

Looking Back at TRAC

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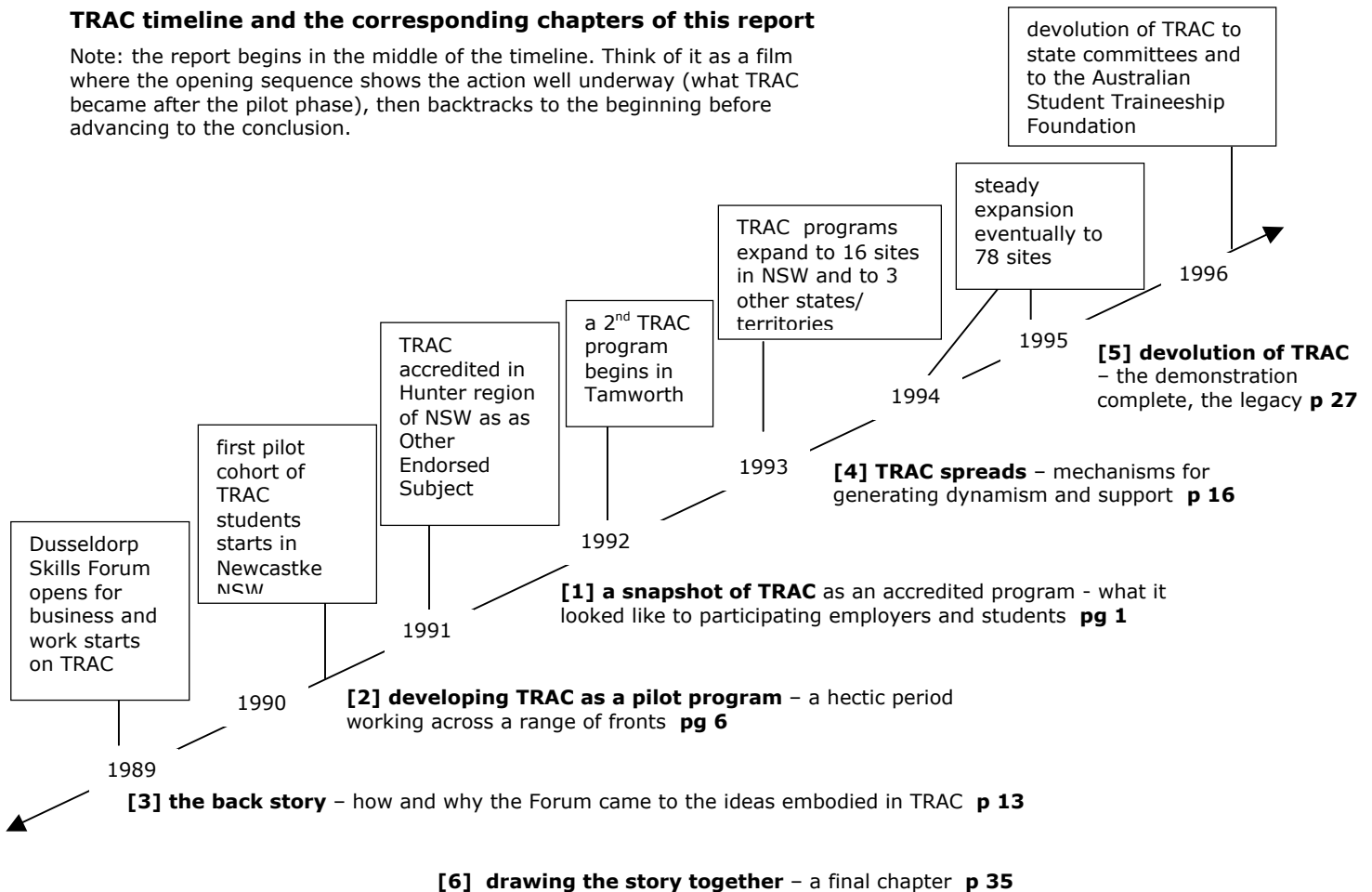
TRAC was a pioneering program of vocational learning for school students in Years 11 and 12 centred around structured and assessed work placements. It was designed and developed by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum to bridge the almost complete disconnect, at the time, between the skills students acquired through school and the skills they would need to enter the labour market.

By every measure – and there were careful evaluations both by the Forum and by external researchers – TRAC more than achieved its aims. It demonstrated, on a national scale, that upper secondary schools can *and should* prepare students for work in ways that are rigorous and accredited.

This 'look back' is not to re-assess the TRAC program itself, although its history and operation are described in some detail. The purpose, rather, is to search TRAC's development, implementation, and eventual devolution for lessons that might be learned – underlying principles that might exist – which could usefully be applied to other of the Forum's ventures and ambitions. The image of an iceberg, although a cliché, does illustrate the idea: it is to look for the essential, but submerged, foundations which enabled TRAC, the visible surface, to achieve the successes it did.

TRAC timeline and the corresponding chapters of this report

Note: the report begins in the middle of the timeline. Think of it as a film where the opening sequence shows the action well underway (what TRAC became after the pilot phase), then backtracks to the beginning before advancing to the conclusion.



1. Snapshot of a TRAC Program

A description of a TRAC program in action including its core components:

- (i) the students
- (ii) the curriculum
- (iii) the Management Committee
- (iv) the Coordinator
- (v) the employers
- (vi) the schools
- (vii) the funding model

The TRAC program selected is the one undertaken by 37 Year 11 students in the Hunter region of NSW during the 1991 school year. These were still early days for TRAC – indeed, this cohort marked the transition of TRAC from a pilot program for the schools involved to one fully accredited by the Board of Studies as a 2-unit Other Endorsed Studies subject. It was, in effect, the first ‘real’ TRAC program but it illustrates well in general, and often in detail, the 77 TRACs which were established over the following few years.

A brief introduction, first, to some of those involved because reducing TRAC to its component parts seems to remove the sense of liveliness, even exuberance, that characterised it.

Rob Player, at the time Director of Belmont TAFE and a member of the TRAC Management Committee, interviewed for this report: *It was fun. We felt we were doing pioneering work and we were. We took risks by going against the ‘way things are done’. Structured work placements were new. Asking employers to assess school students was new. Asking them to pay for the privilege was new. There was energy and enthusiasm..*

But it was more than that. We had a profound belief that what we were doing was needed. That our kids were being short changed by an education system that didn’t give them real opportunities to prepare for the world of work – that favoured academic studies to the exclusion of vocational ones.

Maryanne Olive, a TRAC student from St Francis Xavier College, interviewed for the TRAC newsletter in December 1991: *It’s been hard but I don’t regret it, TRAC taught me a lot about the retail industry and helped me to cope with part-time work ... It’s different from normal work experience where you just look at what’s happening. With TRAC you have to get in and do the work and show how you have mastered it.*

Elaine Steel, Office Manager for TRAC employer chartered accountants Cutcher and Neale interviewed for the TRAC Newsletter in December 1991: *This sort of program should be available to every kid – I wish it had been around when my children went through high school... I was on a TRAC interview panel recently and the students came across as very keen to succeed. They seemed to really want to get something out of the experience.*

The outcomes for the 37 Year 11 students who made up the TRAC Class of ‘91, were pleasing – keeping in mind that the purpose of TRAC was to link school to work. The fact that so many students chose to stay on at school for Year 12 was not an outcome originally intended by

TRAC although the Forum quickly recognised that bringing vocational education into secondary schools made schooling in general more relevant and congenial for many young people, a satisfying result for all. Of the 37 students:

- 7 left school during the year to take up full time and part time jobs;
- 6 left school during the year to seek work (as of December 1991 2 had gained jobs);
- 1 left school to undertake further training;
- 15 are staying at school and will do TRAC in Year 12;
- 8 are staying at school but will leave the TRAC program.

The students and their parents were surveyed at the end of the year: 90 per cent of the students felt they were virtually in charge of their own performance and progress in TRAC (and liked that); 90 per cent felt it should be offered as a continuing course in Year 12; 50 per cent reported that their school friends wished they were in a TRAC program; and 80 per cent of the parents regarded it as a great experience for them¹.

The Hunter TRAC was a remarkably coherent program, distinguished by the close interactions amongst its various parts, but it is easiest to describe the components in turn:

the students

TRAC was for 'ordinary kids' – mid-level achievers – and the 37 Hunter students fit that pattern well. These were students planning to return to school for Year 11 but were unclear about their educational goals. As one recalled,

I could cope with school perfectly well and I was well behaved, never got into trouble. But I hated it. I was one of the kids who kept saying 'what am I going to use this for in real life?'. I knew I wanted to go out to work, not to study.

Students applied to join TRAC and were interviewed by a panel consisting of a teacher, an employer and an existing young employee. Their selection was based on their motivation and sense of personal responsibility. The Hunter program had been well publicised: students from the pilot phase enthused about it; the media wrote about it; parents and students were told about it and given the opportunity to ask hard questions about it.

The students attended school four days a week. On the fifth day, dressed in their TRAC uniform – a white shirt with the TRAC logo in rust and turquoise and a dark skirt or pants, and a jacket again with the logo in those fashionable colours – they set out for either Charlestown Square or Garden City shopping centres for their work placement. At work, employees (who have already received special training for the task) helped students acquire a pre-specified set of skills through normal work practices. That day might also include some time at the TRAC Centre – an office space near the shopping centres – for off-the-job training and so the students could work on their group projects. The students were rotated to a new workplace each term, giving them four different placements over the year to ensure a variety of skills were developed.

the curriculum

The core of the TRAC program was a set of skills common to three service industries (retail, hospitality and commerce) which had been constructed in collaboration with employers in the Hunter region during TRAC's development phase. The resulting curriculum combined three types of skills:

- elements of general education and personal development – for example maths skills, communication skills, human relations skills, personal appearance and presentation;
with
- broad industry knowledge skills – for example, general awareness of the industry, occupational health and safety, industrial relations;
with
- skills that were more job specific – for example, product knowledge, marketing and promotion, cash handling and credit cards.

Each student had a Skills Booklet which set out clearly and simply the skills they were to acquire. Students also had to submit a report of each work placement and participate in two group assignments. Competencies were assessed in the workplace either by the employer or an employee who had been trained as a TRAC assistant. The Skills Booklet also went to parents, employers, employees and schools before the school year started so that everyone was familiar with the whole program and there was an opportunity to negotiate details which might be adjusted.

the Management Committee

The Management Committee was a critical element in the TRAC structure, and one of its most novel features. The Committee was an incorporated body balanced between employers, educators and community leaders. Its incorporation made it independent of the school system but gave its members the power, and responsibility, to shape an educational program. In effect, it was a small public-private partnership for local education which brought two very different cultures together – education and service sector business – to create new opportunities for young people.

The chair of the Hunter Management Committee in 1991 (and subsequently) was Justin Davies. He was a retailer who was highly respected both as a businessman and for his community work. Altogether the Committee had attracted dynamic individuals who worked tirelessly, and imaginatively, to ensure TRAC made a real contribution to the community as a whole, not only to the students who participated.

the Coordinator

This was a full-time position with an extensive brief which included: recruiting employers to for placements, recruiting students, talking to parents, overseeing student selection, organising off-the-job training, and generally managing the delivery, assessment and certification of learning in the workplace and off-the-job. The calibre of the Coordinator, together with the Management Committee, determined the shape and dynamism of TRAC programs.

Suzanne Moore, who went to Newcastle as Coordinator for the 1991 TRAC program, says there were three keys to effective coordination: being flexible, being entrepreneurial, and being very clear about the essential features of the program:

Negotiation went on throughout the year - flexibility was vital in order to actually deliver to employers and students what was promised because there were always details or concerns that needed to be addressed and often adjustments made. That kind of openness and the skill to connect to the right kinds of employers in the first place was important. Underpinning it was

understanding exactly what TRAC was trying to do and what was essential and what was negotiable. Quality was essential and if I had concerns about a particular employer (or student) I would visit that placement every week.

It is worth noting that early in the development of TRAC students in focus groups were asked to come up with a job specification for the Coordinator. Their answer: a person who has lots of energy and who understands both kids and employers. They were sure the position shouldn't go to a teacher. In fact it turned out that many later TRAC programs were ably coordinated by dynamic teachers, but it was the case that Moore came from a background in youth development.

In the Hunter there was a TRAC resource centre with an office, meeting and training rooms located adjacent to one of the large shopping centres. Moore was based there and ensured the space functioned as a drop-in centre where students, parents, TRAC assistants, employers were welcome to stop by, and often did.

the employers

Twenty-five employers from the two shopping centres (providing 32 separate work sites) participated in the 1991 program. Finding employers who were willing to participate in TRAC, in this instance and in every other, took real work: the program makes significant demands on employers and their staff. The recruitment task falls to the TRAC Coordinator although here in the Hunter some key community leaders came on board for the pilots and that helped to influence other employers. It was not a matter of just any employer, however. Kim Harrington, the initial Hunter TRAC coordinator, explains:

You need a value set that is aligned. If you haven't established that with an employer, if you haven't a shared platform and commitment from both sides [TRAC's and the employer's], it doesn't work. With it, when they come to difficulties with a student or questions about being able to teach all the required skills, we could chew over the fat and work things out. You also have to let employers ask 'what's in it for me?'. And you have to be able to answer the question.

Part of the answer to 'what's in it for me' came from employers' location within a shopping centre. In a shopping centre, whilst businesses might be in competition with one another, all have a common interest in the centre attracting customers and maintaining positive community links. TRAC offered them a mechanism for improving opportunities for youth (community PR) while improving the financial viability of their commercial environment. Shopping centres were, in effect, skill ecosystems in that they harboured a coherent skill and knowledge base which could be used (and developed) for mutual advantage.

There were other answers, too, to the 'what's in it for me?' question. One capitalised on widespread discontent amongst local employers about the low level of students' work readiness on leaving school. TRAC gave them a chance to influence education, to add a vocational component so students would be more competent and motivated young workers. Retailers wanted, particularly, to change people's perceptions of the industry and let students and their parents (and the schools) see that retailing was not a 'dead end job' but an industry that held genuine career pathways. On the other hand, many employers simply liked the idea of 'doing something' for kids – contributing to the community – and TRAC looked a good way of doing this since their obligations in the program, while

significant, were also clearly set out and employers were assured they would receive any help needed.

The staff member who supervised the student's placement and was responsible for assessment, called the TRAC assistant, was, of course, central to the program. These assistants received special training and on-going support. Employers were encouraged to select young staff members for the role but workers of all ages liked working with and training the students.

the schools

The 37 TRAC students came from ten high schools (which included one non-government school). The spread was a little uneven: five schools had only one or two students participating; Gateshead, which had been one of the pilot schools in 1990, had the most with ten students; the remainder had four or five. While the schools were pleased to participate in TRAC, with these relatively small numbers, they did not have to make significant adjustments to accommodate the students' day away from school. One of the students was quoted in the TRAC Newsletter at the end of the year: "you do miss out on some school work, but you can do it if you're determined and my teachers gave me a lot of help to catch up".

the funding model

Personal interactions amongst all the people involved in the program – the Coordinator, members of the Management Committee, employers, TRAC assistants, schools, and the students themselves – generated the lived sense of partnership that was essential to TRAC. The funding model, however, provided the formal backbone ensuring the program was an equal partnership between industry and education. There were three principal elements to the funding:

- employers made a direct contribution to recurrent costs by paying a quarterly fee of \$150 for each young person at their work site – a fee set by the Hunter Management Committee. This met approximately 60 percent of operating costs;
- schools in conjunction with the regional office of the Department of Education funded the Coordinator's position;
- Dusseldorp Skills Forum provided the curriculum materials, Skills Booklets and the software for managing assessment data as well as promoting the program at every opportunity. The TRAC team at the Forum actively provided support and encouragement for Coordinator and the management Committee.

Donations from employers and the community also provided resources. The TRAC Centre premises, for example, was made available free of charge. Computers and general office equipment had been donated during the Hunter pilot phase.

It is important to note that the order in which the components have been presented here – first students, then curriculum and employers only later – was designed to focus on what the program was there for: to benefit students. However, all of the TRAC materials and reports place employers and their role front and centre. That emphasis is the correct one. As is detailed in the next chapter, employers basically constructed the TRAC curriculum *and* for each student placement it is the employer's attention and involvement that is the core of TRAC.

2. TRAC Development Phase 1989 - 1990

Work started on TRAC in late 1988 with the establishment of the Dusseldorp Skills Forum. Within 8 months a pilot program was operating. The intense activity to get to that point and then to fine tune TRAC as experience was gained through more pilots in 1990 entailed four basic steps:

- (i) finding a trial location – the Hunter region of NSW
- (ii) identifying pilot industries – service industries (retail, hospitality and commerce)
- (iii) building the TRAC skills set
- (iv) positioning TRAC within schools

Dusseldorp Skills Forums was created to mark the retirement in October 1988 of the founding chair of the Lend Lease Corporation, G. J. (Dick) Dusseldorp. Its ambition was, in part, to find stronger routes into employment for young people leaving school. As Dick Dusseldorp put it:

Since schools regard young people as students and employers see them as workers, a third party is needed, independent of both, to see young people as young people and to create a bridge between education and work for them.²

As is explained in the next chapter, that ambition had a long period of gestation. What is interesting is how rapidly the underlying ideas cohered into a sharp framework once the Forum started work. By 16 January 1989, a two-page document titled

What Would A New System Of Transition From School To Work Look Like?’

had been produced. The answer it outlined was that a new pathway of transition would need to:

- be a broad-based accredited *program of learning*
- combine general education, social education and basic education with vocational training
- have a significant component of learning on-the-job and participants would be employed, at least part-time
- the learning would be competency based with the focus on a broad rather than a narrow range of occupational competencies
- off-the-job learning would be provided by a variety of institutions: public, private, community, schools and TAFE
- the exact form of each person’s program of learning would be negotiated with the various parties involved (including negotiation about an occupational or industry career path and wages paid during the periods of employment).

The two years of development and piloting (1989 – 1990), which led to the TRAC program described in the preceding chapter, can be seen as a refinement of that broad answer. As Jack Dusseldorp described it:

We started with a hypothesis [the dot points] which we thought was a valid one but we needed to find people who could help us put together a learning program that would test the basic premises and then find people to carry out the test. The Forum would act as a go-between, an observer.

That scenario of finding a program to test and then trialling it was essentially a case of progressively narrowing focus so a specific practical pilot could be put into action.

1. focusing on the Hunter region of New South Wales

The choice of the Hunter region as the pilot site was reasonably straight-forward. It has been frequently used as a test bed as it mirrors the general demographics of Australia. It is also close enough to Sydney, where the Forum is headquartered, that it could be reached relatively easily.

As it turned out, a further feature of the Hunter region made it an ideal site for trialling TRAC. It is a well-defined region with a strong sense of its own identity. As one interviewee said, "the Hunter is a little like a state within a state" which meant that, at the time, the regional offices of both the Department of Education and the union, the Shop Distributors and Allied Employees Association, operated with a significant degree of autonomy. This autonomy was important:

- unions were not enthusiastic about school students in the workplace for a number of reasons including a concern that they would be exploited but also that they would take away casual adult jobs. The local office, however, was willing to let a trial proceed;
- the state Education Department, for its part, has a legal responsibility for students (and the NSW Board of Studies for curriculum). It was unusual for an independent third party like the Forum to propose a fundamental change in the location of student learning and the nature of the curriculum. Both the Board and the central office of the Department were informed of the developing TRAC program from the start, and gave in principle support for TRAC being trialled*.

It was the regional office of the Department, however, which played quite a direct role in the development of TRAC. Alan Beard, Director of the Hunter region at the time (and for some time before that), was enthusiastic about TRAC from the moment he was told about it. He had the confidence to experiment with something like TRAC without interference from the Department's central office. He also was able to bring his considerable standing in the community to bear in putting the Forum in touch both with schools and employers[†].

The Forum itself helped to reinforce a sense of the specialness of the Hunter community by its many early meetings with students (that is where the TRAC Coordinator's job specification came from), with parents and with employers. These were vigorous meetings and are still remembered with some fondness and in surprising detail.

* The NSW government itself was also interested in the TRAC concept. Not long after winning the election in 1988, the Greiner government established the NSW Education and Training Foundation as a mechanism that could help bring education (at all levels) and employers closer together. In fact, it was this body (with the Forum acting as underwriter) that funded the TRAC pilots.

[†] Regional Department offices became important and helpful allies for TRAC throughout NSW. Lesley Tobin, coordinator of Central Coast TRAC, gave a lovely example of this in describing how Bill Low, the Regional Director and therefore the most senior Department person on the Central Coast, gave up a weekend to drive a truck to move TRAC furniture from Gosford to Erina with Lesley's husband.

2. focusing on retail and commercial services industries:

The decision to direct the 'new transition model' to the retail, commercial services and hospitality industries was something of a hunch on the Forum's part. Lend Lease's experience developing shopping centres had led them to note weaknesses in the training base of those industries. In this sense, it was an advantage that the company operated a shopping centre in the Newcastle area but, equally, its involvement might have aroused suspicions it was proposing TRAC simply out of commercial self-interest. To demonstrate the Forum's intention to be an honest broker, AMP and Westfield – Australia's two other major shopping centre developers – were invited and agreed to support the development of TRAC.

There were other grounds for focusing the 'new transition system' on these service industries. One of the principles the Forum was founded on was: All Jobs are Skilled. It was entirely consistent with this view that they would look outside the traditional trades and well established skill domains to occupations with a patchier skill development base. It was also well known that these are the industries where many young people get their first jobs

While the Forum was well served by intuition and principles, there were questions about where the job prospects really were in the Hunter. Traditionally the workforce there was shaped by the steel industry and many school leavers, boys in particular, assumed their future began with an apprenticeship at BHP. The Forum commissioned the Hunter Valley Research Foundation to study the distribution of jobs in the various industry sectors in the Hunter region and predict where the jobs would be in 5-10 years time. This early research showed that retailing was by far the largest employer of young people and pointed out that the range of work done in the industry goes well beyond selling, which is all most people think of. The program-in-development was given the title the Retail and Commercial Careers Program (which almost as quickly was re-dubbed TRAC, Training in Retail And Commercial).

There was a second outcome from the research. It was to bring Ms Kim Harrington to the Forum. Kim was the 25-year-old demographer at the Hunter Valley Research Foundation who undertook the study. Having met Harrington twice – once when briefing her about the study and then when she presented the report – the Forum invited her to accept a secondment to work on the development and piloting of TRAC. This was an inspired choice and set a pattern whereby much of TRAC's success was due to the exceptional talents and energy of the people who involved themselves with TRAC.

3. refining the TRAC curriculum framework and skill set

The general shape of the TRAC program – one day a week in the workplace, competency-based assessment – came from an analysis of international experience and research, especially of European work placements, apprenticeships and vocational education. This was the special expertise of Richard Sweet who joined the Forum as TRAC's first full-time employee in early 1989. It is worth pointing out here that time and again in the interviews conducted for this 'look back' at TRAC, people commented on the importance of that research base and Sweet's ability to present it. As one said "he was gifted and skilled at pulling in international stuff and fitting it to the local and, vice versa. He had a good eye, too, for what was workable."

An initial matrix of job-specific retail and commercial skills and of more general employability skills was developed from existing sources. The Forum's process of refining these into the TRAC skill set was a text-book case of how to consult meaningfully and effectively with a community, in this case the community of local employers. There were almost constant informal meetings with leading figures in the community, but it was the 'big ticket' consultations during the first half of 1989 that led to major advances in the design and acceptance of TRAC:

- a forum held 28 March for employers. Objectives included: ascertaining the employers views about the adequacy of current skills and training and the prospects for new young workers; getting them to generate ideas on fresh approaches to skill development; and gaining a commitment from them to assist with a fresh approach, for example, releasing their young shop assistants to attend a two-day forum in May;
- a two-day forum (1-2 May) attended by 31 young shop assistants which included some presentations about 'Our Idea' but focused on them going through, in small groups, a series of questions, for example: if a retail and commercial careers program was set up, how could you make sure the right sort of young people took part in it? Three clear messages emerged from the forum:
 - the young workers wanted major improvements in the links between school and work and thought they could play a major role in helping school students make the transition into the retail and commercial industries;
 - despite the poor image of retailing, *they* knew their jobs were skilled and that the industry provided career opportunities;
 - they were enthusiastic about the ideas for TRAC presented to them.
- a presentation in mid-May to the Newcastle Chamber of Commerce, again seeking feedback on the developing program and fostering enthusiasm for it;
- in late May a thorough questionnaire (21 pages long!) was developed by a group of 20 employers who were supporting TRAC. It set out their views on the broad tasks areas which make up the work of a skilled young worker and then itemised the specific skills that fall into each of these task areas. One important outcome from this work was evidence that the service industries did have in common a fundamental set of skills (e.g., communication, customer service, personal confidence, time management, basic maths) which meant TRAC students didn't have to select one industry strand over another as their preferred career and could (and should) be rotated to work placements across the three industries. In June, sixty local employers completed the survey as a check on the validity of the list generated by the first 20 employers and to probe for any additional skills.

One can see in this development of the TRAC skill set the significance of the two shopping centres as skill ecosystems – as a setting the skill and knowledge required by the collection of businesses overlap enough that collaboration benefits all. In 1989 the concept of skill ecosystems did not have the currency it does now and, as one informant pointed out, using the shopping centres “as sites of shared workforce training needs, as a skill ecosystem, was another way in which the Forum was ahead of its time – in this case, well ahead.”

While the logic of the consultation process is clear (both in developing the TRAC skill set and earlier in talking with parents, students and the broader Hunter community), what

made it so effective is the scrupulous way the Forum took on board the information it was hearing. Participants in the skills development sessions were delighted, and inspired, when their rough suggestions were handed back to them the next day or even a few hours later beautifully organised and typed. This expert facilitation (and sometimes all night analyses) needs also to be credited to Richard Sweet who effectively became, in the words of one witness, "the guardian and developer of TRAC's intellectual property".

Kim Harrington, as TRAC Coordinator, played an important consultation role in developing the TRAC skill set. Throughout this period and into August, she was approaching individual employers to see if they would be willing to provide work placements for school students in third term. At each business she would talk to the employer and front-line supervisors about skills they might want to develop in young people using the latest version of the skill set: "It was a verification process but it would have felt like an open-ended discussion to them."

Kerrie Stevens' role throughout needs also to be acknowledged. She formally joined the TRAC initiative early 1989, having observed its beginnings through her work at Workskill Australia with Jack Dusseldorp, and played a leading role at every stage of TRAC's further development and devolution*. In the first instance, Kerrie brought to TRAC her experience in working with employers, understanding the needs of businesses and the constraints they operate under. But more, as a colleague pointed out, were the "immense skills in project management and in knowing what will click with people and what won't". His comments are worth reporting further:

Her unfailing good judgement was absolutely critical. The classic is her sitting there in a meeting and saying nothing and then giving a devastating summary afterwards. But she, with the others, enjoyed mucking around on the ground – getting our hands dirty so we could learn from close observation as we went along.

4. finding TRAC's place within schools

Four schools piloted TRAC in 1989 and an additional three in 1990. They had been suggested because their Year 12 retention rates were below average even for the Hunter. The principals were keen to pilot TRAC. All recognised that upper secondary school had stayed focused far too long on students planning to go to university despite the consistently expanding numbers of students who had no such ambition.

The pilots helped focus TRAC on students in Years 11 and 12. A word of explanation is required here because there is an aspect of the TRAC story that has not yet been mentioned. When the Forum, back in January 1989, outlined its answer to the question 'what would a new transition from school look like?', it envisioned TRAC as a two-phase program. Phase One would be, as TRAC became, for students still at school who would remain school students even though they were spending one day a week in a work placements. Phase Two would be almost the mirror image of Phase One: participants, who had successfully completed Phase One, would now spend four days a week in the workplace and one in off-the-job skill and knowledge development. They would be employees, not

* Kerrie Stevens has continued to work at the Forum and was a wonderful help in the preparation of this report through her deep knowledge and insight of TRAC, as one would expect, but also because of her generosity and good humour.

students, and would receive an appropriate wage. Their learning program would be coordinated by a third party – remember, the idea was to construct a wholly new educational transition phase – and might use an array activities (and sites) for the off-the-job learning including schools and TAFE Institutes but also the community education sector and private training providers. The skill set developed in the process outlined above actually distinguished between skills which would be acquired in Phase One and those which would be acquired in Phase Two.

Three TRAC models were piloted during the 1989-1990 period:

- (i) a Phase One program in third term 1989 with 41 Year 10 students from four schools;
- (ii) a Phase One program in 1990 but this time with Year 11 students (37 from seven schools). While in one way it is easier to introduce change into Year 10 than in the high stakes HSC Years of 11 and 12, the option of leaving school at Year 10 and going into the labour market, even with a TRAC program under one's belt, was looking less and less appropriate* ;
- (iii) two post-school Phase Two programs in 1990 each of six-months duration: first with 13 participants from the 1989 Phase One pilot and then with 13 participants in the 1990 Phase One pilot. 1990. All became employees of Hunter TRAC Pty Ltd, a group employment and training company, established for the purpose. An independent evaluation of the first (1989) cohort found that while 9 of the 15 companies participating would stay "loyal" to repeat Phase Two, there were difficulties in implementing the program and maintaining its quality. There were also problems of articulation to the Australian Traineeship System and to TAFE (and, indeed, to Year 12 if Phase Two participants wanted to complete Year 12) as well as complex industrial relations issues. At this point, with the growing interest in Phase One TRAC, the Forum let the Phase Two program drop away.

Since the 1990 Phase One pilot became the standard TRAC model, it is worth reporting Kim Harrington's, the TRAC Coordinator through the 1989-1990, answer to my question: what did you pay most attention to in terms of feedback?

The kids gave the most honest feedback. They were the measuring stick of what the real issues were. They could pinpoint brilliantly the personality conflicts and prejudices that interfered with things (either at school or with employers). The nuts and bolts of implementing TRAC was not the curriculum but personalities. You do need good systems and processes but a program stands or falls on everyone's level of commitment and integrity. The kids impressed me and I was prepared to acknowledge how hard they worked[†].

This is not to say that conversations and issues raised by employers were unimportant. They provided real insight into how to improve the operation of the program. A group of 23

* Year 12 completion was already becoming the educational standard with retention rates steadily rising from a little above 30 per cent in 1980 to 50 per cent in 1989. In 1991 the Finn Review^{*} set a target of 95 per cent of 19 year olds completing or have completed Year 12 or its equivalent by 2001

[†] the balance with school work in Year 11 was tough. For those students wanting to continue at school in Year 12, supplementary English, chemistry and maths coaching was arranged and conducted in the evenings at the TRAC Centre by Education students from the University of Newcastle.

employers, for example, attended an evening workshop in August 1990 where they rated again all the TRAC skills in terms of their importance (to them) and then again in terms of their match with a set of work place basics. More than an impressionistic assessment, the ratings were subjected to a thorough statistical analysis and the results fed back to the employers, as well as further fine tuning the TRAC skills list.

The overall cost of developing and piloting TRAC came close to \$500,000 dollars. The initial planning phase, roughly from February to May 1989, which included demographic research, concept formation, testing and endorsement as well as identifying personnel and premises cost \$63,000 and was funded by the Forum. The cost for the pilot year June 1989 – May 1990 was estimated as \$390,000 of which \$180,000 would be paid by the Forum, \$105,000 by the NSW Education and Training Foundation (see footnote p 7), and the remaining \$105,000 by industry sponsors (with the Forum taking responsibility for finding this sponsorship). The pilot phase continued for six months beyond the initial estimate, to December 1990. The cost of that extension in terms of staff salaries, travel, marketing and promotion was likely to have been at least another \$50,000.

Overall this was a period of intense activity. To go from the Forum's fairly general ideas in January 1989 to an on-the-ground operating pilot eight months later required relentless activity and almost boundless energy. While it involved extensive curriculum and assessment development, the key to the work was its on-going consultation and negotiation with its diverse range of stakeholders: community leaders, employers, employer groups, unions, Department of Education officials, schools, parents, students and the media. These interactions worked well because the Forum was open and pro-active in explaining its intentions and responsive to concerns, uncertainty and even misunderstandings on the part of others. The expert facilitation of formal meetings also contributed to the positive outcomes of the period. While operating over such a broad front, there was nothing 'ad hoc' about advancing the project: it was systematic and thorough. But the ground had been well prepared, and it is that back story – what was happening before January 1989 – that is the subject of the next chapter.

3. the back story (prior to the establishment of the Forum in 1989)

- There are two aspects to the back story
- the experience of TRAC's three seminal figures:
Jack Dusseldorp
Dick Dusseldorp
Richard Sweet
 - the piecemeal recognition by others that school students' vocational skills and their transition to work were not being adequately addressed.

The early decision that the Forum's first goal would be to establish explicit pathways into employment for school leavers was largely due to the concerns of Jack Dusseldorp, Forum Director, and his father G.J. (Dick) Dusseldorp. They shared an interest in helping youth and a profound conviction that the vocational education available to them needed vastly to be improved. The fact that they had been thinking about these issues for many years is apparent in mentioning only a few of their earlier endeavours:

Jack Dusseldorp: established the WorkSkill Australia Foundation in 1982 (now Worldskill Australia) as an early initiative of the Evatt Foundation. Its purpose was to improve both the status and quality of trade skills in Australia by involving Australia in the international Youth Skills Olympics. The idea was to inspire a competitive will to win and thereby improve. Drawing in players from industry, trade unions, TAFE and the community, WorkSkill Australia set about organising regional and national competitions to select the team that would compete in the 1983 Skill Olympics. Australia came home with no medals and wounded pride, but insight into why others fared better and a determination to excel in the future. This determination spread, especially amongst TAFE teachers. By February 1988, when the Workskill Australia Foundation hosted the international Youth Skill Olympics at Darling Harbour, the host team won twelve medals and placed third overall.

Jack spent 1985 as Director of the Office of Youth Affairs in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The previous year the Kirby Inquiry into Labour Market Programs³ had found that traditional apprenticeships, which had been designed for trade-based industries, lacked applicability to other sectors and employers*. The Hawke government accepted the Inquiry's recommendations and set the bold participation target of 70,000 traineeships which became part of Jack's work in Canberra.

He also had some experience introducing new curricula into senior schools through his work with the NSW Law Foundation which developed law related education courses. He was recognised then the potential of harnessing the enthusiasm and commitment of teachers and educators on the ground as well as the complexities of working with public education authorities.

Dick Dusseldorp was the founder of the Lend Lease Group of Companies. A book has been written about his business acumen and his "exceptional approach to management" which the author, Lindie Clarke, summarised as "bringing together labour, capital and other

* This was also around the time that the OECD reviewed youth policy in Australia and concluded that the country must lift its game in initial vocational preparation – indeed, it put Australia second bottom of its league table of vocational preparation.

stakeholders, challenging their hidebound ways of doing things and orienting them to a practical goal which would yield mutual benefits"⁴. He built Lend Lease by developing the skills and talents of his managers, in particular, but the company was also one of the largest employers of apprentices. A commitment to youth training was formalised through the establishment of the ACTU-Lend lease Foundation in 1980. Dick Dusseldorp was also extremely interested in Jack's development of Workskill Australia and later played a sponsorship role.

Lend Lease wanted to do 'something' to mark his retirement in 1988. One proposal was to fund a university chair – exactly the opposite of what, according to Jack, he wanted to do in retirement, which was to 'put his shoulder to the wheel to build a stronger movement for skills'. His suggestion was to establish a Foundation that would have the capacity to innovate and take risks in developing improved transitions to work for people without being beholden to funding agencies who tend to provide limited funds for short periods. Thus the Dusseldorp Skills Forum as an independent non-profit organisation with a charter to stimulate and promote continuing investment in Australia's workforce, with a particular focus on developing the skills and personal effectiveness of young people, was born. It received an allotment of Lend Lease shares totalling one percent of the issued capital of the company (about \$13 million). Shareholders voted to meet half the cost; Lend Lease employees voted to meet the other half. Dick was the inaugural chair of the Forum and served as its patron until his death in April 2000.

Richard Sweet's background also forms part of the TRAC back story. He was brought into the Forum early in 1989 as its first full-time employee and played a critical role in establishing both the theoretical and research-evidence base for the development for a credible TRAC design. He had worked in TAFE in many capacities but had a special talent for research. Indeed in 1985 Jack Dusseldorp, as Director of the Office of Youth Affairs in PM&C, commissioned Sweet to do statistical analyses. This, in fact, is how the two met. In 1984 Sweet was seconded from TAFE to manage the Sydney Research Group for the Kirby Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs. He was an inaugural member of the Employment and Skills Formation Council, a Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training, from 1988 to 1991

As reference to the Kirby Inquiry suggests, the Dusseldorps and those whom they worked with were not alone in worrying about the poor preparation for working life given school students not bound for university. Individual schools, who saw young people day in and day out had also begun to experiment with change. Rosny College in Tasmania – to chose a particularly vibrant example – had, as early as 1983, put in place an unusual timetable with a two and a half hour break in the middle of the day every day to introduce adult education programs for their students. The College developed an enriched practical curriculum. They not only ran a child studies program, for example, but took over a kindergarten where Rosny students ran Play Groups. The College gradually began to refine these offerings so they were more explicitly vocational, not mere enrichment.

The states, too, were attempting to address the inadequacy and inequity of secondary schools providing a single track academic, primarily university-oriented, program for an ever diversifying body of Year 11 and 12 students. These efforts were fairly piecemeal although there was a pattern of encouraging local partnerships between schools and TAFEs. When the

Forum first approached the NSW Department of Education, for example, seeking permission to pilot TRAC, the person they met with – the Chief Education Officer in the Directorate of Studies – had just been asked to develop a proposal for a three-year program that combined school, TAFE and work in the retail area which would lead to both an HSC and a TAFE qualification.

The important point is that within this broad context of discontent and review dating from the early 1980s, Jack Dusseldorp and Richard Sweet had front row seats and, at the national level, often were actively on stage. An example that illustrates the value of their placement concerns the traineeships established in 1985 after the Kirby Inquiry, which Sweet had worked for. There were early signs that the implementation model eventually selected was flawed, especially in its rigid, top-down approach with almost no connection to employers or students. Jack Dusseldorp had seen this first hand from the Prime Minister and cabinet's Office and had tried, unsuccessfully, to address. By the time the Dusseldorp Skills Forum was set up in late 1988, only 20 per cent of traineeships had been taken up. One of the first things Sweet and Dusseldorp did at the Forum was to go back and think through exactly why the traineeship exercise had not succeeded. Besides its top-down approach, they concluded the traineeships were, too like apprenticeships, still based around occupations rather than the more fluid skills mix required in the service sectors. They also remarked on the, as Sweet phrased it, "absurdity of a vocational preparation model that separated general from vocational education".

The ability to draw on experience – years spent paying attention to programs designed for youth and for skill development generally – gave TRAC a base that was probably unique. Without wanting to denigrate reviews and inquiries, the capacity to build on deeply bedded, unconscious learning lends a different edge to the activity which follows. It can be more intuitive, which some of TRAC certainly was, even as it was systematic and articulated. TRAC understood the general ferment about youth and employment going on around it but could, and did, develop independently. At the risk of an awful pun, TRAC built and stayed on its own track. It is my view that the length and strength of the TRAC back story was fundamental to its forward success.

4. expansion: from 1 TRAC site to 78 sites in three years

The rapid spread of TRAC was the result of an almost seamless merger between local communities' initiative and hard work and the Forum's intellectual work and supportive mechanisms. It was the complementary and two-way intermingling of their contributions that enabled TRAC to be taken up so widely so quickly. Four instances of this synergy are described:

- (i) the role of the TRAC Program Manager
- (ii) input from Tamworth TRAC
- (iii) points of difference amongst TRAC communities
- (iv) 'backroom' work at the Forum: taking TRAC into school systems

These examples also demonstrate that the interactions which helped TRAC to grow were not only between the centre (the Forum) and periphery (local communities) but depended on the support local TRAC communities gave to one another. The image of a spoked wheel comes to mind where, in the initial years of TRAC's expansion, as the number of spokes increased and the connections between them strengthened, so did the capability of the whole.

The chapter concludes with some observations on the way the replication of TRAC fits new thinking about the spread and take-up of innovation

The chart on the next page shows the take-up of TRAC and its explosive growth: first in New South Wales; then Tasmania; and then in South Australia. It should be noted that Western Australia picked up the TRAC model quite early but labelled it Instep and, while keeping some connections with TRAC, did not participate in the range of activities developed during the expansion phase. TRAC was also taken overseas in the early 1990s by Dick Dusseldorp to shopping centres he was involved with* ; however, those programs developed rather differently from the Australian model and there was virtually no connection between them and the Australian story.

The impressive Australian spread of TRAC suggests something of a 'better mousetrap' phenomenon: it caught on effortlessly on its own merits. A conclusion which would be confirmed by the recollections of people who found out about TRAC and brought it back to their communities. Here are three teachers who did that:

Mark Buckland from Tamworth NSW: *My principal had heard about TRAC – word about the Hunter program was being spread in NSW at that level – and he suggested I take up an invitation for Hunter's Skill Challenge in July 1991[†]. I drove down with Anne Jacob from the regional office. We were impressed by the Challenge competition and we looked carefully at how TRAC itself was structured. On the way home we started planning what we could do – we were sure it was a program with great potential for us.*

* in Nottingham in the UK and Savannah, Georgia in US (which became an off-campus school for some 60 'at risk' students and which was replicated at a number of sites in the US).

[†] The TRAC Skill Challenge was a gala two-day competition in mid-July 1991 organized by the Forum, based on their experience with Workskill competitions. Some hundred young employees (under 25 years of age) who worked in retail, commerce and hospitality businesses located mostly in the two 'TRAC' shopping centres participated. Skills were assessed by judges and included interviews, observation, 'mystery shoppers' and role play. Each competitor received a report on how they performed in different skill areas. It generated a lot of interest and was wonderfully well received.

Table 1 Location of TRAC programs post-development/pilot years

1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996 this list is based on fragments and probably contains minor inaccuracies
NSW: Hunter	NSW: Hunter Tamworth	NSW: Hunter Tamworth Armidale Central Coast Griffith Inverell Junee Lower Hunter Macleay Valley Manning Narrabri Northern Beaches Northside Orange Tenterfield Wagga Wagga Tasmania Rosny ACT Canberra Northern Territory Darwin	NSW: Hunter Tamworth Armidale Central Coast Griffith Inverell Junee Lower Hunter Macleay Valley Manning Narrabri Northern Beaches Northside Orange Tenterfield Wagga Wagga Blue Mountains Gilgandra Grafton Inner West Port Macquarie Yass Tasmania Rosny Hobart Launceston ACT Canberra Northern Territory Darwin Queensland Toowoomba Goondiwindi St George	NSW: Hunter Tamworth Armidale Central Coast Griffith Inverell Junee Lower Hunter Macleay Valley Manning Narrabri Northern Beaches Northside Orange Tenterfield Wagga Wagga Blue Mountains Gilgandra Inner West Yass Blacktown Clarence Valley Deniliquin Forbes Guyra Hastings Parkes Southern Illawarra Ungarie Tasmania Rosny Hobart Launceston Alanvale Burnie DON College Elizabeth College Smithton ACT Canberra Northern Territory Darwin Alice Springs Queensland Toowoomba Goondiwindi St George South Australia Torrens Valley Victoria Melbourne East Melbourne South	NSW: 32 existing plus Coomoalla Narrandera Tasmania: 11 existing plus Oatlands Kingston Queenstown Lakes & District Claremont St Mary's ACT: 1 existing Northern Territory: 2 existing plus Nhulumbuy Tennant Creek Queensland: 3 existing plus Brisbane East Maryborough/ Hervey Bay South Australia: 1 existing plus Adelaide South West Bordertown Clare Valley Coober Pedy Kangaroo Island Lucindale Northern Adelaide Mount Gambier Murray Bridge Port Augusta Southern Adelaide Strathalbyn Whyalla Victoria: 2 existing

Jann Eason from McLeay Valley NSW: *There was a conference about TRAC in Tamworth for the many people who had begun asking the Forum about TRAC – this must have been 1992. The regional office here sent me to represent them and I thought it was brilliant. I kept thinking: where have you been all my life? ... We invited influential business people of Kempsey to an evening meeting. Only half a dozen showed up but no one could find fault with TRAC: it had all the hallmarks of employers having shaped it and they liked the idea of helping kids. We had TRAC program running the next year with a lot of community support.*

Pam Tyson from Rosny College, Tas: *I went to a careers teachers conference in Queensland [1992] and heard Suzy Moore talk about TRAC. I came back to Rosny and – they tell me – I just raved about it. So we asked Suzy to come down and tell us more. And the rest, as they say, is...*

Many other interviewees made the same basic point: TRAC was a solution to a problem that had been nagging at them for a while. And it was a practical solution, based on a solid foundation and offering quality materials. One feature that was especially important to schools was that it came in “manageable chunks”: one didn’t have to have a large assemblage of students to get started – one class, or even a few students, would suffice.

Despite the many occasions, as above, where TRAC was embraced after only a relatively brief introduction, Richard Sweet describes the expansion phase as “a hard grind”. From the Forum’s perspective – with its goal of seeing the numbers increase sufficiently to convince people it could work in communities of different sizes, both metropolitan and rural, and in different states – expansion was a task that required wide ranging and persistent effort. One can see glimmers of that even in the quotes above with their references to conferences either conducted or attended by TRAC speakers, invitations to Department of Education directors, and dissemination to principals.

In fact, almost exactly analogous to its initial development in the Hunter, TRAC’s spread through NSW and beyond was the combined effect of the Forum’s ‘hard grind’ and the enthusiasm and initiative generated in local communities once they had been introduced to TRAC. Four examples of the synergy which drove the progressive expansion and strengthening of TRAC are described in this chapter, followed by a brief theoretical reflection.

(i) the role of the TRAC Program Manager

This position was established at the Forum in January 1992 and filled by Suzanne Moore who had been TRAC Coordinator in the Hunter the previous year. Her work as Program Manager illustrates well the resonance that developed between ‘the centre’ and local TRAC programs with each learning from the other. Her roles included:

licensing new TRAC programs

Many people at the Forum took every opportunity to promote TRAC through existing channels (conferences, community events), but whenever there was a specific “whisper of interest”, Moore would visit. The initial interest was usually expressed by educators but the TRAC model required that businesses take a real leadership role, not merely ‘buy in’ to a school program. Thus, Moore had an interesting balancing act to accomplish: to bring employers to the fore when educators had expressed the initial

interest. She did this by talking to all parties from the start, explaining what had to be done to be licensed as a TRAC program. Those visits also allowed her to gauge the community's capacity to commit to TRAC and implement it.

supporting new and existing TRAC programs

Because curriculum materials and detailed guides had been produced by the Forum, it was tempting for communities interested in TRAC to say, as they did, 'you've done all the work, this is easy to step into'. In fact doing it wasn't easy at all and Moore spent a great deal of time in the field: working with Management Committees; monitoring to ensure the TRAC 'rules' were adhered to; meeting with students and parents. But above all she was a support for Coordinators. Coordinators needed the confidence, and the skill, to manage the many incidental issues students and employers inevitably threw up, as the reminiscence of a former TRAC student nicely implies:

Lesley [Tobin, Coordinator for the Central Coast] played a big role in all our lives. She motivated us to achieve our best. She found uniforms for us, made sure our hair was done, all those small things but done with us not to us. And she made the whole group feel close. She was tough on us, too. I had to be dealt with at one point. It was me being a teenage brat but I didn't like my second placement – they were competitors to the first one which I loved. So I refused to behave well for this staff. Lesley pulled me into line pretty smartly!

One frequent request from Coordinators was for Moore to accompany them on recruiting visits to employers because that was always a taxing task even for those who were gifted at selling the concept. Moore is sure that her having been a Coordinator was an enormous benefit in helping others.

building networks amongst Coordinators

The Coordinators were brought together several times a year – a notable advance in itself over the more typical annual forum. These conferences were organised by the 'centre', by Moore, but they were the mechanism by which Coordinators could establish their own relationships independent of the centre. The conferences were a highlight for the Coordinators. In the interviews for this 'look back' you can hear still their pleasure:

The workshop aspect was stimulating: they brought very experienced, interesting people in to talk to us. But you could also see we had talented, energetic colleagues ... The whole thing was great. The venues were good, wonderful dinner; it was a chance to dress up! My first and strongest memory though is that, for all my 16 years teaching, this was the first time anyone had congratulated me for having a good idea or thanked me for the contribution I was making – I'd forgotten such appreciation was possible.

Jann Eason (McLeay Valley)

With TRAC we were doing a unique and unusual thing and spending a lot of time out of the school – so we were rather isolated back in our schools. At the conferences you were talking to people who knew what you were trying to do. We learned an immense amount from one another.

Marie Knight (Junee)

The conferences were about developing quality materials – they sent the message that TRAC was about quality. That fitted because you knew you

were doing more in this role than you had intended, but we all kept running with it. They were also about bonding. The conferences made the Coordinators into a family. In a strange way it was like being part of a religious group..

Anne Leahy (Rosny)

providing professional development

It was inevitable that once the numbers of Coordinators, teachers and workplace supervisors participating in TRAC increased, formal professional development programs would be required. This became another aspect of the Program Manager's role. Training of workplace supervisors had been provided from the start but it was extended from a half-day orientation to a recommended one and a half days of the formal Category 1 Workplace Trainer Category course accredited by the University of Technology, Sydney. Supervisor training was one of the great 'value-adds' of TRAC. In 1995, for example, 1004 employees participated in supervisor training delivered by 50 regional training teams, each team consisting of one industry and one school-based partner.

In sum, the TRAC Program Manager applied the resources of 'the centre' to build the capacity of local TRAC sites, but at the same time used her central position to soak up the knowledge that was building 'out there' so it could accumulate and be shared. Because the personal and professional qualities of many of the key people involved in TRAC over the years are, in my view, absolutely central to its success, it is worth pointing out that Suzanne Moore's term as Program Manager – and as the inaugural Program Manager – was recognised and appreciated by many, especially Coordinators, as pivotal to TRAC's dynamic replication across a variety of local (and sometimes idiosyncratic) communities. One Coordinator described her as "the single most important ingredient of TRAC" and many referred to the astute but warm way she accomplished things, "she knew what she was doing and the way she did it commanded huge loyalty".

(ii) input from Tamworth TRAC

Tamworth, which was only the second TRAC, made a significant, and unsolicited, contribution to the whole program by systematically unpacking the various processes involved in establishing a licensed TRAC program. Mark Buckland, the Coordinator, used the pioneering work of the Hunter and his own experience in establishing Tamworth's TRAC to devise a series of annotated flowcharts and checklists. For example, he itemised steps to be taken in developing a Management Committee, suggested ways of identifying potential members, and listed the roles the Tamworth Steering Committee had assumed for itself. Similarly for the Coordinator position, he described a stepwise process for recruitment and job specification (giving his own as an example). And so on through the curriculum endorsement process; marketing to students, to parents and employers; rounding off with advice about program resourcing (what resources are needed and where they might be obtained).

By June 1992 this, and other, material had been compiled by the Forum into *A guide to TRAC Features and Processes*. Its purpose was to help people wanting to set up a TRAC program in 1993 – and, by mid-1992, many were planning to do so. The Guide starts with a list of the essential features of TRAC – the minimum requirements for use of the name TRAC – and includes the important point:

The key to TRAC's success in both Newcastle and Tamworth has been the **process** used to develop and run the program. Getting the process right is one of the keys to the success of future TRAC programs.⁵

The value of this material based on lived, local examples was commended in various evaluations conducted during the years of TRAC's operation.

Mark Buckland also serves as an example of the close working relationship between the centre and a local coordinator. He pointed out during the interview for this 'look back' that the Forum gave him an immense amount of administrative support and, by enabling him to spend time in Sydney at the Forum, singular professional development. In turn, he made 'guest appearances' on behalf of the Forum at Orange and other communities interested in TRAC.

(iii) points of differences amongst TRAC communities

One of the remarkable features of TRAC is that it was a prescriptive franchise model (many things *had* to be done to be a TRAC program and these were closely monitored for compliance) yet it generated local commitment, energy and learning. Perhaps the paradox is resolved by the simple fact that doing those 'top-down' things required extensive 'bottom-up' effort – effort willingly expended because a sense of purpose and values was shared equally between the TRAC centre and TRAC communities.

One example is the way TRAC skill sets outside the retail, commercial and hospitality sector were initiated by local communities. The original choice of retail, commercial and hospitality industries for the development and testing of the TRAC model was sensible and pragmatic (see pg 8). It was always expected, however, that the model would be appropriate for the range of industries which attract school leavers. As it turned out, communities took the lead in extending TRAC to new industry sectors. Rosny College, for example, because of its success with TRAC Retail began to develop its own vocational program in sport and recreation closely following the TRAC model. The Forum heard about it and offered to support the work as a pilot TRAC program. Later Tamworth developed an automotive TRAC as particularly appropriate for students in their area.

There were some apparently significant differences between TRAC programs:

- the first ones had a TRAC Centre independent of the schools involved, but that turned out to be a resource few could muster;
- in some places the students had a TRAC uniform, in others they didn't;
- the fee charged to employers for the privilege of providing a work placement varied: in Tamworth it was \$150 per term, in Launceston \$75 per term;

These differences turned out to be of little consequence in terms of student outcomes or employer engagement.

There was, however, a pattern as to where TRAC worked best. The "secret of success" was whether the community embraced it. That embrace was more likely where:

- the Coordinator was energetic, entrepreneurial and had a sound understanding of the local business environment. And empathetic. As one said, "you had to be able to see it from every person's point of view. Schools worried about timetabling. Employers worried that staff would become less productive with a student around. The honest answer in both cases was: yes, TRAC will interfere with your normal operations, ";
-

- interest in TRAC genuinely was local. The few cases where it was imposed from the top, by a Minister, the program struggled;
- school principals and education authorities were willing to take a bit of a risk. One example, placements were only supposed to take place during daytime but for hospitality that was often difficult. The principal concerned simply said to the Coordinator, 'ignore the directive, let them work at night, I'll deal with the red tape'. Eventually the prohibition was reversed.

The trio of successful features seemed to arise most readily in regional and rural communities. There is a certain spirit and shared sense of identity in many such communities which allowed the management committees, for example, to deliberate in a less formal way and for word-of-mouth enthusiasm to spread more effectively than in metropolitan areas.

(iv) 'backroom' work at the Forum: taking TRAC into school systems

One strategy for continuing the expansion of TRAC was to convince state Departments of Education to embrace it and make it a *normal* part of their provision of upper secondary schooling. This is different from the lateral replication of TRAC by local communities and was primarily a task for the Forum itself. Getting state authorities to accept and incorporate the TRAC model played out differently in different states as the experience in New South Wales and in Tasmania illustrates.

system response in NSW

NSW was TRAC's original home and interest from the Department of Education in the Forum's early work was real. A spirit of collaboration between them can be seen, for example, in the establishment of the Centre for Workplace Learning in November 1993 by the NSW Education and Training Foundation. The Centre's mission was to "stimulate innovation in the development, recognition and expansion of high quality workplace learning programs which enhance individual and group productivity and employability". It undertook a number of activities which furthered TRAC programs including: dissemination of information (e.g. employer breakfast briefings); sponsorship of training for TRAC Coordinators and teachers: and, with UTS, supporting a workplace supervisor development program. The Centre also saw its role as influencing the development of non-TRAC work placements, but its emphasis on school-to-work programs rather than labour market programs or tertiary courses is a mark of the influence of TRAC.

A central task during this period, both for the Forum and the Centre for Workplace Learning, was to place TRAC within the Higher School Certificate (HSC) curriculum, considered the centrepiece of schooling in NSW. Initially the NSW Board of Studies granted local TRAC programs the status of Other Endorsed Study which meant that schools effectively had to apply for permission to run the program. That permission was routinely forthcoming but it reinforced the sense that TRAC was 'exceptional' and not a recognised part of the HSC.

In 1994 the Board produced its own Content Endorsed Courses for three vocational strands (retail, office and hospitality) which would contribute 1 or 2 units of study towards the HSC. The net effect was that TRAC as a recognised model for bridging the gap between school and work through structured work placements and specified skill sets was progressively squeezed out of the government school sector in NSW. Observers

from outside the Forum, even from outside the State, say that the Department began to be noticeably antagonistic to TRAC and its proponents, "they white-anted it at every stage" was how one such interviewee described it. The reason seems to have been three-fold. The Department preferred:

- programs that would be identical at every site – a sharp contrast with local employer input which was a hallmark of TRAC. Indeed, vesting control of TRAC in an independent incorporated local Management Committee effectively created public-private partnerships which limited the unilateral control the Department normally enjoyed;
- an all-or-nothing roll-out so that TRAC would need to be available at every school for Year 11 students from the start. Again, this contrasted with the gradual development of commitment across locales;
- less costly models – TRAC was deemed an expensive 'Rolls Royce' option.

The upshot of this reasoning was the appearance, if not the reality, of a Department that only supported what *it* initiated and designed, not what some independent group did.

system response in Tasmania

Tasmania, it has to be recognised at the outset, is approximately the size of a single education region in NSW – possibly even smaller: there are only eight senior secondary colleges in the State, compared to 400 government secondary schools in NSW. The small size means, as one Tasmanian official put it, "it takes fewer people to make things happen here". However, that doesn't explain why the Department was so much more willing to 'make things happen' – to embrace TRAC as TRAC.

The answer to that lies in what Rob Dobson, who at the time was Principal Curriculum Officer for Senior Secondary Education, calls an alignment of the planets. A new, criterion-referenced Tasmanian Certificate of Education had been introduced in 1990 purposely to open up on-going curriculum change. Dobson's role was, in fact, to encourage and oversee curriculum improvement. Further, he had only recently moved to the position from Rosny College where he had seen on a day-to-day basis the unmet vocational needs of students and the work of exceptional teachers trying meet those needs (see p 15).

TRAC came to Dobson's attention in 1992: Richard Sweet spoke at the annual Conference of Tasmanian secondary colleges; Pam Tyson was enthusing about it at Rosny. Dobson was immediately impressed:

TRAC embodied fresh and independent thinking – it was a good analysis of the problem it was trying to address and jargon free. The Forum had the wherewithal to develop it and support trial.

...The skill set was on the money, but it wasn't the skills per se, it was that they gave us something to talk about in terms of curriculum with employers and with schools and it made those conversations thoughtful and careful.

... It could spread because colleges were free to pick up new programs in their own way. It wasn't bottom-up or top-down. There is a middle layer here that allows both ends to comprehend one another. We're fairly flexible and comfortable with letting policy follow practice. We did work closely with the Minister and obtained his support early on.

Tasmania contributed its own 'good analysis' of TRAC through research conducted by Robin Scharaschkin on its three 1994 pilot programs. She looked at *learning practices* in the three programs – an interesting focus in its own right – and anticipated what the demands on the Department would be if TRAC were to expand significantly. The system, in her view, would be confronted by:

- policy issues – should TRAC type programs, for example, be managed through local committees or regional or central bodies? who should be responsible for the ongoing sustainability of programs like TRAC? where should these programs fit in the college curriculum: as integrated components of college offerings or as separate add-on initiatives?
- structural changes – changes to organisation and staff attitudes will be required to accommodate irregular, part-time, unexpected learning in the regular college program and timetable;
- resource issues – if new programs like TRAC are to grow, they will need adequate resourcing, on-going support and a clearly articulated sense of direction.

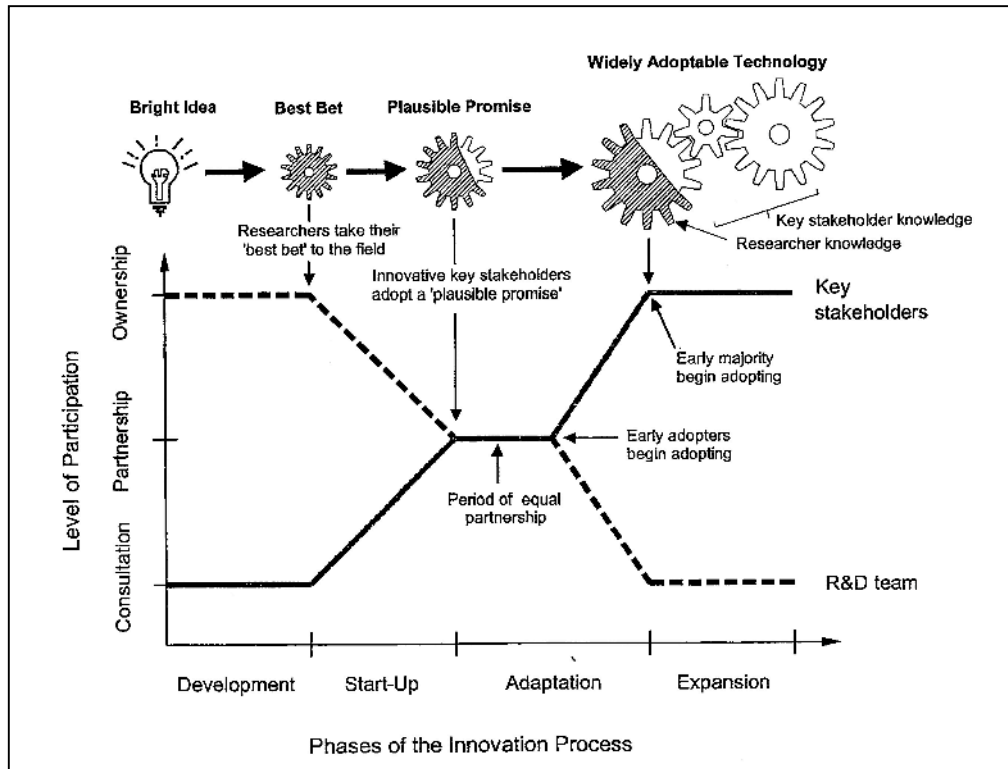
In sum, in Tasmania there were talented educators interested in educational reform at many levels in the system – educators already grappling with how to meet the needs of capable school students who wanted to enter the world of work rather than follow academic pathways to success. TRAC offered a promising model for tackling the problem. The factors which allowed the education *system* in Tasmania to embrace TRAC were similar to the factors which encouraged *regions* of NSW to do so – factors which did not operate higher up the NSW hierarchy. It does need to be said that in Tasmania, the Forum's early requirement that local management Committees be incorporated bodies was relaxed.

a theoretical reflection on the rapid spread of TRAC

Recent work on the spread of innovation moves beyond the rather tired notion that take-up rests simply with the temperaments of potential users – i.e., they are either early adapters, late adapters, laggards, etc – and focuses instead on how the experience of users is captured and applied. It seemed interesting to assess whether the impressive lateral spread of TRAC conforms (or confirms) this new way of thinking about the take-up of innovation. The 'new thinking' has been conceptualised in a few ways:

- the plausible promise model: developed by Douthwaite⁶, it suggests one should start with a plausible promise (not some fully developed product). Pilot sites are chosen where the need for innovation is high. These pilots are an equal partnership – equal between the designers of the plausible promise and the people on the ground testing and adapting it. He depicts the initial plausible promise – a 'best bet' – as a cogwheel and provides convincing examples that for it to 'mesh in' to an existing system, it needs to be tried and adapted in different contexts, and the knowledge acquired through these various trials brought together. The cogwheel increases in size to represent the increase in knowledge it now contains and the picture moves from a single cogwheel to interlocked ones, as illustrated on the next page.
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Douthwaite's innovation process



(Source: Douthwaite⁷)

- the testable idea model: similar to Douthwaite's but is being applied to enhance the take-up of best practice health care rather than in perfecting commercial products. It is, apparently, quite difficult to get health professionals to change even to a demonstrably better practice. The period of equal partnership in this case is establishing multi-disciplinary projects in which practitioners (and administrators) work out how best to apply the essential element(s) of the new practice *in their circumstances* to achieve improved outcomes;
- the knowledge-brokering model: also being used in the health field, sponsored particularly by the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation, here knowledge brokering is a *collaborative* enterprise, not simply the responsibility of individual brokers.

Knowledge brokering is about bringing people together, to help them build relationships, uncover needs and share ideas and evidence that will let them do their jobs better. It is the human force that makes knowledge transfer (the movement of knowledge from one place or group of people to another) more effective ... brokering occurs even without individuals dedicated to the task so it is important to focus on the activities and processes, not solely on individuals⁸.

TRAC fitted the key dimensions of all three models: an initial idea; collaboratively experimented with; the acquired knowledge fed back to improve/expand the idea:

- the researchers 'best bet' in the Douthwaite model and 'testable idea' in the health field was the TRAC 'hypothesis' trialled in the Hunter 1989-1990. It was a good 'best bet' – a

plausible 'plausible promise' – based on sound analysis, experiential depth and expressed in the language of its prime stakeholders (employers);

- there was a long period of TRAC being tested and adapted – the communities that came on board after 1991 might not have thought of themselves (or be thought by the Forum) as experimenters but because of the give-and-take, back-and-forth infrastructure, their local learning in implementing TRAC grew the cogwheel of knowledge in Douthwaite's picture. The TRAC partnership model (between employers, educators, and community leaders) effectively created the multi-disciplinary teams of the testable idea model;
- TRAC knowledge was accumulated and shared in many ways: (i) there were early process guidelines for new TRAC programs that came from the field; (ii) exuberant Coordinators' conferences which exemplify perfectly the virtues of the collaborative knowledge brokering model; (iii) new coordinators were teamed with more experienced and imaginative ones – a kind of buddy system; (iv) students themselves (their achievements, their enthusiasm, their explicit feedback) made a significant contribution; (v) there were formal evaluations of TRAC programs and an annual follow-up of the previous year's students; (vi) formal training programs for the range of participants; and (vii) a constant stream of material for the media.

One noticeable aspect of TRAC across the three dimensions was the *attention to detail* which stakeholders at every level of involvement gave to their roles in TRAC. Where these models are less helpful is in describing the way a formal system might take-up local innovation. They tend to rely on endless replication of take-up which is something the Forum was not in a position to support.

TRAC had been the prime, at times almost the sole, focus of the Forum during the development and expansion years. By 1994 supporting new and old programs was stretching the Forum's resources to the limit⁹. There was a real danger the Forum would end up becoming full-time administrators of TRAC – exactly the opposite of its original objective of continually creating innovations that would improve and extend the skills of Australian workers. And, in fact, although the Forum had been generously funded, Dick Dusseldorp had placed a constraint on its operations: it was not to touch the capital the Lend Lease donors had provided. "That one rule," he later said, "forced us either to abandon TRAC or find some other way to foster it." Finding another way to foster TRAC (and its overall legacy) is the subject of the next chapter.

5. letting go: the devolution of TRAC and its legacy

It was the Forum's goal that TRAC would eventually be absorbed into each state school system as closely as possible to the original model. The process of devolution was complicated, however, and the elements of TRAC tended to be disassembled in the process. Three factors generated the complexity:

- (i) the operation of state education authorities
- (ii) the development of a range of VET-in-schools programs
- (iii) the strength of the TRAC identity

The legacy of TRAC is substantial, seen most clearly in today's broad agreement that schools have a responsibility to provide pathways to employment as well as to further study. Further, TRAC changed the lives of many individuals it touched and, while that might not impress those who think policy change is the pinnacle of success, it has been of lasting value to those concerned.

The Forum's intention from the start was that TRAC would *demonstrate* that Australia's school-to-work transition arrangements could and should be reformed – that distributed teaching/learning (distributed between schools and workplaces) based on carefully constructed skill frameworks did develop young people's competence and confidence for work and life, and generated practical support from local communities. As early as 1992, the Forum had prepared, at the request of Prime Minister Keating's Office*, a proposal outlining how the Commonwealth might take TRAC forward in the future. It proposed establishing a national agency, with an independent board, charged with the task of stimulating grass roots partnerships, involving employers and ensuring curricula were industry-led.

By 1994 the Forum had come to the firm decision that it would need to relinquish administrative responsibility for TRAC sooner rather than later as it was stretching resources and diverting attention from its intended role as a 'catalytic agent'. The Forum made some attempts to generate a self-governing model for TRAC (based largely on state Steering Committees). The more effective path, however, in 1994 was to take advantage of the fact that the Commonwealth was preparing an Employment White Paper. The new Minister for Education, Simon Crean, expressed an interest in building the TRAC model into it. The 1992 proposal was resubmitted and Richard Sweet spent time in Canberra developing it further so it fit with the thrust of the White Paper. *Working Nation*, published in May 1994, did establish an Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF) which was charged with two principal tasks:

- to expand and improve the quality of accredited upper secondary school-industry programs that blend structured vocational placements with off-the-job training;
- to build bridges between these programs and post-school training arrangements such as apprenticeships and traineeships.

There would be regional brokers and these were expected to be existing bodies. The examples cited were regional development bodies, TRAC Management Committees and group training schemes. The ASTF was allocated \$38 million over four years.¹⁰

* From the start, the Commonwealth was kept informed about TRAC. Both Jack Dusseldorp and Richard Sweet knew key people in the Education Ministers' and Prime Ministers' offices during the years of the Hawke-Keating governments and they were vigilant in keeping these politicians and their staff up-to-date. Although their strongest connections lay with the Labor side of politics, they were careful to speak (and listen) to Coalition figures, particularly David Kemp.

In principle, the ASTF mechanism was tailor-made for sustaining and expanding TRAC programs. Its charter was based on the key principles of TRAC. A number of people associated with the Forum contributed to the ASTF, most notably John Goodman. Goodman, who joined the Forum Board in 1992, was asked by the Commonwealth to establish the ASTF and chaired its Board to 1997; Jack Dusseldorp served on the Board after 1997. During the ASTF's first few months, staff were seconded from the Forum to set up its initial systems and to facilitate consultations around the country to explain ASTF and to listen to suggestions (the report of these 60 forums was actually titled *An Ear to the Ground*).

But there was no simple hand-over of TRAC to the ASTF and the devolution of TRAC is a more complicated story than might have been anticipated in 1994. There are several reasons for this: (i) the role of the states/territories; (ii) the burgeoning of other vocational education programs in schools; and (iii) the strength of the TRAC identity. These are discussed in turn.

(i) states/territories as complicating factors

The States/Territories have legal responsibility for schools and the accreditation of students. The Forum understood this and did, of course, negotiate with system authorities. It expended considerable effort, for example through the work of Ian Colley in particular, aligning TRAC programs with vocational curricula being developed in different states and the emerging national traineeships. The initial effort was promising [Ian's phrasing was to call it 'successful' rather than my word 'promising' – but if it was 'successful' it couldn't have gotten, as he accepts "too hard"] but the task, as he said, "just got too hard – we couldn't sustain the effort required." In Victoria the relations were such that only two TRAC programs were ever established there. The South Australian education authorities engaged quite positively with TRAC.

There is evidence that the Forum did not always appreciate the constraints under which state school systems operate nor the tendency for the public service to protect its constitutional prerogatives. A number of informants to this review who were great supporters of TRAC, some very much involved in managing TRAC programs, voiced a quite consistent concern about the way the Forum managed its relations with state authorities:

It is at this policy-change level that the great work done by the Forum with TRAC comes a bit unstuck. Having achieved the conceptual breakthrough of mixed school work pathways across the nation, the Forum would have been more successful at the state policy level if they had softened their approach on program detail and accepted that each state would work out its own – and would come a long way to the TRAC model but using their own words and guidelines.

It was easy for bureaucrats to interpret the Forum as being harshly critical of their current school arrangements – which it was. But the language used made the authorities defensive and antagonistic. The Forum itself operated well outside a bureaucratic mindset and they appeared quite intolerant of bureaucracy.

Many observers thought the Forum wanted to by-pass the states on principle. In one way, the impression is correct: the TRAC model and the ASTF both provided support directly to local partnerships; resources purposely were not given to state education systems. Further, the governance model in these vocational programs demoted education

authorities to a partnership role (with employers and the local community in leadership positions) which was not their usual mode of operation.

In another way, however, the impression is false: the Forum's ultimate goal was for the states to embed the TRAC model so it operated in every community as a fully accredited choice within senior secondary schooling. During 1995, for example, Ian Colley was engaged full-time – more than full time – attempting to map, maintain and refresh TRAC curriculum documents to meet course requirements in different States and Territories:

It was hugely costly and time consuming. I remember days in the office around Christmas 1995 almost weeping with despair from the effort of checking and double checking all the details to get the mapping right before a deadline. And curriculum was never the true heart of TRAC. That was the real problem as the various States started to meet the challenge of workplace learning: most treated it as a curriculum issue, and the partnership features which TRAC had pioneered were abandoned or severely curtailed.

The ASTF saw its role as building the momentum of TRAC-like programs to the point that State/Territory school systems would feel compelled to incorporate the essential TRAC features in their own vocational education programs. The ASTF, it is important to recognise, was always meant to be a transitional agency, a bridge from local TRAC programs to mainstream systemic provision. The ASTF was "a vehicle, not an institution", in the words of Eric Sidoti, who worked on strategy with both the Forum and the ASTF. One of the unanswered questions about the ASTF, in fact, is whether it could (or should) have been able to persuade the Commonwealth to use its legislative and financial muscle to embed TRAC's essential features in state provision by, for example, demanding the presence of such features to receive VET in schools funding. The Commonwealth often influences State/Territory schooling by setting criteria in return for funds, from embedding literacy testing to displaying the Australian flag.

John Goodman, who served on the Boards of both the Forum and the ASTF during the critical 1994-1997 period, believes one of the lessons to be learned from the weakening of the essential TRAC features through the devolution processes is that inadequate attention was paid to the underlying demographic data. So while it was wonderful that there were 2,000 TRAC students in 1996 and ASTF's target was to have a further 5,000 students participating through its funded programs, the reality was that there were 400,000 students in the Year 11/12 cohort.

Goodman's point is that the magnitude required to make quality structured workplace learning available to all who might profit from it was largely set to one side. The resources available to the ASTF which, at \$38m over four years, appeared very generous (and was actually in excess of what the Forum had expected would be the Commonwealth's initial contribution) could not have supported TRAC programs on a large scale. In TRAC a Coordinator looked after about 40 students at a cost of about \$50,000 a year. If one rounded that down to \$1,000 per student, the \$9m per year available to ASTF would have supported Coordination only for 9,000 students (without funds for anything else including its own administration). The ASTF did commission the Australian Council for Educational Research to conduct surveys of school-industry programs in 1995, 1996 and 1999¹¹ which at least provided some information on the issue of scale. The data showed that participation in workplace programs was increasing (from seven per cent of Year 11/12 students in 1995 to twelve per cent in 1996 to nineteen per cent in 1999). The data also

revealed, however, that less than a third of the programs involved extended time in the workplace (20 days or more over the year) and many had no workplace learning requirement whatsoever.

There is a consensus amongst those interviewed for this report that system-wide implementation would always mean some diminution of TRAC quality. Their reasons differed. One thought quality would deteriorate because systems are traditionally loathe to provide the resources required for program coordination. In TRAC, one Coordinator worked with 40 or so placements. There are examples now of a single Coordinator handling 1,000 or even 2,000 placements (albeit with help from teachers, but teachers as a rule do not have their feet equally on both sides of the education - business divide). Another explained that as other people came onto the scene, changes would inevitably be imposed: "one just has to accept that". A former Coordinator explained it this way:

Large education systems are about quantity – about numbers. It is almost inevitable that you trade quality for quantity. When TRAC was dissolved into the Department, I got frustrated. The employers lost ownership. I felt really sad but numbers are important. Now we've got a hell of a lot of kids doing VET and workplace learning.

(ii) other VET-in-schools programs as complicating factors

TRAC was, and still is, widely acknowledged as the first program in Australia to convincingly demonstrate that school-to-work vocational programs set to industry standards could meet the needs of a large cohort of senior secondary students whose needs had not previously been adequately addressed. It not only achieved outstanding outcomes for the students involved, benefited employers and their staffs, and often whole communities.

The Forum was not the only group, however, working to improve school to work transitions. Traineeships had been available since the Kirby Review of 1985 and although the take-up was far less than expected and they were a post-school option, they constituted an explicit pathway between school and work. Then, in the early 1990s, the Commonwealth commissioned what became a trio of linked reviews of vocational education, particularly focused on entry-level training. These were a response both to pressure from employers about the adequacy of education and training for school leavers and concern about the steadily increasing number of students who did not intend to go on to university but who were staying at school through Years 11 and 12. The three reviews were:

- the Finn Review of Young People's Participation in Post Compulsory Education and Training in 1991: although it focused on post-school rather than school options partly out of a fear that schools would be accused of streaming students if they were to have an explicit role in preparing students for work;
 - the Carmichael Report of 1992: the Employment and Skills Formation Council chaired by Laurie Carmichael produced a design for a new entry-level training system, the Australian Vocational Certificate Training System (AVCTS). It left open the possibility that schools could play a role in vocational education. In fact, a significant number of
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the 'Carmichael pilots' that were funded to explore aspects of the AVCTS were school-based*;

- the Mayer Key Competencies in 1993: this specially constituted Committee, chaired by businessman Eric Mayer, proposed a set of key competencies (generic or core employability skills). These were to be achieved by all school students, not only those wanting a vocational strand in their secondary school studies.

This trio of reports were largely independent of TRAC although Richard Sweet and Jack Dusseldorp did meet with the various review committees. Their essential arguments – that educational reform for young people not going on to university should be: (i) at the level of senior secondary schooling; (ii) national in scope; and (iii) vocational, not generic, in orientation – were not effectively taken up.

Some of the pilot programs funded as an outcome of the 1992 Carmichael Report, however, did develop new school-based vocational pathways. One pilot at Alcoa in Geelong had many features of the original TRAC Phase Two model in that students still at school were paid employees during their time in the workplace although it involved only a single employer, a single school and a single TAFE Institute. In taking the step of employing school students, the industrial relations issues which were minimised in the [Phase One] TRAC model had to be directly confronted. They were complicated and protracted. The Alcoa program was maintained by the company for a number of years and was taken up in Kwinana in Western Australia (a program that won international recognition) and in Gladstone in Queensland.

During this period there were also a range of school-initiated vocational transition programs and although many of these lacked the research and resource base of TRAC, they had features which met the needs of some students. State authorities were experimenting with their own school-to-work pathways – for example, the fact that when the Forum first approached the NSW Department of Education and Training back in 1989 to talk about its ideas for (what became) TRAC, the officer they spoke with had already been directed to look at a retail vocational program. With the advent of Training Packages, in the mid-1990s, the vocational options available to schools and students became yet more varied.

Thus, by the time the Forum was phasing out its role(s) in TRAC, there were a number of other school vocational pathways which were less demanding of school time and resources than the sophisticated TRAC model where employers played a central role managing the program and assessing students. The ASTF thus faced an increasingly complex ecology of school-to-work programs which it needed to accommodate. In fact, the ASTF's early tendency to fund TRAC-like partnership programs, which its brief suggested it should favour, had caused some resentment.

(iii) the strength of the TRAC identity as a complicating factor

In a paradoxical way, the very strength of TRAC and the sense of personal loyalty and identity it engendered made the Forum's task of disengaging from TRAC that much more difficult. In the initial devolution stage, there were attempts to maintain the TRAC brand.

* several people interviewed for this report attributed the unexpectedly large number of school-based (as opposed to employer-based or TAFE-based) Carmichael pilots to the influence of TRAC which had already shown what schools could achieve.

The existing State Steering Committees were to take on the quality management and advocacy roles of the Forum as well as supporting program coordinators by fostering networks, facilitating the sharing of resources, and arranging seminars. The Forum worked through 1996 to strengthen these Steering Committees whose members were keen to maintain TRAC as TRAC. One of the leading edge TRACs, the one at McLeay Valley in NSW, was designated a 'core TRAC' to be the central point of contact for other programs. It was a responsibility they managed for a year but, as the Coordinator there said, "we couldn't do it as well as the Forum did".

No new TRAC programs were established – franchised under the TRAC label – after 1996 and by mid-1996 most TRAC programs were applying directly to the ASTF for funding. Interestingly, ASTF funding gave schools more discretionary income than they had previously enjoyed. For a time the ASTF organised and facilitated TRAC Coordinators Conferences and furthered the cause of a Coordinators Network. It also continued to develop the Supervisor Training Program.

It was inevitable that the TRAC identity for vocational programs would fade as the centring role and substantial infrastructure of support provided by the Forum came to an end. As one Coordinator put it:

The Forum provided a bedrock – a foundation. When we heard it was going to be moved on there was a huge personal sense of loss. We knew how much time and money the Forum and people like Suzie [Moore] put into supporting us.

What is remarkable is how memorable the TRAC identity – and loyalty to it – is to this day. One example: in arranging interviews for this report, Mike Cochrane's name came up as an employer on the central coast of NSW who had been involved with TRAC. I called his number and explained to the woman who answered that I wanted to talk to Mike about the old TRAC program and started to spell T-R-A --- "Stop," she said, "I know about TRAC..."

I was a TRAC student! One of my placements was here in Mike's office at the shopping centre – it must be ten years ago. My first job after school was with a branch of the real estate company I had a placement with. I've had a few jobs advancing up and now I'm here. How funny!

There was a smile in the voice of everyone I spoke with as they recalled their experience with TRAC. Their recollection of particular details was surprisingly vivid.

TRAC'S legacy

TRAC's legacy on a national scale in vocational education and training is substantial. It can be seen in:

- schools: TRAC convincingly demonstrated to most teachers, students, parents, employers and the broader community that schools have an obligation to provide sound and accredited vocational programs for Year 11 and 12 students, still keeping open their general educational opportunities. Since 1995 every state has reviewed – or is still in the process of reviewing – the provision and certification of upper secondary schooling (often at considerable expense) with a special focus on ensuring the equivalence of vocational and academic (sometimes called 'general') studies. The legitimacy of VET in schools is often most notable in schools where TRAC operated. Beyond curriculum change, much of
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the current work on student transition management can be traced back to its roots in TRAC programs;

- structured work placements: TRAC's pioneering development of structured workplace learning is reflected in all serious work placements (those provided by TAFE Institutes as well as by schools) and certainly moved thinking away from vague work experience programs. The spread of VET-in-schools has seen a gradual retreat from structured work placements – an outcome that was rued by the employers interviewed for this 'look back' who reported that in recent years they have not been approached by schools to take on students and they miss the opportunity. Nonetheless, the TRAC-based material *Workplace Learning: a Handbook for trainers, mentors and coaches* available on the Forum website is one of the most popular downloads from the site, requested by organisations in sectors as diverse as not-for-profits, industry, schools and TAFE.
- closing the gap between businesses and schools: TRAC broke new ground in placing employers at the heart of TRAC programs but all structured work placements require cooperation and mutual understanding between educators and employers (and their staff). The old idea that a school can (or even should) work independently of its local economy was undermined by TRAC and its demonstration that insulating schools from their communities did students a grave disservice;
- VETnetwork: This network of teachers, trainers, careers advisers and others committed to vocational learning and youth transition, established in 1995 and continuing to this day, was "strongly influenced by the TRAC experience of its early committee members," according to Mike Frost, one of those committee members. VETnetwork's purpose aligned with and furthered the aims of TRAC:
We knew very clearly what we were promoting through VETnetwork: good programs with big chunks of work placement time, driven by committees comprising business, industry, local communities and schools – providing good options for successful career education and training transitions.
- competency-based learning and assessment: TRAC's pioneering use of competency-based learning and assessment is reflected in the design and use of Training Packages, now the VET sector's only accepted curriculum model. Quite a few of the teachers and employers who were involved in TRAC became leaders in the development of industry Training Packages. But at the school level there has been an unfortunate retreat from TRAC's 'gold standard' of having trained employers and employees assess school students' workplace learning. Current VET-in-schools programs have been effectively reclaimed by school educators at the expense of utilising employers' judgement.

Overall, TRAC (and the ASTF) pushed the boundaries for vocational education and training in schools well beyond where schools or school systems would otherwise have placed them. Few would dispute the view of one informant who said, "what became possible changed because of TRAC".

TRAC also made an immense difference in the lives of individuals who participated in TRAC in various capacities:

- almost all the students who joined TRAC said glowing things about their experience at the time and many remain convinced that it kept them in school and/or put them directly on the path to fulfilling careers;
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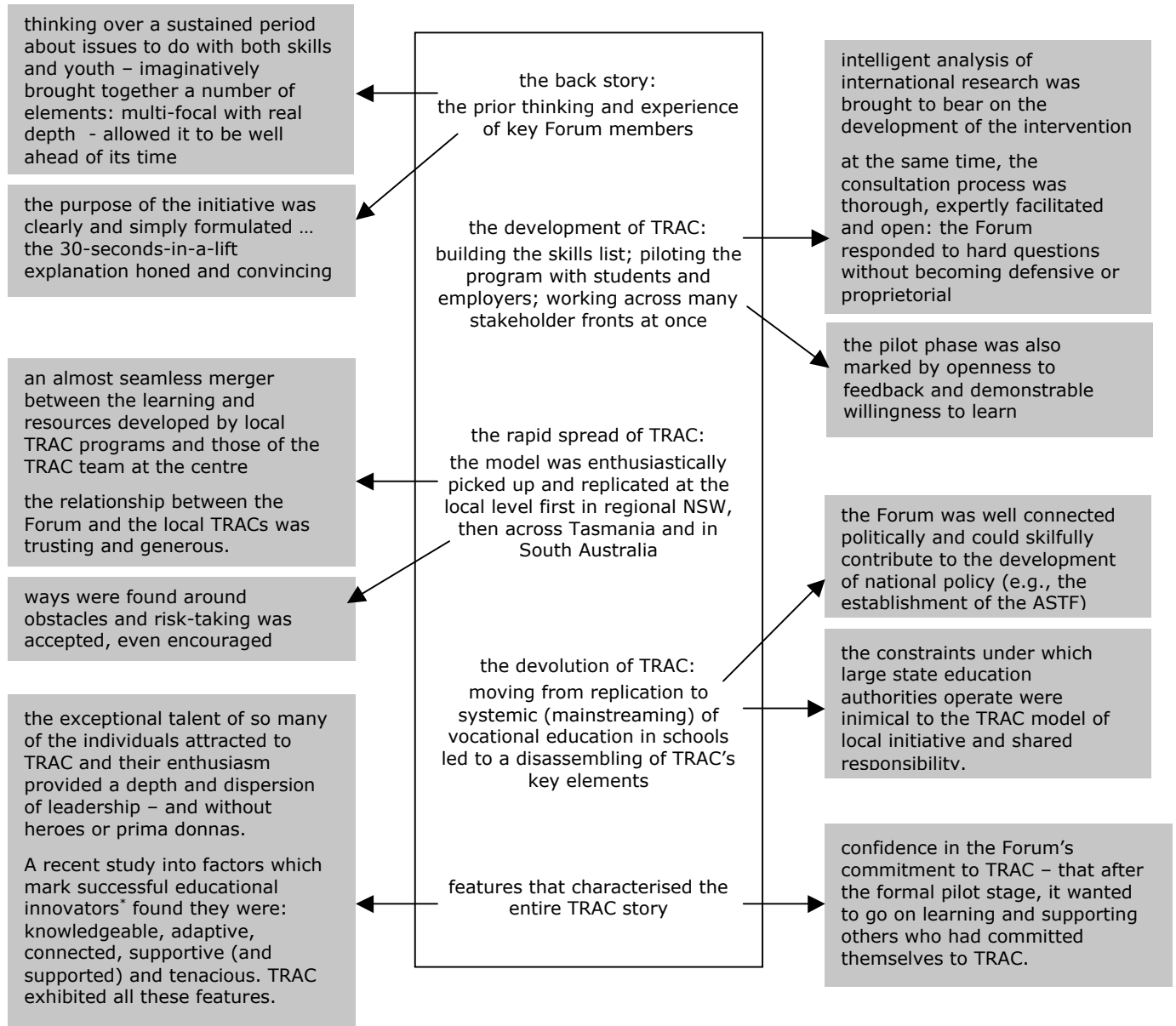
- there were classroom teachers for whom the experience of working with employers – “with the real world out there” – rejuvenated their teaching; teacher Coordinators received extended and unrivalled professional development from TRAC which continues to inform their work;
- the experiences gained as a TRAC Coordinator open new career paths for many: out of the handful interviewed here, one has established a profitable enterprise helping local businesses to improve; one has pursued an interest in community learning that was triggered by TRAC; another is a successful facilitation and organisational development consultant; a fourth has set up an independent (non-systemic) vocational high school especially for disaffected youth, several of whose Board members were on the old TRAC Management Committee;
- the training given to employees who acted as workplace supervisors developed a range of their own skills as did the train-the-trainer training given to some employers and teachers.

There is also the not inconsequential pride and pleasure that remains for participants. Employers felt great satisfaction in helping young people and in having the opportunity to hand on their own skills and values¹². Many developed a new appreciation of schools and their teachers (“I had thought the schoolies would just fizzle out”). By the same token, teachers developed a new respect for businesses, especially in the retail sector which had been looked down upon as a low skill dead end environment. One regional community, Junee, remains convinced that the cohesion of the town was lifted by TRAC. Finally, so many simply felt, and feel still, that TRAC gave them a rare chance to do exciting, important things – things that made a difference. And they loved the energy and spirit in themselves it unleashed.

The total cost of developing, implementing and devolving TRAC is almost impossible to estimate. The Forum made some early efforts to calculate the in kind contributions of employers and community leaders but did not even attempt to place a figure on the extensive extra time even paid personnel like teachers, Coordinators and the Forum’s own staff put into making TRAC the success it was. The point that Jack Dusseldorp likes to make is that the considerable funds the Forum put into TRAC were its own “independent” dollars *and* they were applied for about eight years, far, far longer than the 12-month ‘pilots’ typical of education projects. He is also quick to point out that as significant as the Forum’s funding was, the cash and in kind contribution of the other participants would have been even larger. One might say the Forum’s dollars were independent and catalytic.

6. drawing the story together

The purpose here is to identify elements which underpinned the development, implementation and devolution of TRAC – the submerged part of the TRAC iceberg, as it were – which might usefully be applied to other of the Forum’s ventures and ambitions.



If one had to choose from amongst these important elements the single feature that distinguished TRAC from other worthy educational innovations, I would nominate the intelligent support people provided to one another. This was nicely described by a former TRAC student who happened to run into his TRAC Coordinator having not seen her for many years. He smiled, “I was a bugger, wasn’t I? But you were there for me”. It is that ‘being there’ for one another which shines through all the interviews and perhaps explains why moving TRAC into bureaucratic education systems was so difficult: bureaucracies are not built on, nor usually expect, trust. Yet, it seems to me, trust was the cornerstone – or to return to the iceberg analogy – the ingredient which gave TRAC its buoyancy.

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