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Lifelong Learnings

Providing a vital service for the national workforce, TAFE Queensland is setting out to remind the public of the value of vocational education and training.

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After gaining qualifications in accounting and marketing, Jodi Schmidt, CEO of TAFE Queensland, kicked off her career in local government working for Brisbane City Council. She moved to the United Kingdom to work for the National Treatment Agency, then returned to Australia to join Southbank Institute of Technology. Jodi has had varying experience between public and private sectors, working with the government to reform the vocational education and training (VET) sector in Queensland. This culminated in her appointment in July last year as the first CEO of TAFE Queensland.

Jodi notes that the challenges for TAFE Queensland have been numerous and varied. One key issue the organisation faces is a public perception problem. “TAFE Queensland delivers qualifications to the lion’s share of the workforce in Queensland; around 60 per cent of jobs require a vocational education and training qualification. It is sometimes difficult to attract students to these courses, even though they will get really good job outcomes, and that’s what we’re focused on doing. Queensland and the rest of Australia need to understand the

value of what a TAFE qualification actually means. 90 per cent of people who study with TAFE Queensland gain employment or go on to further study about three months after they complete.

“Generally, vocational and educational training is a misunderstood sector; it’s a sector where, depending on where you grew up in Australia, you’ll have a view of what it’s for and who goes there, and generally it’s considered a second-rate option. What people rarely understand is that we deliver to 180,000 people every year, we issue around 65,000 qualifications across Queensland annually, and we deliver programs across hundreds of different disciplines.”

As part of VET reforms in Queensland, Jodi helped the government introduce a five-year program to deregulate the system. “Historically, vocational education and training was delivered by monopoly providers, which were TAFE institutes owned by the government. Governments across the country are making changes to the way they provide funding. Government has set its sight on raising the bar for quality and addressing systemic issues hampering the best possible output, and will attempt to do this

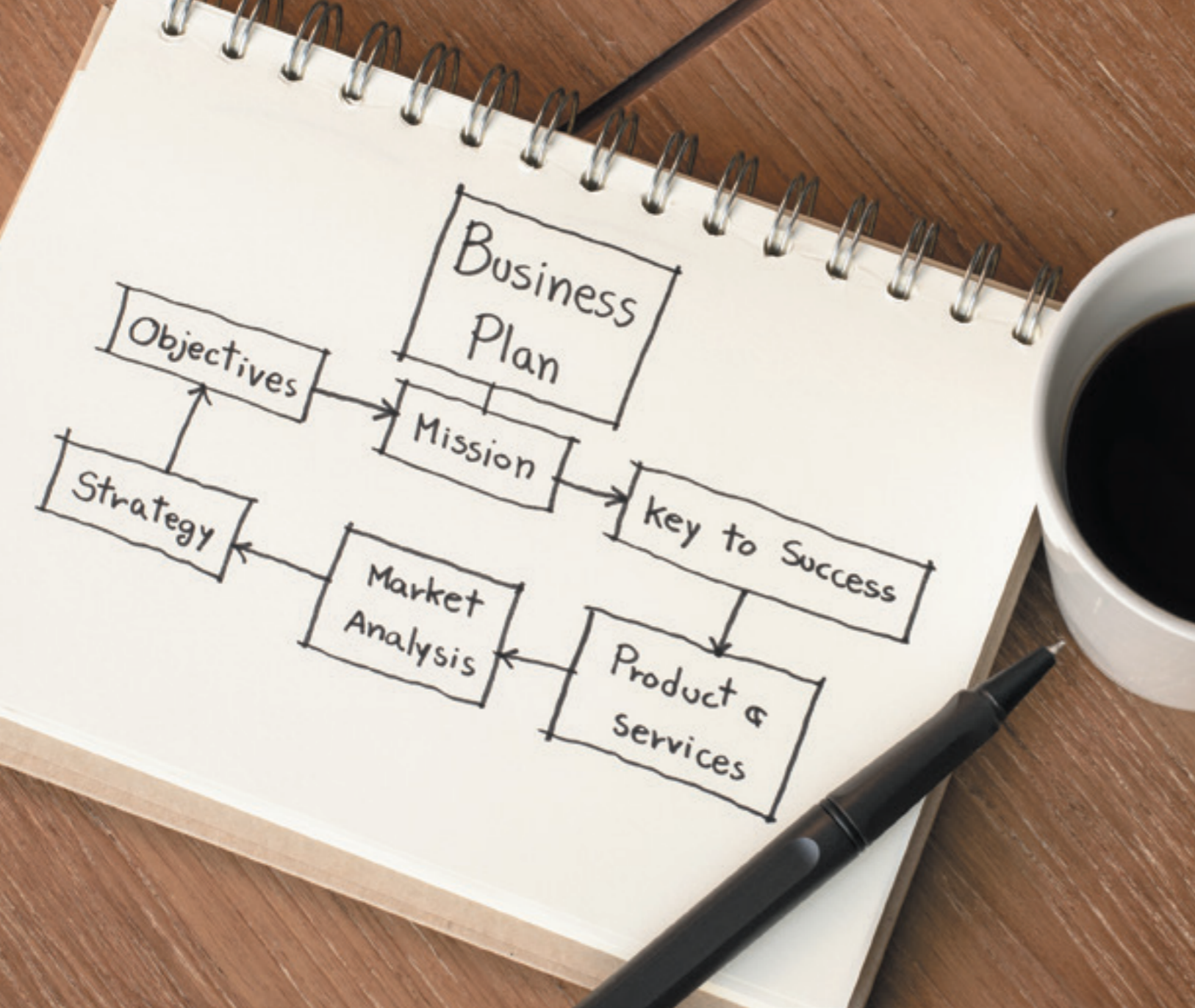
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by creating a training market to increase competition. We’re seeing publicly owned training providers like TAFE having to compete with the private sector for all of their business.

“We are reforming TAFE Queensland, changing the way in which it delivers to make sure that it delivers innovative training to people that leads to job outcomes. We have strong links to industry, and the employers we service value and seek out our graduates because of the skills we impart to them through our training. As part of the reform of our organisation, we are further strengthening our offering by bringing together what used to be 13 institutes and having them operate as one connected organisation.”

While TAFE Queensland is a government organisation that provides services to the community, Jodi believes government protection shouldn’t determine its success. “We need to be a commercial organisation that is successful because the service it delivers is excellent, and we are certainly putting every effort in to ensure that that is the case. I would say that we have proof in that we have 89-per-cent student satisfaction, and our employer satisfaction levels—from the people who receive our students >



once they graduate—are more than 82 per cent.”

According to Jodi, the purpose of TAFE Queensland is to change people’s lives and help them by developing their practical skills through training. This mission is defined by the organisation’s key values. “Our first value is commerciality, and what we mean by that is that we continue to deliver things that make returns to people to improve their lives.

“Our second value is innovation, and by that we mean encouraging people to push boundaries and to continue to improve things. It’s a value that underpins almost every educational organisation, and the effectiveness in which they draw innovation through every part of the business ultimately determines their success.

“The next value is teamwork. Part of our strategy is about collaborating. We believe firmly that collaboration, partnerships, and alliances are the future, not just in education delivery but in business. Working together as one TAFE Queensland through all levels of the organisation means a consistent and quality experience for our students and employers at every touchpoint.

“Finally, accountability: do, and deliver what we say we’re going to deliver, both within the organisation and to our clients.”

The education sector has changed dramatically over the years with advancements in online technology and communication. “We now have the ability to put a class together that includes people from Far North Queensland to the most southern or western points of the state. We use a combination of videoconferencing and online interactive learning material—the

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full gamut of technologies—to bring people together into learning spaces.

“We continue to investigate the most effective ways for individuals—since we all have different learning styles—to achieve their goals. We have more than 60 points across the state where we can videoconference; we have a learning management system available 24/7; our learning materials are available to students, whether it be for assessments, study materials, or readings, where they can catch up on delivery that they may have missed. It also allows students to interact even if they’re not in the same location.”

TAFE Queensland is currently going through a relaunch of its brand to help change public perception and to signal change within the organisation. “We’re changing our delivery model, we’re becoming much more focused on meeting our students’ needs, and we want to show that. Our approach is to say, ‘For too long it has been about the doctors, the lawyers, and the journalists; it’s time we celebrate the doers: the builders, the bakers, the fancy-clothes makers. These are the people that really make the world turn. They make our society work, and they are there every day making sure that we live the lifestyles that we have.

“Vocational education and training has almost double the number of people in its system at any point in time in comparison with the universities. TAFE Queensland, as an organisation, touches more people collectively than all the universities in Queensland every year. We’ve taken a campaign to market, and our tagline ‘Make Great Happen’ has had a really positive impact and we are really pleased with the feedback we’ve been getting from staff, students, and employers.

“We are building a stronger TAFE Queensland to ensure that we continue to develop skills to boost the economy in Queensland and nationally. We’re here for the people of Queensland. Because we are a large and dynamic organisation, we have a lot to offer to students from other states in Australia. TAFE Queensland also has a large international delivery component: we’re involved in delivering education in the South Pacific where we run campuses through the Australia-Pacific Technical College.

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“Fuji Xerox understands change, we are a company that is forever evolving and adapting to changes. This is why we have been supportive whilst TAFE underwent their recent reform and proud to be a technology partner to them in the future.” - Sunette Carroll, Business Development Executive – Education & Government, QLD, Fuji Xerox Australia Pty Ltd