

## **Partners and Pathways in Education: the Whyalla model**

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*This paper describes the educational relationships that have been established between three key educational institutions within the regional city of Whyalla in South Australia. Edward John Eyre High School, Spencer Institute of TAFE and the Whyalla Campus of the University of South Australia have formed a partnership to promote the educational pathways available in the area of Business Studies. The regional educational opportunities created will assist in retaining young people who wish to study in the business field as well as encourage graduates to remain within their local communities. This important initiative embraces the rationale of successful learning communities and aims to develop skilled professional business people who will become future leaders in business and enterprise and contribute to the economic and social success of regional South Australia.*

### **Introduction**

This paper outlines the links established between the Business and Enterprise unit at the Whyalla Campus of the University of South Australia and the business staff of the Spencer Institute of TAFE and the Whyalla Secondary College in order to provide clear, direct pathways for students wishing to continue their studies into higher education.

Whyalla is an industrial city of approximately 23 000 people located 400 kilometres North West of Adelaide on upper Spencer Gulf. The predominantly steel-making city has a declining population. In 1976 the population was 33 390 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1995, p 339). It is characterised by high unemployment and many people reliant on welfare due primarily to downsizing and restructuring within its main industry. (2001 Census data show 13.1 per cent unemployment for Whyalla compared to 7.6 per cent for South Australia.) Having a university campus, Whyalla is frequently promoted as "The Education City". However, the concept of ongoing life-long learning is generally not part of the culture of the city's youth.

The pathways project undertaken by the three key educational institutions presents a model that aims to improve tertiary education participation and assist in keeping youth within their communities. The model also fits into the framework of the Australian National Training Authority's Learning Communities Project adopted by many regional centres throughout Australia (ANTA 2002). The objectives of these learning community projects include:

- promoting and supporting lifelong learning and the connection of learning opportunities;
- promoting employment and training for all people (in particular youth and those who are at risk);
- maximising opportunities for all members of the community, particularly the economically disadvantaged and the business, government and education sectors; and
- developing strategies to assist local young people to think globally and act locally (Toowoomba Learning Communities Network, 2002; Hill, 2002).

## **Background**

The Whyalla Secondary College comprises two public schools with students in years 8–10 and a senior school with years 11 and 12 that also accepts year 10 graduates from one private year 8–12 school. Edward John Eyre High School is the senior campus of the Whyalla Secondary College and has an enrolment of approximately 200 Stage 1 and 190 Stage 2 students. It also enrolls approximately 20 – 30 adult re-entry students each year. The senior secondary business curriculum has traditionally provided an opportunity for students to gain a firm foundation for tertiary study. The publicly examined subjects of Accounting Studies, Economics, Legal Studies, Information Technology and the publicly assessed Business Studies subject, have exposed students to career paths through tertiary study at the Whyalla Campus of the University of South Australia and the Spencer Institute of TAFE. The school to university transition in Whyalla has been streamlined and enhanced by having students visit the university for some classes, particularly in the areas of accounting and economics. Business staff from Edward John Eyre High School have also held part-time lecturing positions at the local university or TAFE campuses. This has enabled students to receive the most current information about procedures, expectations and course requirements. Another initiative, undertaken in collaboration with Spencer Institute of TAFE, offers a business pathway by providing Stage 1 students with the opportunity to complete a Certificate 1 in Business (Office Skills) within the first year of their South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE). This program is supported within the school by means of a fully functioning practice office where competencies are assessed in a workplace environment. Students are encouraged to gain traineeships and continue with higher levels of certificates through the Spencer Institute of TAFE.

The Spencer Institute of TAFE covers eighty-five per cent of the geographic area of South Australia and provides an open-entry/open-exit, self-paced, flexible model of learning. The Institute provides an educational service for people aged 15 years and over located in rural and isolated areas and larger provincial cities. The awards offered by Business Studies include Certificate 1 to Advanced Diploma, and cover the program areas of Office Administration, Financial Services and Accounting, Management, Policing and Justice Studies, Small Business Management, Retail Operations, Information Technology and Workplace Assessment and Training. Students are able to enter Spencer Institute of TAFE courses at any time and the various exit points from courses allow pathways to employment and/or other courses.

The Whyalla Campus of the University of South Australia is the only regional campus of a metropolitan university in South Australia. It is a matrix managed, multi-disciplinary campus of approximately 60 staff and 600 students, with academic and other connections to Schools and Units within the wider University. Studying at the Whyalla campus combines many of the advantages of city and rural living. Programs are offered in a broad range of disciplines such as business, nursing, social work, engineering, and computer and information science, reflecting the University's commitment to providing access to higher education for non-metropolitan students. The personalised attention that low staff/student ratios allow and the excellent on-campus student accommodation provide an ideal environment for study.

In the Business discipline, the Whyalla campus offers a three-year undergraduate *Bachelor of Business* degree that may be studied on a full-time or part-time basis, either internally or externally. It is designed to equip graduates with the diverse range of skills and qualities necessary for business management. The Bachelor of Business contains a major in accountancy. Beyond the major, students then choose to complete a minor in professional accounting, e-business, or tourism or hospitality, depending upon the direction they would like their degree to take them. Alternatively, they may choose a minor in another area of interest from those that are available through flexible delivery. The broad nature of the degree allows it to meet the educational needs of those students who wish to become professional accountants and gain entry into the two professional accounting bodies in Australia (CPA Australia and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia), and also of those students who want a more general preparation for a career in business and commerce

Under a collaborative arrangement with the Spencer Institute of TAFE, initiated as a result of demand from local industry, those students who plan to work in the developing areas of tourism or hospitality

can spend the fifth semester studying the TAFE awards in the chosen area and receive full credit for four courses within the degree. This means that students can exit with a TAFE certificate as well as the degree. The result is the creation of a career path for local and regional people, who can, as a consequence, stay in the region and avoid the additional costs of studying in the city. The community is also advantaged, as these students are likely to accept local employment and remain in the region. Likewise, TAFE tourism and hospitality graduates who subsequently enrol into the Bachelor of Business will receive full credit within the degree for the awards they have completed. It is also noteworthy that the University of South Australia credits TAFE awards with bonus points for entry into undergraduate programs.

In addition, a further point of entry to undergraduate programs at the Whyalla campus is provided by successful completion of the Whyalla Bridging Program. Bridging programs are designed to encourage better access to higher education by groups such as disadvantaged persons from rural and isolated areas (Martin, Sawyer and Rouse, 2001, p. 40). It is a one-year, generic program available on a full-time or part-time basis that focuses on adult learning and academic skills building.

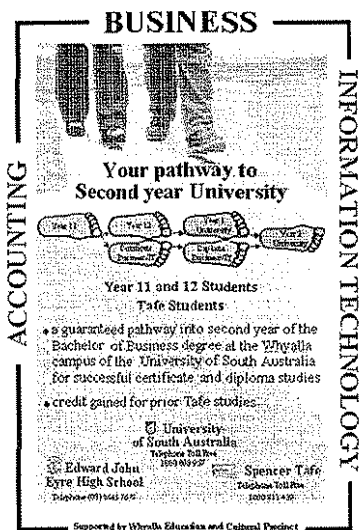
### **The Pathways Project**

James (2000) argues that the factors inhibiting university participation for rural and isolated people are primarily socio-economic. He reports of social divisions within Australia where only six rural or isolated Australians attend university for every ten urban people and where only five people from lower socio-economic backgrounds attend university for every ten people of medium or high socio-economic backgrounds. James notes that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to see any relevance of a university education for themselves and are less likely to believe their teachers were encouraging them to aim for university. The West Review of Higher Education, Funding, and Policy noted also that "students continued to be drawn disproportionately from higher socio-economic status backgrounds and from urban areas" (West 1998, p 92).

Some of the challenges facing educators within Whyalla and the surrounding area include convincing young people to engage in post secondary education, and encouraging them to consider attending their local TAFE or university campus so that they can join the ranks of the skilled and gain employment. The educational institutions aim to allow the region's youth to have the confidence to engage in further education by ensuring that they are not blocked from future study because they may have experienced lack of success at school, or spent several years in unemployment, under-employment, or in unfulfilling employment. It was perceived by the authors that one strategy that could be used was to

alert students to the possibilities provided by their local tertiary education institutions by showing them that there were a number of pathways to gaining the education they required or desired, either now or in the future.

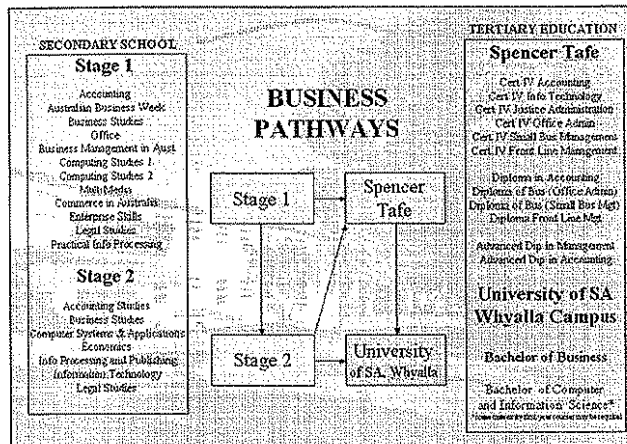
To initiate the pathways project, the Senior Lecturer in Charge of Business and Enterprise at the Whyalla Campus of the University of South Australia met with representatives from the Senior Secondary College, Spencer Institute of TAFE and the Whyalla Education and Cultural Precinct with the aim of formalising the relationships that existed between the three educational institutions and presenting them in easy to read and understand print materials for distribution within schools and TAFE campuses within the Upper Spencer Gulf and Eyre Peninsula regions. These materials would support other promotional resources, but in particular make clear the direct pathways available to university studies. A poster and brochure were developed. As can be seen in Figure 1, the poster, via the feet and arrows, illustrates that year 11 students can either continue on to complete year 12 studies and enter university directly as a school leaver, or upon completion of year 11 studies choose to continue their study at TAFE and on completion of a Diploma in Business enter university as a TAFE graduate. Considerable credit can be gained within the university business program for prior TAFE studies. This “pathways poster” is distributed to all schools and Institutes of TAFE in the region as part of the Whyalla Education and Cultural Precinct visits that are undertaken each year.



**Figure 1** Poster prepared for Secondary School and TAFE students

The brochure continues “the path to second year university” theme as shown in Figure 2. Inside, it itemises the Stage 1 and Stage 2 courses in the business discipline at Secondary School level, the

Certificate, Diploma and Advanced Diploma awards offered by Spencer Institute of TAFE and the programs they articulate into that are available at the Whyalla Campus of the University of South Australia. The brochure also illustrates the business pathways and links between these educational institutions, and provides contact details for each.



**CONTACTS:**

**Edward John Eyre High School**  
Telephone (08) 8645 7677

**Spencer Tafe**  
Telephone Toll Free  
1800 813 439

**University of South Australia**  
Whyalla Campus  
Telephone Toll Free  
1800 808 957

**BUSINESS**

**Your path**  
to  
second  
year  
**University**


ACCOUNTING

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY


Supported by Whyalla Education and Cultural Precinct

**Figure 2 Pathways Brochure prepared for School and TAFE Students**

A second poster, "Taking the next step is easy", as illustrated in Figure 3 is distributed to the regional Institutes of TAFE. This poster itemises the credit that may be awarded.



UNIVERSITY OF SA - WHYALLA CAMPUS



**COMPLETED YOUR TAFE  
BUSINESS AWARD?**

**TAKING  
THE NEXT STEP  
IS EASY.....**

Students from South Australian Institutes of TAFE can follow an exclusive pathway.

At the University of South Australia, Whyalla Campus, your TAFE Business award will be credited with units within the Bachelor of Business degree.

**WBBU Bachelor of Business** 108 units

The Bachelor of Business is a three year program that can be studied on campus or through flexible delivery. It is designed to equip graduates with the diverse range of skills and qualities needed for business management. Students study a major in accountancy and are able to complete a minor in professional accounting, or alternatively in e-business, tourism or hospitality, or other area of interest.

The following credit may be gained for the respective TAFE awards:

- Advanced Diploma of Accounting 54 units
- Diploma of Accounting 36 units
- Other business awards:
- Advanced Diploma 36 units, Diploma 27 units, Certificate IV 18 units.

We are also the only university where your TAFE award is credited with bonus points for entry to all our undergraduate programs.

Please contact Whyalla Campus Central on (08) 8647 6161 or Janet Sawyer, Program Director, on (08) 8647 6010 for further information.

**Figure 3 Poster prepared for TAFE Students**

Generally the holder of an Advanced Diploma of Accounting from TAFE will receive 54 units of credit, which is the equivalent of 12 courses, or one and a half year's study. Holders of TAFE Diplomas in Accounting are awarded credit in 8 courses, which is the equivalent of one year's full-time study. For other relevant TAFE business awards credit is usually 8 courses (36 units) for an Advanced Diploma, 6 courses (27 units) for a Diploma and 4 courses (18 units) for a Certificate IV.

Graduates from Institutes of TAFE are a valuable cohort of students for the University of South Australia and it is anticipated that an outcome of the pathways project will be an increase in the number of TAFE graduates who choose to continue their studies at university in Whyalla. The number of students admitted on the basis of TAFE awards for the past two years is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 UniSA Commencers admitted on the basis of TAFE**

	Enrolled 2000	Enrolled 2001	Enrolled 2002	Enrolled 2003
Whyalla Campus	14	22	21	41
Total	325	450	547	781

It is noteworthy that the Whyalla Campus recorded a 95 per cent increase for 2002-2003 while the overall University increase was 43 per cent.

The findings of a recent survey of commencing students at the Whyalla campus showed that the majority of new students were in the 15 - 24 age group. In relation to educational background, the highest qualification attempted was reported to be Year 12 (55%) and TAFE (27.5%). It appears that students attending Whyalla campus are making a clear decision to do so with 69 per cent indicating that it was their first preference. Sixty-three per cent of respondents were the first person in their family to have attended university. In response to a question asking *Who influenced you the most in your decision to attend university?* some age relationships emerged with younger respondents (15-24 years) indicating a strong influence by their teachers (Hughes 2003). These survey results would tend to suggest that the collaborative efforts of the educational institutions are yielding positive outcomes.

Each year, prior to the closing date for the South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre (SATAC) applications, business staff and counsellors from the public and private schools and the Spencer Institute of TAFE in Whyalla meet with university business staff on campus for a "Happy Hour/get-together" at which the business programs available at the Whyalla Campus are discussed and program schedules, course statements, and standard letters addressed to secondary school students and TAFE business graduates, are provided for distribution as appropriate. Staff at the various educational institutions are encouraged to promote the established pathways to higher education to their students through keeping them well informed of the options and programs available, bringing the students onto the campus for guest lectures by university staff, visiting on Open Days, and generally highlighting the advantages for them of studying locally.

## **Conclusion**

It is acknowledged that many young people who have not been successful school participants need a pathway whereby they can improve their literacy and numeracy skills if necessary and develop appropriate study skills. By joining TAFE and negotiating a program tailored to their own needs students can position themselves to join a university program in the future and gain credit for their TAFE studies. The development of the suite of posters and the brochure had the express purpose of highlighting the multiple ways of gaining access to learning opportunities. Accompanied by careful counselling and attention to the emotional state of applicants the Whyalla model should help to overcome the anxiety and fear some young people experience when they contemplate further education.



Being the only regionally based university campus in South Australia, the Whyalla campus of the University of South Australia has a unique place in higher education in the State and is an important resource for the region as it provides access to many student groups who may not otherwise be able to avail themselves of higher education. To reach its full potential the campus must not only develop and maintain strong links with its community but also become an integral part of the social and economic fabric of the region (University of South Australia, 2002). The work of the pathways project group allows secondary students and TAFE students to become familiar with the opportunities available to them and encourages the community's youth to stay in the region and study at their local TAFE or university campus. In turn, graduates from regional campuses are usually more willing to work in regional organisations, a situation that serves to curb the current crisis of the difficulty of attracting professionals into rural and remote areas.

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- photographs (black & white is best)
- pen and ink drawings (by children or adults)
- other suitable visual material

that you think would grace the pages of the journal, please submit this (following the procedures outlined for submission of articles).

We'll acknowledge all work used.

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