

AID-FOR-TRADE CASE STORY

AUSTRALIA

THE AUSTRALIA PACIFIC TECHNICAL COLLEGE (APTC)

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Region: Pacific

Country: All Pacific Island countries can access APTC. Students come from the Cook Islands, FSM, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Type: Project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC) was established in July 2007 with Australian Government funding. The APTC aims to increase the supply of skilled Pacific workers to meet industry needs; and provide greater employment opportunities for Pacific Islanders in local, regional and international labour markets.

The APTC delivers Australian Certificate III and IV courses in five industry sectors: automotive, manufacturing, construction and electrical, tourism and hospitality and health and community services. Flexibility exists for the APTC to add or remove courses, campuses and training partners in response to changing demand from employers.

Students at the APTC come from various Pacific Island Countries (PICs) and are trained in areas of local/regional skills shortage (eg. construction, health care) and major services related export sectors such as tourism and hospitality. Qualifications gained through the APTC are widely recognised, including throughout the Pacific, Australia and New Zealand.

The project has contributed to regional integration, trade in services and facilitating labour mobility — all being particularly important in assisting to meet the particular development challenges faced by PICs as small and vulnerable economies (SVEs).

Initial surveys amongst employers suggest a significant increase in productivity of APTC-trained employees. 70 per cent of surveyed employers highlighted that there were improvements in productivity of APTC trained employees.

Graduates of the APTC are supporting the growing infrastructure needs of the Pacific with students receiving qualifications in automotive, construction, electrical and manufacturing.

The initiative is fulfilling a niche role by providing a standard and level of training not previously available in the region.

ISSUES ADDRESSED

- Pacific Island countries are geographically remote from each other and major economic centres. They have small populations, limited natural and human resources and limited fiscal and institutional capacity. Access to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) opportunities is often not available outside the capital and in the outer islands. Many countries do not have quality-assured national skills standards and training can be supply-driven and of low or variable quality.
- Skill shortages are widespread across the Pacific, resulting in loss of productivity, lower profits, problems with equipment maintenance and loss of markets.

OBJECTIVES PURSUED

The APTC provides training at Australian (and international equivalent) standards in order to:

- increase the supply of skilled workers in targeted sectors in the Pacific region
 - help Pacific Islander women and men with Australian qualifications realise improved employment opportunities nationally, regionally and internationally. In part, this recognises that remittances are an important source of household income in many Pacific Island countries (*e.g.* in Tonga and Samoa, remittances represent over 30 per cent of GDP, and over three times the amount these countries received in foreign aid).
- increase the productivity of individuals and organisations in targeted industries and sectors.

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Australia-Pacific Technical College was designed to:

- complement and not compete with existing regional and local training institutions, and
- partner with other Pacific training and education providers including the private sector to build on existing strengths within the region.

Campuses have been established in PNG, Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu, in partnership with local training institutions and businesses.

Courses are delivered by contracted Australian Technical and Further Education Colleges at Australian Certificate III/IV (trade and post-trade) levels. The courses are delivered in response to demand identified through industry consultations and employer surveys that were conducted during the design of APTC. A Scholarships Fund is included to improve access for disadvantaged students (*e.g.* taking into account gender, those from remote areas, poor backgrounds, people with a disability) and those from the non-campus countries.

CHALLENGES

A second phase of APTC will commence in 2011. A challenge is to assess options for the longer term integration of APTC within the regional technical and vocational training architecture. Considerations include amalgamation with viable regional training institutions, deepening partnerships with industry, widening the funding sources and greater use of national teachers and managers.

Another challenge is to ensure that the high quality and standards of APTC are maintained.

Poor literacy and numeracy levels can be a constraint for some students and in response, APTC is now in a partnership with the University of South Pacific to develop literacy programs contextualised to APTC requirements.

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

The key reason for the APTC's success is its niche role in

- delivering high quality training that meets industry needs, including through flexible delivery, including on worksites, and trade skills testing,
- providing internationally recognised qualifications,
- partnering with private sector groups, industry and local institutions to complement existing public and private investment in the sector,
- addressing the needs of men and women and people with disabilities by:
 - offering women-only courses in heavy trades
 - promoting men's enrolment in children services
 - engaging a sign interpreter to assist hearing impaired students
 - providing safe accommodation for women.

RESULTS ACHIEVED

Demand for APTC training has been strong from employers and students. As at February 2011, 1,386 students are currently enrolled and a total of 2,424 students have graduated. The College has received 10,072 applications. The program will exceed its target of 3000 graduates by 30 June 2011.

A mid-term review and surveys have found that the APTC is meeting its objectives by increasing the supply of skilled workers in targeted sectors in the Pacific region and enhancing the future employment and promotion prospects of its graduates.

Additionally, the APTC is having a growing impact on national and regional training capacity through:

- delivery of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment enabling local trainers to obtain a high quality qualification,
- enrolment of industry and institutional trainers in APTC programs, and
- positive demonstration effects in partner institutions.

Whilst sample sizes are small and results need to be further tested, initial surveys amongst employers suggest a significant increase in productivity of APTC-trained employees.

The APTC has facilitated the increased skilling of workers in key export sectors such as tourism and hospitality. Almost 75 per cent of APTC graduates have received qualifications in a trade related field.

Specific stories about successes can be found on the APTC website (<http://www.aptc.edu.au>).

LESSONS LEARNED

Implementation of the APTC has highlighted the importance of

- strengthening linkages between campus and non-campus countries
- flexible delivery methods including temporary teacher placement in non-campus countries and remote locations; and strategies to simulate workplace environments
- on-going labour market analysis to inform course profiling
- comprehensive tracer surveys to confirm impact (in particular, post-training employment of graduates)

CONCLUSION (applicability to other programmes)

The APTC can be seen as a successful regional approach to education and training services. Due to the small and dispersed populations in the Pacific, a single delivery model will not fit all circumstances. Technical and vocational education can be costly and capital intensive and regional solutions need to be considered. The APTC is a value-adding project that responds flexibly to address constraints and opportunities across the Pacific, while keeping a focus on its niche of delivering demand-driven, high quality training.

As implementation progresses, the APTC is developing a strong brand and a positive reputation. This in turn is generating new demands for APTC campuses and for services in areas beyond the current scope. Australia views the APTC as one part of a range of support, by donors and national governments. Considerable attention is given to ensure that the APTC complements rather than competes with other TVET strengthening initiatives aimed at improving the quality of national TVET systems, including the delivery of lower level courses (Certificate I and II).