that captures the key characteristics of an RMIT Associate Degree
- The delivery of situated professional development opportunities which produced practical outputs, outcomes and impacts of immediate relevance for those leading, developing, implementing and teaching into RMIT Associate Degrees.
- The fostering of ongoing informal and informed networks of practitioners who are now more able to engage on common ground and support each other’s work
- Securing improved definition of the marketing task involved in conveying the attributes of an RMIT Associate Degree to both prospective students and employers, recognising that the Associate Degree is a new product rather than a familiar product.
• Business cases/program designs were supported to completion for three new Associate Degree programs (Associate Degree in Screen and Media Production; Associate Degree in Professional Screenwriting; and Associate Degree in Professional Writing and Editing).

3. Project outcomes and impacts

3.1 Introduction

The motivation for seeking LTIF support for this project was to respond to three conundrums that have beset those charged with creating RMIT’s strategic and operational platforms for Associate Degrees:

• The lack of any organised and accessible institutional repository of knowledge or information – the lack of any reference points – has meant that developing a new Associate Degree relied on chance and the personal (rather than the institutional) perspective of those who had trod the development path before. Consistency, certainty and efficiency were absent.

• The lack of defined procedures and timelines specifically attached to approval for Associate Degrees meant that the final stages of the development journey were often improvised – again, consistency, certainty and efficiency were absent.

• Development was taking place within individual schools or Colleges. It was not joined up across the University, and diverse interpretations of the RMIT approach to Associate Degrees were evident. The opportunity to generate and embed a common language about Associate Degrees, understood across the University, was slipping away. Given the growth in number of Associate Degrees offered by RMIT, and the growth in enrolment numbers, it seemed necessary to secure a cogent set of RMIT-endorsed understandings, and formal, statements about Associate Degrees – to allow a fragmented approach to persist was to store up wet grain.

Through the LTIF grant, we have moved quickly from besetting conundrums to greater clarity.

Some sense of the potential of an Associate Degree Network had been identified in DSC where a small-scale network was established in the College in 2010 to support those tasked with developing new Associate Degree programs. An LTIF project was the most appropriate avenue through which to expand the reach of, and extract the greatest value from, the idea of an extended University-wide Network.

Initially, the project objective was to establish a cross-College professional development network to support the development, delivery and implementation of RMIT Associate Degrees. Professional development was seen as purposeful way in which to build confidence in, and cultural attachment to, RMIT’s approach to Associate Degrees. As the project progressed and Network participation expanded and deepened this objective was usefully elaborated by Network members such that it:

• more precisely identified the tasks preliminary to devising and implementing a successful institution-wide professional development strategy

• framed conceptual understandings of the pedagogy for RMIT Associate Degrees so professional learning could be better structured and targetted

• revealed the significance of addressing with closer attention the positioning of Associate Degrees with prospective students and with employers.

The project developed an iterative and mutually beneficial relationship with the Teaching Fellowship project undertaken during 2011 by Dr Helen Smith. Funded through the (now wound-up) Australian Learning and Teaching Council, Helen’s project was titled ‘Improving tertiary pathways through cross-sectoral integration of curriculum and pedagogy in associate degrees’. Given the common interests of both the LTIF project and the Teaching Fellowship, it made sense for them to draw on and support each other. A number of activities, processes and key issues
were advanced jointly, such as the VETLink Forum on Associate Degrees and the exploration of market positioning. Without doubt, this levering increased the return on investment of LTIF project funds.

A final point before reviewing the chief project outcomes/impacts. The RMIT Associate Degree Network is not an activity bounded by LTIF grant timeframes. It was originally conceived as a scaling up of a DSC network to meet similar needs across the University. Through collaborative endeavour and shared insights, the RMIT Associate Degree Network has exceeded that early aspiration. It has a lively agenda before it. The outcomes and impacts of the LTIF project funds applied to establishing and building Network are mostly works in progress rather than finalised endpoints.

Cultural change was a central dimension of the Network project. Securing that change is a task beyond a six month period. It is too early to call clear outcomes that go to cultural or behavioural change. The observations made below about outcomes and impacts are offered in full recognition that the work is unfinished, but even after a short period of six months it is a widely held view that the signs are very promising. Much now depends on the receptiveness of the wider University community as the Network takes its learnings and propositions beyond the Network of Associate Degree practitioners and leaders who have participated so keenly to date.

3.2 Creating a shared language to support internal RMIT collaboration on Associate Degrees

The need to develop a common point of reference for developing Associate Degrees emerged as a priority task for the Associate Degree Network. The Network asked a small group of its members to collaboratively develop a draft statement that captured the key characteristics of an RMIT Associate Degree. The drafting group comprised: Keith Cowlishaw (Head of School, School of Fashion and Textiles); Sally Leavold (Deputy Director TAFE, College of Design & Social Context); Vicki Molloy (Head of School, Business TAFE School); Helen Smith (ALTC Teaching Fellow); and Cheryl Underwood (Head of School, School of Life & Physical Sciences).

The drafting team drew on several key sources, and most significantly on three: the Australian Qualifications Framework descriptor for Associate Degrees; the RMIT policy on Associate Degrees approved in 2007; and the accumulated understanding developed over the course of the LTIF project from June to December 2011. The drafting commenced in November 2011 and was completed in January 2012. While the draft was completed after the formal conclusion of the LTIF grant, it must be seen as a substantive product of the LTIF project.

The final draft was forwarded to Professor Geoff Crisp, Dean – Learning and Teaching, for comment. Minor amendments were made and the final draft version (see Appendix A) is scheduled for discussion at a meeting of PVCs Learning and Teaching in late February, 2012.

3.3 Advancing RMIT’s Associate Degree Strategy

Resolving the three conundrums cited earlier was essential for RMIT to bring real force to its entry into the growing Associate Degree market, taking advantage of the twin attributes of the qualification: first, as an exit qualification with strong vocational outcomes, and second as a pathway to other qualifications.

The LTIF project has progressed RMIT’s strategic interest in the Associate Degree market by laying the groundwork for meeting those conundrums with improved consistency and certainty for those developing and implementing RMIT Associate Degrees. An important benefit of the Associate Degree Network’s activities is greater clarity about what differentiates our Associate Degrees from those offered by other providers – clarity brought about by exploring the design of
other offerings through a workshop on the AQF level 6 descriptors and the VETLink Forum which hosted presentations from other institutions about their models for the qualification. This exploration was supplemented by Helen Smith’s analysis of Associate Degree models in Australia, undertaken as part of her Teaching Fellowship.

It is important to contextualise the benefits to RMIT of the Associate Degree Network’s advances by reference to the historical context for RMIT’s strategic interest in the Associate Degree qualification.

In 2007, RMIT’s Academic Board adopted a policy paper on Associate Degrees, titled ‘Associate Degrees – A Strategy for RMIT University’. Among other things, the policy outlines principles for administration and program architecture for Associate Degrees.

With considerable prescience, the policy paper noted that despite the almost unheralded incorporation in 2003 of the Associate Degree into the Australian Qualifications Framework, take up of the qualification by providers across Australia was relatively rapid and that trend would accelerate. As the policy noted, by 2007 15 Australian universities were offering Associate Degrees. By 2010, 39 universities and TAFE Institutes were offering more than 130 Associate Degrees.

The 2007 RMIT policy stated the case for a concerted entry into the Associate Degree market for domestic students. By February 2012 RMIT had accredited a total of 24 Associate Degrees. In 2010, RMIT Associate Degree enrolments stood at 1114 EFTSL – an instructive comparison in that in 2005 there were 1778 EFTSL in Associate Degree programs across Australia (Source: DEEWR, 2009 customised national enrolment data file).

The 2008 Bradley Review emphasised the importance of reconceptualising the tertiary education space by moving beyond a limiting binary distinction between VET and higher education. For RMIT as a multi-sector provider, the Associate Degree provides a particularly sturdy bridge to both strong vocational outcomes from the qualification in its own right, and to study at AQF level 7 and above.

3.4 Establishing leadership capability for Associate Degree development and implementation

The Associate Degree Network provided a forum for those carrying the responsibility to oversee the prosecution of RMIT’s strategic positioning in the Associate Degree market – academic leaders, program developers, and those managing implementation and delivery.

Appendix B lists those who have regularly participated in the Network, both in attending meetings and taking on tasks between meetings. In total, 23 staff members from all Colleges and key support units participated in the Network, ranging from Deputy Directors TAFE and Heads of School to Industry Group Managers and Program Managers – all with a specific role in managing, developing and/or implementing Associate Degrees. All RMIT Associate Degree programs were represented through the Network’s membership.

The relevance of the Network in purposefully addressing pressing issues is testified through consistently high attendance, and through the outcomes/impacts indicated in this report.

The Network forged common vision and purpose about Associate Degrees among those with primary strategic and operational carriage for delivery of RMIT’s Associate Degrees.

Network members have signalled their intention to continue their engagement in the Network in 2012 in order to pursue a broad agenda, outlined in Section 3.6 below.
3.5 Building across RMIT shared capability for, and engagement in, Associate Degree development and implementation

The Network provided an important forum for developing and sharing insights about Associate Degree program architecture, pedagogy, development and implementation. The Network offered situated professional development opportunities, with practical outputs, outcomes and impacts flowing from grappling with knowledge and practice of immediate relevance to Network members’ work contexts.

A significant outcome of the Associate Degree Network is the fostering of ongoing informal and informed networks of practitioners who are now more able to engage on common ground and support each other’s work.

3.6 Framing the marketing task for RMIT Associate Degrees

The Network progressively revealed the terrain for RMIT Associate Degrees by drawing on the experience and working through the queries of Network members. An important aspect of the landscape explored during the Network’s discussions is the nature of the marketing task ahead.

While marketing and market positioning forms a priority agenda item for the Network in 2012, a number of matters are now much more clearly defined as a result of the Network’s focussed attention, including:

- The need to delineate the differentiating characteristics of an RMIT Associate Degree – a task now in hand through the deliberative development of a draft narrative statement about RMIT’s Associate Degrees (see Appendix A).
- The importance of informing, and marketing thoughtfully to, secondary school students about the attributes of an RMIT Associate Degree.
- The importance of informing employers about the attributes of an RMIT Associate Degree.
- The importance of engaging employers so that their input to RMIT Associate Degree design underpins the vocational outcomes of the programs.

Conveying the attributes of an RMIT Associate Degree to both prospective students and employers must account for the reality that the Associate Degree is a new product rather than a familiar product. Feedback from the VETLink Forum, overwhelming anecdotal evidence from RMIT staff who have launched Associate Degrees, and evidence from Helen Smith’s research related to her ALTC Fellowship, all consistently demonstrate that among both school leavers and employers there is generally limited (or no) understanding of the particular attributes of an Associate Degree. From a marketing perspective, this requires both an explanation of the Associate Degree in broad terms, and for RMIT it must entail an explanation of the differentiating characteristics of an RMIT Associate Degree.

An outcome from the VETLink Forum – subsequently pursued in general terms through Helen Smith’s Teaching Fellowship activities – is the interest among other Victorian Associate Degree providers in developing and implementing a marketing strategy that takes to prospective students and employers a readily accessible explanation of what an Associate Degree is, both in terms of pedagogy and vocational and further study outcomes. The practicality of turning this widespread interest into something tangible remains to be fully investigated.
3.7 Identifying 2012 priorities for professional learning and further work

The successful bid for an LTIF project framed the Associate Degree Network as a professional development opportunity. The Network has delivered on this objective, and has gone considerably further, as this overview of outcomes indicates. Professional development remains at the core of the Network’s agenda for 2012. In addition, a number of other tasks sit on the Network’s agenda, underlining the wider role that the Network has defined for itself. This broader suite of agenda items has two foci: first, pursuing RMIT’s strategic positioning in the Associate Degree market, and second, establishing a firmer base for understanding the place of Associate Degrees in RMIT’s qualification firmament.

The Network’s agenda for 2012 includes the following key items:

- Improving data collection and analysis on key items such as: demographic characteristics of enrolling students; entry level academic aptitudes of enrolling students; retention rates; vocational outcomes for Associate Degree graduates; academic progression of Associate Degree graduates who are selected into RMIT undergraduate programs.
- Building a consolidated understanding of the pathways from RMIT Associate Degrees to RMIT undergraduate degrees, recognising that selection processes and credit arrangements differ across the University.
- Establishing mechanisms for describing and enhancing Associate Degree pedagogy.
- Providing well-structured, as well as semi-formal, opportunities for reflective sharing about Associate Degree development, implementation and teaching practice.
- Generating an understanding of what kind of industry engagement practice will best support the development, delivery and review of RMIT Associate Degrees.

As this agenda makes plain, significant outcomes from the LTIF grant to establish an Associate Degree Network include:

- A self-sustaining Network over the longer term
- A focussed, strategic and practical approach to pursuing RMIT’s Associate Degree strategy.

4. Dissemination strategies and outputs

At the outset, the Associate Degree Network adopted a strategic approach to disseminating outcomes and outputs. The critical strands in this approach were:

- Inclusiveness. Ensuring that opportunities were made available for direct involvement by staff with varying responsibilities for Associate Degrees, whether as leaders, developers, implementers, program managers.
- Relevance. Framing an agenda that targeted the pressing needs of those involved with Associate Degrees.
- Breadth. Drawing on the expertise, experience and perspectives of people external to RMIT in order to pitch a wide frame of reference for internal deliberation and practice.

It is envisaged that these approaches will be deployed by the Network in 2012.

Specific strategies and activities for dissemination included the following.

- Setting up a collaborative workspace in Yammer which is accessible to Network members.
- Maintaining ongoing contact with University leaders so that they are engaged and informed about the Network’s activities. Examples include:
  - Inviting the Dean – Learning and Teaching, to make a presentation to the August VETLink Forum (see Appendix D – Professor Crisp’s PowerPoint presentation).
  - Scheduling discussions with PVCs Learning and Teaching regarding the draft narrative prepared by Network members (see Appendix A).
• Conduct a VETLink Forum on Associate Degrees in August 2011 – see Appendix C. The Forum was attended by 108 RMIT staff members. The Forum involved: presentations from RMIT staff and representatives from other Associate Degree providers; eleven poster presentations by RMIT staff; structured discussions on key items of interest to participants followed by plenary discussion. The group discussion framework for the Forum is at Appendix D. Outcomes of the Forum are variously reflected in: the Network’s 2012 agenda; the refinement of understandings about the marketing task and other matters dealt with by the Network in meetings in the last quarter of 2011; the draft RMIT Associate Degree narrative at Appendix A.

• Conduct of six Network meetings over the period July to December 2011, distribution of minutes, tasking of members with actions and reporting back to Network meetings.

• At the August meeting of the Network, an action plan was framed to support development of Business Cases for proposed Associate Degrees and for exploring pedagogical approaches. The action plan was disseminated for review and then implemented.

• Review and reflect on Business Case development for proposed Associate Degrees in the context of curriculum and pedagogical concepts emerging from other Network activities. Review and reflection were undertaken by Network members in collaboration with developers between September and November 2011. Outputs from this process were reflected in the draft statement on Associate Degrees at RMIT. Outcomes from this process will be disseminated via a seminar on Associate Degree curriculum and pedagogy to be held at the end of semester one 2012.

• Conduct of an AQF Forum in November 2011, led by Suzi McKenna (formerly of the AQF Council Secretariat). The purpose of the AQF Forum was to establish a firmer understanding of how Associate Degrees are differentiated from other AQF level 6 qualifications and what the AQF design imposes in terms of program design, pedagogy and pathways. The Forum was attended by 24 Associate Degree program leaders from the three Colleges. Outcomes were disseminated through a report to Network members and Associate Degree program teams. A copy of Suzy McKenna’s presentation is included at Appendix F.

5. Evaluation of project outcomes

The evaluation framework for this project relied on:

• continuous feedback from Network members regarding the relevance and applicability of its activities

• achievement of key milestones allied with substantive outcomes.

All key milestones were achieved. The main signals of positive outcomes are addressed in previous sections. The following outputs and outcomes demonstrate the impact of the Network.

5.1 A sustainable RMIT Associate Degree Network has been formed following enthusiastic endorsement for its continuation. All those responsible for leading implementation of RMIT’s Associate Degree strategy were engaged in the Network in the last half of 2011, and have signalled their intention to maintain their involvement in 2012.

Staff responsible for developing and teaching Associate Degrees were engaged directly and in a variety of ways (as outlined in Section 4). Staff response to these activities, and to creation and implementation of action plans that supported develop Associate Degree programs, was uniformly positive.

5.2 An agreed draft definition of an RMIT Associate Degree was produced by the Network. This was a task that, until the Network focussed on it, had eluded completion since at least 2007.

5.3 An ongoing and substantive agenda has been framed for the Network in 2012.
5.4 Business cases/program designs were supported to completion for three new Associate Degree programs:

- Associate Degree in Screen and Media Production
- Associate Degree in Professional Screenwriting
- Associate Degree in Professional Writing and Editing.
6. Budget report

The LTIF grant for this project was $20,000. Total expenditure was $20,899.45

A financial statement (in PDF), signed by the team leader and relevant Finance Manager of acquittal of funds is attached to this report.
7. Appendices

Appendix A: The Associate Degree at RMIT:
Final draft statement developed by the AD Network for discussion with Associate PVCs Learning and Teaching

An RMIT Associate degree is a stand alone RMIT accredited AQF qualification whose primary focus is to provide students with the opportunity to undertake a 2 year study program to develop skills and knowledge for immediate application and value in the workplace.

Associate degrees also include the skills and knowledge to allow students to undertake further undergraduate studies, with pathways into AQF 7 qualifications with recognition for up to 192 credit points into a three or four year degree program in a related discipline.

The target groups for the associate degree include school leavers seeking career entry and members of the workforce seeking career advancement.

The RMIT associate degree is a paraprofessional qualification based on a combination of high level technical skills with the theoretical knowledge from one or more disciplines. It has a unique curriculum that enables students to develop competency in critical skill areas, a greater capability to apply a depth of knowledge, and breadth of skill to demonstrate initiative, judgement, autonomy, and responsibility. The pedagogy of the RMIT associate degree is student centred, enabling students to engage in self directed learning for the application of knowledge and skills in work and further study.

An Associate Degree is an RMIT accredited program based on 16 courses of 12 credit points. To enable students to reach the level of cognitive, technical and creative thinking skills required to achieve vocational outcome and address longer term workforce needs the associate degree is delivered over the equivalent of two 16-17 weeks semesters per year. This extended learning time and delivery by staff with vocational qualifications and experience, plus the focus on applied learning and assessment with an emphasis on vocational skill development, clearly distinguishes the associate degree from the first two years of a degree program.
Appendix B – Participants in the Associate Degree Network

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Role in associate degree development</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marcos Anastasiou</td>
<td>Office of Director TAFE</td>
<td>Coordination of development of three associate degrees in School of Media and Communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenn Blair</td>
<td>Director VET Programs</td>
<td>Coordination of development of three associate degrees in School of Media and Communications</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Creative Industries</td>
<td>Coordination of development of three associate degrees in School of Media and Communications</td>
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<td></td>
<td>School of Media and Communication</td>
<td>Coordination of development of three associate degrees in School of Media and Communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn Cap</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Identification of professional development needs and advice on sources of funding and other support</td>
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<td></td>
<td>VET Workforce Development</td>
<td>Identification of professional development needs and advice on sources of funding and other support</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Office of Director TAFE</td>
<td>Identification of professional development needs and advice on sources of funding and other support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith Cowlishaw</td>
<td>Head of School</td>
<td>HoS responsible for the development and implementation of six associate degrees</td>
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<td></td>
<td>School of Fashion and Textiles and School of</td>
<td>HoS responsible for the development and implementation of six associate degrees</td>
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<td>Design</td>
<td>HoS responsible for the development and implementation of six associate degrees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Georges</td>
<td>Deputy Director TAFE</td>
<td>Oversight of and support for development of associate degrees in Engineering.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Science, Engineering &amp; Health</td>
<td>Oversight of and support for development of associate degrees in Engineering.</td>
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<td>Coordination of development of three associate degrees in School of Media and Communications</td>
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Appendix C – VETLink Forum Agenda

ASSOCIATE DEGREES AT RMIT
an LTIF Funded forum
8.45 am-1:30 pm August 26th, RMIT Research Lounge Building 8, level 5

This forum aims to provide managers and teachers involved in the design and delivery of associate degrees with an opportunity to share their experiences and to explore the nature of associate degrees in the context of the national and institutional strategic directions. The forum also aims to help shape a shared narrative about associate degree programs as a basis for promotion of these new programs to future students, industry and the community.

Included in the program is a poster competition which is open to all current RMIT associate degree programs and programs proposed for introduction in 2012 and 2013.

Forum program

8.45am – 9.15am Arrival and viewing of posters - tea and coffee available

9.10am Welcome
- Vicki Molley, Head of Business TAFE School and 2011 RMIT VETLink Convener

9.15am Introduction to the forum
- Helen Smith, Office of the Director TAFE/LIU – Forum Facilitator

The associate degree landscape
- Professor Geoffrey Crisp, Dean, Learning and Teaching, RMIT

9.30am Panel Discussion – The emerging Associate Degree landscape

Associate Degree models at Victorian tertiary providers:
- Alicia McCool, Manager, Deakin at Your Doorstep, Deakin University and Katrina Holabird, Chisholm Institute;
- Rose Stephens, Director Learning School of Creative & Service Industries, Swinburne University of Technology;
- Keith Cowlishaw, Head of School, Fashion and Textiles, RMIT University

Questions to the panel

10.40am – Morning tea and voting on posters

11.10am Group discussions – sharing Associate Degree experiences

- Associate degree program architecture
- Developing an associate degree – practical issues and solutions
- Learning and teaching in associate degrees – issues and opportunities
- Making choices: what goes and what stays when associate degrees are introduced?

12.10pm Closing plenary – key ideas from group discussions: where to from here?
- Sally Leavold, Deputy Director TAFE DSC College – Convener RMIT Associate Degree Network

12.50pm – Announcement of winning poster

1.00pm – Lunch
Appendix D – VETLink Forum – framework for group discussion

Associate degrees at RMIT Forum: Group discussion

This is an opportunity to share experiences in designing and delivering associate degrees and to explore new options for associate degree curriculum and pedagogy in the emerging tertiary space. Below are some perspectives and questions to help frame your discussion.

What is an associate degree?

An associate degree qualifies individuals who apply underpinning technical and theoretical knowledge in a range of contexts to undertake para-professional work and as a pathway for further learning.

AOF 2011

What do our students want from their studies?

Some expectations that students have about their university studies are enduring and are common for most student groups, including an expectation of personal and vocational relevance and coherence in what is studied and assessed and the capacity to be appropriately employed on graduation.


What’s the RMIT strategic context?

RMIT will aspire to:

- Foster independent thought and action through projects, studies and work placements to encourage a focus on and experience of achievement.
- Nurture openness and creativity through the excitement of encountering diverse cultures and different ways of understanding and working.
- Build a sense of belonging and commitment by making connections for students with their chosen professions and occupations and with their fellow students.
- Develop in students the deep knowledge and the skills and attributes required for success in their chosen professions or occupations.
- Understand the experience and aspirations of our students, and use this knowledge to shape improvement in education and services.

Transforming the Future: Strategic Plan RMIT 2015

We desperately need new pedagogical models which will be effective with students from an extremely diverse range of backgrounds and pathways.

Professor Marcia Devlin, Deakin University: The Australian Higher Education August 24 2011

How appropriate are our teaching models?

Industry partnerships in vocational education have been a feature of RMIT since its foundation, and these relationships become ever more important as RMIT uses the full range of its tertiary offerings to build educational pathways and opportunities for lifelong learning in order to enhance students’ preparation for career success and mobility.


Developing its tertiary range, RMIT will build on the current successes of associate degrees and skills electives.

What is an associate degree at RMIT?

What pedagogical approaches are appropriate for associate degrees?

How do we integrate vocational and disciplinary learning to ensure that graduates are work ready and able to articulate to degree studies?

Is it possible to combine competency-based and disciplinary learning within an associate degree program?

What do we say to potential students about associate degrees?

What do we tell prospective employers about what an associate degree graduate may contribute to their workforce?