The LiFE Index: Early Learnings and Great Expectations

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The journey to become a sustaining organisation is a long one and involves learning as much about the organisation and its people as it does about sustainability itself. Many achievements and setbacks will be experienced along the way to sustainability becoming a strategic and central organising principle for the organisation.

Many tools exist to measure and evaluate sustainable practice in organisations. However few, if any, are designed specifically for measuring and evaluating the core business activities of education institutions, while at the same time enabling the participation and encouragement that is essential to achievement in this space.

The Learning in Future Environments (LiFE) Index\(^1\) was launched in Australia in February 2012. Referred to as ‘a strategy in an online tool’, it is designed as a performance management, staff engagement and program accreditation system, specifically tailored to the higher education context. As part of reviewing and reorienting its own sustainability portfolio, TAFE Western identified its need for a system with these sector-specific credentials.

This paper presents TAFE Western’s early experiences of utilising the LiFE Index as part of developing a whole-of-institution approach to integrating sustainable practice across all areas of its core business and operations. Future areas of focus will be engaging staff and students in sustainability initiatives; supporting sharing of good practice through increased dialogue, collaboration and partnerships; monitoring and evaluating the programs operating under its Sustainability Framework; and ultimately, seeking accreditation of its sustainability portfolio.

**Keywords:** sustainability, strategic, evaluate, LiFE, performance, engagement, integrating

**INTRODUCTION**

Progress in implementing sustainable practice by education institutions on a global basis is mixed. A particularly challenging aspect remains the adoption of an integrated, whole-of-institution approach to embedding sustainable practice as part of the core business of teaching, learning and research; operations; and other activities such as community engagement.

Numerous tools exist to evaluate organisational sustainable practice. Until the advent of the LiFE Index, there were no tools specifically designed to measure and evaluate sustainable practice as an integrated component of the core business activities of Australian education institutions. In contrast, the LiFE Index is an internationally-benchmarked performance management, accreditation and engagement tool for sustainable practice in the higher education sector. Developed in partnership with the Stockholm Environmental Institute (SEI)\(^2\), and the higher education funding councils of the United Kingdom, it was

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2. Independent international research institute created by the Swedish Government in 1989 - http://www.sei-international.org/
Butt, More & Avery (2012) concluded that specifically in Ryan Jørgenson & Lehmann, 2008; Schaeff even when attempts are made to address these particular problems, universities can often remain in particular, further organisation (for example, Pratt & Pratt, 2010; Benn, Dunphy & Perrott, 2011). The pressure on education institutions industry and education sector's specific management implications reorienting an organisation toward reality of achievement against stated goals and objectives. The development and implementation of these programs is usually guided by various charters, policies and plans that state the organisation's commitment to sustainable practice. These guiding documents also usually set out the activity areas covered by the organisation's sustainability program, and the goals and objectives for each area. However the rhetoric of sustainability programs does not always match the reality of achievement against stated goals and objectives.

Reorienting an organisation toward sustainable practice is a challenging task with significant change management implications. Sustainability is not a 'blanket option' – it must be carefully honed to each organisation's specific circumstances (Pratt & Pratt, 2010). This is particularly the case for the higher education sector. Sustainable practice in education institutions includes operations, research, teaching, industry and community engagement, philanthropy, and outreach, advocacy and community services. Pressure on education institutions to engage more proactively with sustainability continues to mount with the growing evidence that sustainable practice is regarded as key to becoming a high-performance organisation (for example, Pratt & Pratt, 2010; Benn, Dunphy & Perrott, 2011).

Further complication arises from the fact that there is also extensive evidence indicating that universities, in particular, struggle to become more sustainable organisations, with lack of leadership, inability to manage change and failure to properly resource sustainability initiatives being prominent among these. Even when attempts are made to address these particular problems, universities can often remain generally unsuccessful in terms of lasting change (for example, Carpenter & Meehan, 2002; Starik, Schaeffer, Berman & Hazelwood, 2002; Velazquez, Munguia & Sanchez, 2005; Christensen, Herreborg, Jørgenson & Lehmann, 2008; Butt, More & Avery, 2011a, 2011b, 2013a, 2013b; Tilbury, 2011; Tilbury & Ryan, 2011; Lovins 2012; Winter & Cotton, 2012).

Specifically in relation to performance management of sustainability programs in Australian universities, Butt, More & Avery (2012) concluded that:

- The study participants had devoted significant effort to the design, implementation and management of their sustainability programs. When these programs entered a period of stagnation or inactivity, all four institutions were proactive in strategically reviewing their programs.

This paper is organised into the following sections – a brief review of the literature on performance management of sustainability programs and success of same in higher education institutions; an outline of the LiFE Index itself; a brief case study on TAFE Western’s early learnings and future expectations in relation to using LiFE; and concluding remarks.

SUSTAINABLE PRACTICE – WHAT DOES SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION LOOK LIKE IN A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION?

Defining what constitutes a ‘successful’ performance outcome in the sustainability program of a higher education institution is extremely difficult. While most universities and TAFEs in Australia have implemented some form of sustainability program, the concept of sustainable practice itself is a highly contested one in the higher education sector. Each institution designs its own unique combination of program components and initiatives that fit with its institutional history; mission and values; institutional strengths in learning, teaching and research; stakeholder profiles; infrastructure and asset holdings; relevant legislative requirements; and the organisation’s future direction.

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and identifying future directions and intentions, key areas of commitment and activity, and objectives and initiatives for action.

- However, the rhetoric captured in high-level guidance documents did not tend to match the reality of achievement to date against stated goals and objectives.
- The sustainability programs examined rarely incorporated a matrix of targets and performance indicators, and did not tend to be supported by a holistic performance management system that enabled ongoing monitoring and evaluation of actions and initiatives – both in terms of achieving desired outcomes, and ensuring corrective action could be taken when initiatives began to deviate from their planned course.
- Despite this, all four study participants were to be acknowledged for a very real and genuine commitment to sustainable practice, and their stewardship of the resources they manage. However, the major challenge for these institutions in the future is to become sustainable organisations. To do this, they will need to integrate sustainable practice on a whole-of-organisation basis and into all areas of core business, and demonstrate achievement of outcomes through the use of an integrated performance management system. As for many organisations, these four universities still have some way to go on this journey toward demonstrating successful implementation of sustainable practice on a whole-of-institution basis.

In relation to implementation of sustainable practice in the VET sector in Australia, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) noted in its 2011 study that the VET sector was the more natural and proactive educational leader in sustainable practice, rather than universities (or universities and VET providers in partnership). Further, the VET sector has been more proactive and strategic in relation to green qualifications and employability than universities, with sustainability being mandatory content in all courses since 2009 as a result of the Green Skills Agreement[^3]. The VET sector was set a target of 5% enrolment in green skills by 2013, which it exceeded in 2011 when the proportion of enrolled students in TAFE NSW participating in green skills training had already reached 7%[^4] (OECD, 2011).

The monitoring of performance outcomes in sustainability programs in education institutions should, therefore, be a core element of those institutions’ approaches to sustainable practice overall.

### MONITORING PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES IN SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

There are various schemes and systems available to manage and monitor sustainability programs, but not specifically in education institutions. Many of these programs – such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Sustainability Guidelines[^5] and the AccountAbility AA1000 standards[^6] – are time-consuming and resource-intensive to use (for example, Guthrie & Adams, 2005). Others are specific to geographic areas (for example, the European Union’s Eco-Management and Audit Scheme[^7]), sectors (for example, the Dow Jones Sustainability Index[^8] for the private sector; and Sridhar & Jones’ [2013] environmental reporting tool for small-medium enterprise); or focused on underlying systems, documentation and procedures rather than actual outcomes (for example, the International Organisation for Standardisation’s[^9] ISO 14031 and ISO 14001 – the international specifications for environmental measurement and reporting, and environmental management systems) (Dixon, Mousa & Woodhead, 2005; Guthrie & Adams, 2005). Audit

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[^4]: Corresponding data for the higher education sector could not be located
[^5]: [https://www.globalreporting.org/Pages/default.aspx](https://www.globalreporting.org/Pages/default.aspx)
[^9]: [http://www.iso.org/iso/home.html](http://www.iso.org/iso/home.html)
and certification processes also tend to be costly, and can generate onerous reporting requirements to maintain accreditation.

The long list of confusing terminology with regard to environmental management and performance measurement (often used interchangeably and/or inaccurately), along with multiple definitions and approaches applying to the broader concept of sustainability itself, are not helpful to institutional efforts in this regard (for example, Glavic & Lukman, 2007; Hull, 2008). Further, while external verification by an external third party is generally agreed as essential to credible sustainability reporting and disclosure (and becoming more common), there is little to no consensus regarding methodology and standards for verification processes (Dixon, Mousa & Woodhead, 2005; Székely and Knirsch, 2005; KPMG International, 2008).

By the mid-2000’s, it was clear that the higher education in sector in Australia required a performance management system for sustainable practice that was geared towards supporting an integrated, whole-of-institution approach to implementing sustainability initiatives, with the long-term goal of supporting education institutions in their transformation into sustaining organisations. After several years of effort, Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability (ACTS), in partnership with the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges in the United Kingdom, launched LiFE.

The next section of this paper illustrates TAFE Western’s preliminary engagement with LiFE in its first phase of launch in the Australian higher education sector – this also coincided with the main body of work being undertaken by TAFE Western in the strategic reorientation of its sustainability portfolio.

THE LiFE INDEX – PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

By 2012, TAFE Western had been engaged in sustainability initiatives for several years. These had generally favoured environmental projects, with strong efforts made in the areas of governance and planning; utilities; and curriculum. TAFE Western had also focused to some degree on external engagement, internal recognition strategies, business planning, the ‘green office’, and campus landscape management. Social and cultural sustainability initiatives had received less attention.

However, from an institution-level perspective, it was clear that at the start of 2012, TAFE Western lacked an integrated sustainability framework that was aligned to the commitments to environmental leadership in its Strategic Plan 2011-2013; and supported by comprehensive engagement and monitoring systems. Fragmentation of activity across TAFE Western’s campuses over the years had also been a contributing factor. Over time, this had led to staff disengagement with sustainability, and serious risk management implications had started to arise in relation to compliance, market alignment of business products, and organisational reputation. The Institute had also realised that it was failing its moral obligation as an educational institution to prepare its students for their roles as ‘citizens of the planet’ and employees. A new approach was required.

One of the first priorities in the project to reorient the sustainability portfolio was to determine what kind of performance management system would be required to support it. Investigation of other reporting systems such as GRI and AA1000 at this time noted that the complexity of these, and the reporting burden accompanying them, was likely to result in even further disengagement of staff from the portfolio. It was at this time that the LiFE Index was first being promoted within the sector, and the decision was made to undertake preliminary investigation of the tool’s potential to meet TAFE Western’s requirements.

In addition to information available on the LiFE website, a number of ‘deal making’ points were noted during the February 2012 launch of LiFE, and later in a custom briefing delivered through ACTS to TAFE Western’s Sustainability Committee in April 2012:

http://www.acts.asn.au
http://www.eauc.org.uk/home
• LiFE is the first performance management and accreditation tool designed specifically for the higher education sector, and based on the concept of integrating sustainable practice into core business as part of a whole-of-institution approach.

• LiFE comprises four Priority Areas with 16 framework components. Each framework is accompanied by a management structure (for example, policy, action plan, engagement, measurement, communication, training/support, implementation and links to curriculum); selected frameworks are also accompanied by metrics (refer Table 1).

• The performance management component is based on self-assessment, management and continuous improvement of sustainable practice, with a particular focus on policy, practice, process and evidence to bridge the ‘rhetoric to reality gap’.

• The accreditation component\(^{13}\) is based on independent assessment and verification using a weighted scorecard approach that considers appropriateness of institutional response to identified issues:
  - Within each priority area, all frameworks are equal, however, as there is a different number of frameworks in each priority area (refer Table 1), priority areas attract different accreditation points allocations. For example, one area comprised of three frameworks has a higher number of accreditation points allocated per framework, than another priority area that comprises 11 frameworks.
  - Within individual frameworks, there are different weightings for different activities. For example, writing a policy attracts fewer points than demonstrating impact.
  - Whether an organisation is accredited depends on number of points + the proportion of frameworks covered and to what level of activity within frameworks their sustainability program is operating, as well as assessments against identified questions and also metrics where applicable.\(^{14}\)
  - Organisations may elect to undertake a ‘mock assessment’ to obtain a benchmark of their performance level.
  - Assessment for accreditation takes three days; the process is managed remotely and there are no on-site visits (which significantly reduces the cost). Unlike other accreditation processes, there are also no ongoing surveillance audits.

### Table 1: LiFE Index – Basic Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority Areas</th>
<th>Framework Components</th>
<th>Metrics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and Governance</td>
<td>• Leadership</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Human Capital</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities and Operations</td>
<td>• Biodiversity</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sustainable ICT</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Water</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Energy</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Travel and Transport</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sustainable Construction and Renovation</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Resource Efficiency and Waste</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership and Engagement</td>
<td>• Community Engagement</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Business and Industry Interface</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Procurement and Supplier Engagement</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Staff Engagement</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning, Teaching and</td>
<td>• Learning and Teaching</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{13}\) Organisations may be accredited at bronze, silver, gold or platinum levels.

\(^{14}\) LiFE website advises that methodologies for the question and metrics assessments are currently being finalised.
Research

- Feedback is given directly by assessors, who are vetted by the SEI. Assessors are also selected based on their experience in the education sector, and with accreditation systems.
- The tool is fully supported, and further development of the tool continues as its flexibility is enhanced to address issues such as risk management, and incorporate additional metrics and reporting capability over time.

Of particular importance to TAFE Western in its investigation of LiFE’s potential was a clear understanding of what the Index cannot do, and this was also clarified during the 2012 briefing process:

- LiFE does not provide prescriptive answers to specific problems – for example, is the solution to a particular energy management problem a solar array or a cogeneration plant? The tool does, however, provide the frameworks that govern what question/s to ask, and provides a resource base with access to expertise and good practice – the idea being that similar problems may have been examined and addressed at another organisation.
- LiFE also cannot be used to calculate savings generated through deployment of different technologies.

Based on the results of this preliminary investigation of LiFE, and a further trial period of the tool, the decision was made to adopt LiFE as TAFE Western’s performance management system for its new sustainability portfolio.

TAFE WESTERN – EARLY LEARNINGS AND GREAT EXPECTATIONS

In adopting LiFE as the performance management system for its sustainability portfolio, TAFE Western has found the tool to be much more than an exercise in simple reporting:

1. The LiFE Index was an excellent guiding framework to support the reorientation of the sustainability portfolio itself. Based partly on preliminary investigation of the tool, TAFE Western made the decision to reorient the portfolio around sustainability as a strategy for change, rather than simply an exercise in ‘going green’. As LiFE is concerned with whole-of-institution change, so TAFE Western defined sustainability as an issue primarily of change management, as this relates to the organisation’s vision of ‘providing education and training that changes lives’. From this perspective, sustainable practice then became an issue of what is done, how it is done, influencing behaviour, and changing lives.

2. This process then enabled TAFE Western to define the business case for sustainable practice:

   a. Sustainable practice is a strategic tool to assist TAFE Western in repositioning for organisational change.
   b. Being a sustainable organisation is about having sustainable practice embedded in core business.
   c. If sustainable practice is not embedded in core business, then TAFE Western is not sustainable.

The business case for sustainable practice was then integrated into the principles underpinning the new framework and its accompanying Charter15:

   a. Sustainability is part of core business.
   b. Partnerships based on participation and shared responsibility.
   c. Responsiveness.

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d. Openness, transparency and accountability.
e. Caring for Country.
f. Practicality.
g. Integration.
h. Resource Stewardship.

3. LiFE was also utilised by TAFE Western to further guide the development of the governance architecture that now supports its sustainability portfolio. In addition to the Charter and Framework, this architecture includes a refreshed Sustainability Committee, a new action planning system, and revised reporting and budgetary arrangements.

Engaging with LiFE also assisted TAFE Western to activate the portfolio in two key ways:

1. Through a networked approach, whereby multiple initiatives were deployed at the same time, rather than via a linear approach. This enabled the Institute to facilitate wider engagement by both teaching and non-teaching staff than would have been possible if initiatives had been activated on a sequenced basis.

2. Through a ‘one project, multiple outcomes’ approach – again, this was designed to facilitate wider engagement.

Examples of these types of projects include paper procurement; utilities analysis; e-waste; science education workshops in partnership with local schools, the CSIRO and local government and non-government organisations; event sponsorship; and raising awareness about different approaches to incorporating sustainable practice into learning and assessment across teaching disciplines.

However, engaging with LiFE has not been without its challenges. Deployment of the tool at TAFE Western has taken longer than anticipated, for a number of reasons:

1. While TAFE Western has used the tool as a guiding framework in rebuilding its own sustainability portfolio, there is a clear need for LiFE to be situated in the organisational context – sustainability and otherwise. LiFE cannot ‘lead’ the portfolio – leadership commitment, the business case for sustainable practice, and how the sustainability agenda for a particular institution is defined, must precede implementation of LiFE.

2. LiFE must itself be integrated by the organisation with other performance management systems that the sustainability portfolio must also comply with. These include relevant legislation, the institution’s own strategic plan, external compliance frameworks (for example, the Australian Skills Quality Authority [ASQA]16, Industry Skills Councils and national training packages), state and national policies and plans (including their performance targets), industry standards and other relevant benchmarking frameworks. This has posed a particular challenge in the sense that while LiFE has been invaluable to TAFE Western in informing the development of goals, objectives and strategies, the formulation of performance targets has proven to be an exercise fraught with difficulty.

This eventually resulted in TAFE Western abandoning the attempt to define performance targets in the first year of deployment of LiFE and its new sustainability portfolio – rather, this first year became focused on ensuring the governance architecture was established and early programs implemented. Setting of performance targets will now become a focus of the 2013-2014 planning cycle – however, the tension between setting performance targets and deploying LiFE in its second phase in TAFE Western (staff engagement) is anticipated to pose a significant cultural challenge to the sustainability portfolio.

3. While LiFE is not as complicated as the GRI, for example, it does have multiple layers and there is a need to spend significant time with the tool prior to using it to understand how it works. This is

critical if deployment of the tool is intended as part of performance management and/or staff engagement activity within the organisation.

TAFE Western’s own experience has been that using LiFE in its staff engagement capacity also requires its integration in the wider context of staff engagement with the sustainability portfolio as a whole. While TAFE Western supports the view that LiFE is ‘a strategy in an online tool’, TAFE Western’s experience is that LiFE is not ‘staff engagement in an online tool’. This is partly because the tool requires staff to engage with it in a proactive manner (for example, through voting on particular pieces of evidence uploaded to support the case of ongoing development of the sustainability portfolio) – rather than being passive recipients of endless ‘communication’ on sustainability. This has required a rethinking of the communications strategy supporting TAFE Western’s sustainability portfolio.

4. TAFE Western’s experience of working with LiFE metrics, where they have been developed, has been varied. Many of the metrics result in skewed results for the Institute, given it operates in some of the most remote and isolated communities in NSW; and also covers a geographical area the size of Germany. For example:

   a. Bicycle users across TAFE Western are significantly under-represented in the Institute’s ‘transport demographic’ – many campuses are hundreds of kilometres apart, and even campuses co-located within the same town or city require travel by car.
   b. Green vehicles are also under-represented in the transport demographic, partly because of the prevalence of four wheel-drive vehicles in the Institute fleet, due to the need to operate in remote areas. TAFE Western does not operate electric vehicles at this stage, as their potential for use is again limited by distance between campuses.
   c. In terms of utilities, TAFE Western has recently completed a project to run a five-year trend analysis of its consumption and expenditure. While this is of interest in absolute terms, the Institute intends to further this work by mapping these results against an activity measure such as equivalent full-time person (EFTP) to determine more accurate usage and expenditure patterns as they relate to actual buildings (for example, welding bay versus aged care simulator versus teaching classroom). LiFE metrics do not support this kind of detailed analysis in their current form.
   d. For other metrics, TAFE Western often does not have the data to support individual metric reporting (waste); uses other measures (for example, TAFE Western recycles e-waste, but differentiates between repurposing, donation, take-back, revenue-generating and waste disposal in its e-waste program); or works with different reporting elements that LiFE currently does not enable (for example, TAFE Western’s initial focus in relation to office and copy paper procurement has been purchasing, with the program focused on carbon neutral, recycled content, sustainable source and Australian-made products, rather than permitting purchase of non-recycled/non-sustainable source content products and then focusing on recycling these).

In summary, TAFE Western has needed to maintain, and even enhance, its own in-house reporting system, as the LiFE tool cannot completely replace other performance reporting systems. However, these challenges encountered in working with LiFE have not discouraged TAFE Western from working with the tool. Rather, the ‘side effect’ of LiFE not aligning in full with the Institute’s reporting needs has been the motivation to return to the sustainability portfolio and identify the issues in the organisation’s business model, or operating environment (i.e. climatic and geographical factors) that prevent or inhibit the use of a particular LiFE metric – and then prompt investigation into what sensible alternative measures can be developed and/or sourced and integrated into the internal reporting system.

So what of the future for LiFE at TAFE Western? Despite the challenges encountered in the first year of working with LiFE, TAFE Western’s intention is to continue with the tool as a key element of its sustainability portfolio. Engagement with the tool has been conceptualised as progressing in three phases:
• Phase 1 – utilisation of LiFE as a guiding framework in the strategic reorientation of the sustainability portfolio (part 1) and its accompanying performance management systems (part 2). Part 1 is now complete. However, part 2 will continue during the next planning cycle alongside Phase 2.
• Phase 2 – incorporate LiFE as a core component of the Institute’s staff engagement strategy for its sustainability portfolio. This phase commenced in mid-2013, is expected to run for the next year, and will be supported through the Staff Engagement Module of the NSW Government’s Sustainability Advantage Program17. During this phase, TAFE Western will continue to make improvements to the performance management system for its sustainability portfolio, including closer alignment with metrics reporting under LiFE where possible/appropriate.
• Phase 3 – ultimately TAFE Western plans to seek accreditation of its portfolio under the LiFE Index. While the work of performance management, staff engagement and ongoing development of its sustainability portfolio will always continue, accreditation of TAFE Western’s work in sustainable practice is viewed as a major aspirational goal for the future.

Finally, TAFE Western’s intention is to also utilise LiFE as part of its strategy to support sharing of good practice through increased dialogue, collaboration and partnerships. While TAFE Western has commenced this initiative through activities such as conference papers and other publications, participation in industry panels and collaboration as part of sustainability networks, LiFE is also viewed by TAFE Western as a standardised platform through which to promote three key ‘learnings’:

1. Sustainable practice is a management discipline in its own right, alongside risk management, work health and safety, and quality management.
2. There are no sustainable organisations without sustainable leadership.
3. While sustainability as an embedded aspect of core business is currently an ongoing journey, the ultimate goal is sustainable practice as an inseparable element of organisational excellence.

It is TAFE Western’s hope that as more higher education institutions join the LiFE network, these three key ‘Learnings’ eventually become embedded in ‘Future Environments’.

CONCLUSION

This paper illustrates the challenges of establishing performance management systems for higher education institutions in Australia. While there are many tools available for use by universities and TAFEs to manage the ‘rhetoric to reality gap’ that can often emerge in sustainability programs, the complexity and cost of these tools has not been helpful to these institutions in their attempts to ensure a focus on outcomes in their sustainability programs.

In contrast, the advent of the LiFE Index meant that the sector had an internationally-benchmarked tool that enabled credible performance management of sustainability initiatives. TAFE Western was the flagship signatory to the LiFE Index in the VET sector in NSW.

TAFE Western’s early experiences of utilising LiFE as part of developing a whole-of-institution approach to its sustainability portfolio have been variable. While the tool has been invaluable as a guiding framework in the strategic reorientation of the Institute’s sustainability portfolio, challenges associated with how to situate LiFE in the sustainability context, align it with other sustainability performance requirements, use of LiFE’s metrics and integration with staff engagement activity have resulted in the deployment of the tool being rolled out over a longer timeframe than originally anticipated.

Despite these challenges, TAFE Western’s future plans for LiFE include its use as a platform for further improvement of performance management in relation to sustainable practice, enhancing staff engagement with the sustainability portfolio, and eventually, accreditation of the portfolio itself. Ultimately, however, TAFE Western views LiFE as an important means of providing ‘common ground’ through which education institutions can progress their efforts on the journey to becoming sustaining organisations.

REFERENCES


