



DISCUSSION PAPER

# BEYOND THE STUDENT

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WIDER IMPACTS OF SKILLS  
DEVELOPMENT IN THE PACIFIC

FEB 2020 // PREPARED BY TESS NEWTON CAIN, TARUSILA BRADBURGH,  
MEREWALESI NAILATIKAU AND ONARINA UMU





## KEY MESSAGES

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- Much of the work on the impacts of skills training focuses on individual students or cohorts of students.
- There is evidence of wider impacts of training in communities of various types.
- Addressing the community impacts and effects of skills development is relevant and important in the Pacific context.
- Demonstrating the 'beyond the student' impacts contributes to achievement of APTC objectives.
- APTC is devoting resources to identifying, documenting, and communicating 'beyond the student' impacts.

## AN INTRODUCTION TO APTC

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The Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) is a centre for training excellence and collaboration with more than 12 years of experience and broad expertise.

As Australia's flagship technical and vocational education and training (TVET) investment in the Pacific region, we collaborate with national governments, development partners, the private sector, organisations for people living with disabilities, civil society organisations and Pacific TVET institutions regionally and across nine Pacific Island countries: Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

We work closely with industry representatives around the Pacific to ensure our training programs are relevant and aligned with current and future career opportunities for our graduates – careers where skilled employees are in high demand.

Supported by the Australian Government and managed by TAFE Queensland (RTO 0275), APTC was announced as an Australian Government initiative at the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' meeting in 2006 and was warmly welcomed.

APTC offers Australian qualifications from Certificate I to Diploma level as well as skill sets and bespoke training in various vocational areas. Courses are delivered by highly regarded and qualified trainers, and graduates go on to obtain an internationally recognised, accredited Australian qualification.

In its current third stage (2018-2022), APTC works towards the goal of 'A more skilled, inclusive and productive workforce that enhances Pacific prosperity', supported by three end-of-program outcomes:

1. Graduates have improved employment outcomes;
2. Co-investment in skills training increases; and
3. Selected TVET partners demonstrate quality TVET provision.

## BACKGROUND

It is generally the case that assessments of the impacts of training focus on individuals. Tracer studies and other monitoring and evaluation tools are likely to capture data about what individual students have attained, including by reference to further qualifications, employment, and increased earning potential. There may well be studies of particular cohorts of students, particularly over time, and this is one form of 'community' to which students belong.

However, what is less often considered is the impact of participation in TVET on the community (or possibly more accurately communities) from which students come and to which they will most likely return. How does the availability of TVET affect people's families, or their workplaces? Does participation in TVET have impacts on the wider communities in which people live, or on sectors within the economy? Are there indications that taking part in TVET can have an impact on pre-existing social norms in families, workplaces and communities?

That is not to say that these questions have not been addressed elsewhere. Given the difficulty of untangling financial and non-financial benefits associated with TVET, it is becoming apparent that new methods of assessing the return on investment when it comes to skills development are required. Part of this shift is how to identify and quantify 'beyond the student' impacts on families, businesses and the wider community (Schueler, Stanwick & Lovedar; 2017).

These are questions that are particularly pertinent in a Pacific context. The majority of Pacific islanders live and operate in modes that are underpinned and intertwined with sophisticated and complex threads of communalism and collective action. Therefore it is reasonable and strategic to consider how the work done by APTC and our

TVET partners in the region affects not just individual students but the communities to which they belong or may join in the future.

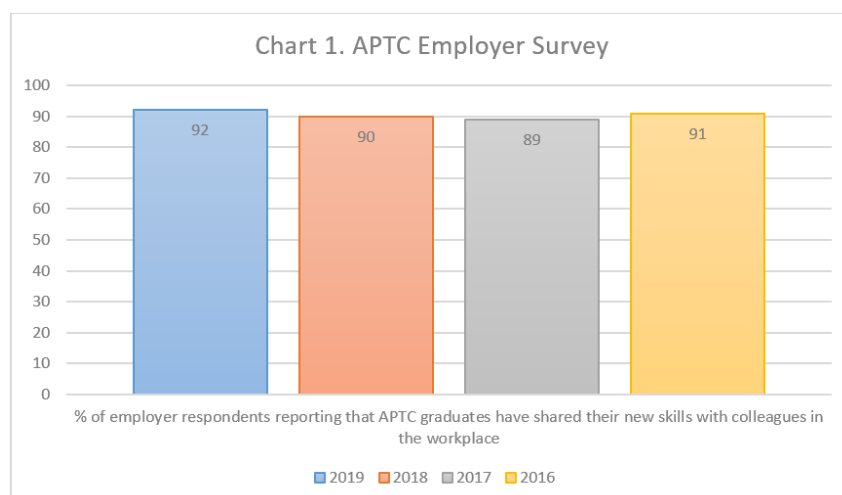
In addition, APTC is itself part of numerous communities, at national and regional level. There is scope to examine how our work and modes of operating affect the communities we belong to as an institution. For example, we make significant investment in resources, including professional development of staff, to maintain the standards required of a regional centre of excellence. This creates the potential for positive spill over effects into wider national and regional communities, including communities of practice. Examples include sharing of resources, facilitating knowledge exchange, or participating in collaborative work with other providers, e.g. to inform government policy or practice in the sector.

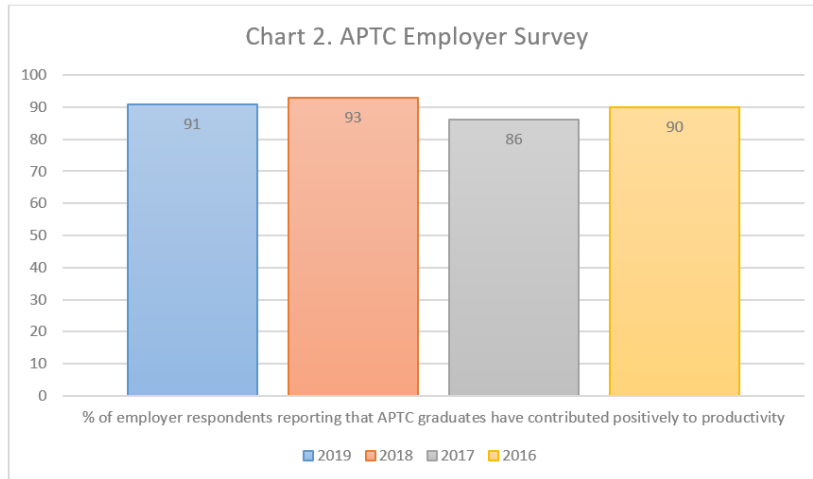
This paper seeks to open a discussion about the ways in which our work can be viewed through the lens of community impacts. It draws on recent surveys of students and employers, case studies, and preliminary data collected in relation to the coalition building aspect of our work.

## WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

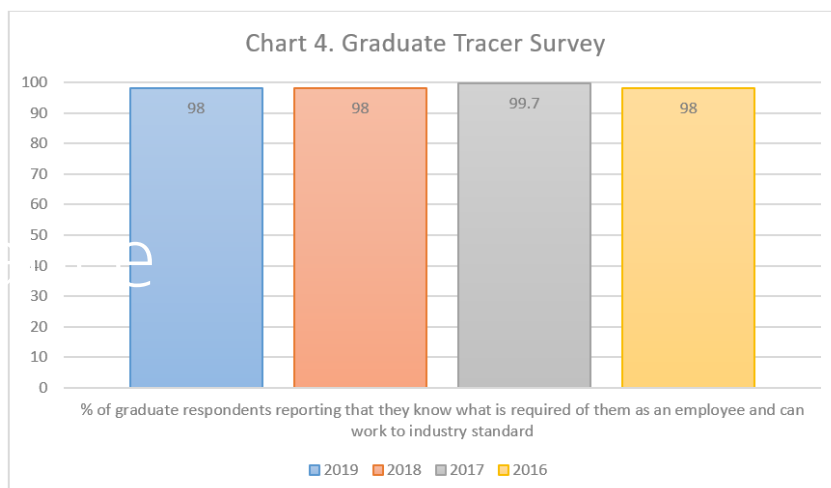
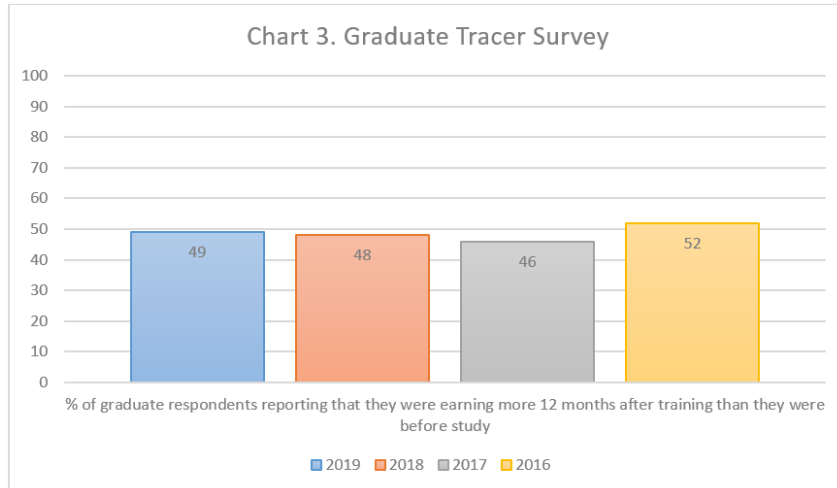
APTC is learning more about the ways in which skills development has impacts extending beyond the individuals involved in training. Whether it be a graduate who has applied new skills to the benefit of a village community, or an employer who has seen her business as a whole improve, the impacts of upskilling are reaching into workplaces and sectors, as well as families and communities.

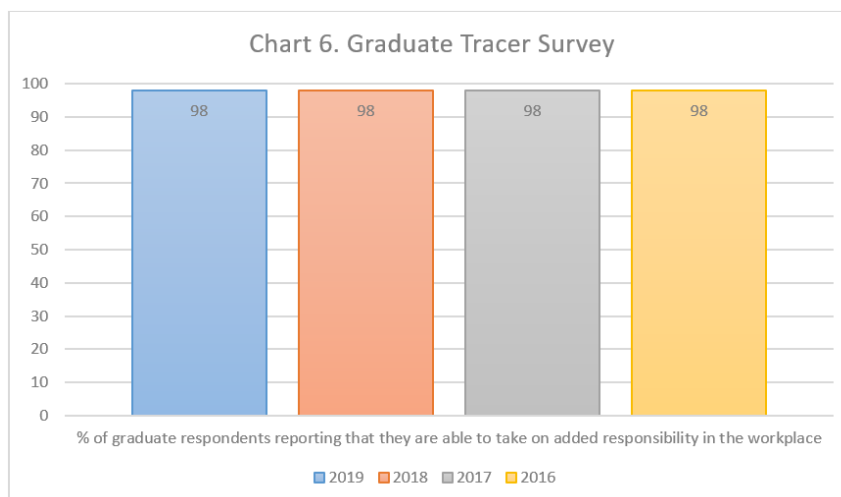
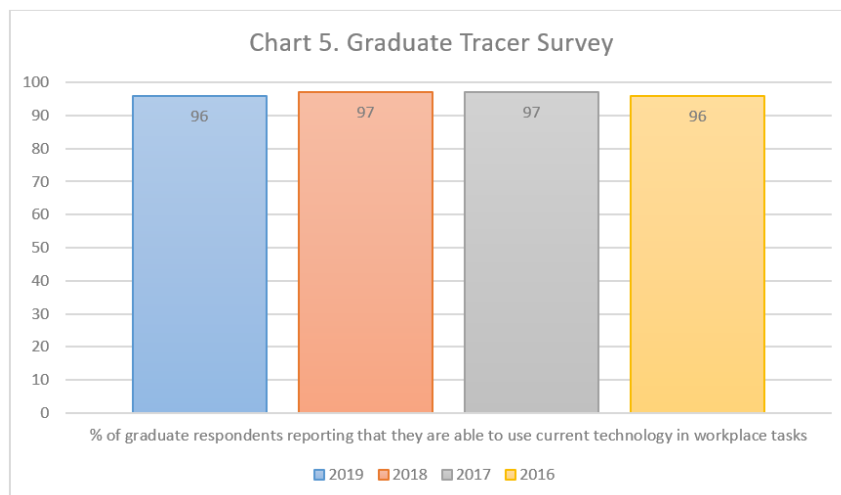
In APTC's 2019 Employer Survey 92% of the employers consulted (386 responses received, with a 57% response rate) report that APTC graduates have shared their new skills with colleagues in the workplace. In addition, 91% of employers note that APTC graduates have had a positive impact on overall productivity. This indicates that beyond the individuals trained, their colleagues and employers are also gaining through skills transference and improved productivity. Since 2016, an average of 90.5% of employer respondents have affirmed skill-sharing by APTC graduates in the workplace. In addition, an average of 90% of employer respondents have noted APTC graduates having had a positive impact on overall productivity.





In the APTC 2019 Graduate Tracer Survey, a substantial proportion (49%) of graduate respondents (895 responses received with a 56% response rate) indicated they were earning more twelve months after training than they were before commencing study. It is reasonable to expect that this is having indirect positive impacts on families, including by reducing the amount that graduates require by way of support and increasing their ability to provide assistance to others. In the same survey, 98% of respondents reported 'knowing what is required of them as an employee and being able work to industry standard', 96% are able to 'use current technology in workplace tasks' and 98% are 'able to take on increased responsibility in the workplace'. Tables 3-6 below show the graduate respondent rates over a four year period from 2016-2019, indicating impacts beyond the student.





These findings point to indirect beneficiaries of APTC training including co-workers, businesses, families and communities, as well as industry more broadly.

## PORGERA: CHANGING MINDSETS

An example of how access to TVET via APTC can change family and community mindsets comes from the highlands of Papua New Guinea. In 2018, 15 young men employed by the iPi Catering Group in Porgera undertook Certificate III in Commercial Cookery (SIT30816) training with APTC. The majority of these men had never left Porgera, and, according to their trainer Sala Tikoduadua, were not accustomed to the idea of being trained by a woman. As with all APTC training, the Certificate III in Commercial Cookery (SIT30816) includes learning beyond technical skills. In this case, students also undertook core and elective units that include competencies like working effectively with others, environmentally sustainable work practices and using business technology. Towards the end of the training, Sala noticed changes that extended beyond the cookery components of their upskilling.

*"Through our learning from each other, toilets were built within [students'] homes and communities, the young men were groomed and presentable, and their wives reported that they were now being given money for food and the well-being of their children".*

According to the Porgera women who visited Sala, it had been two months since their husbands had been violent towards them, and they noticed changes in their husbands' behaviour including: speaking more kindly to their children, providing money to their wives for household and children's needs, remaining at home more and not hanging around tribal talks unless related to mine lease renewal. At the time of the women's visit to Sala, four students had stopped chewing betel nut and three had built toilet facilities in their homes.

*"Some women furtively visited me at my accommodation to thank me for their husbands' changes in behaviour, stating, 'Em no kilim mi. Mi hamamas tumas. Tenkyu tru, bossmeri.' (He doesn't hit me anymore. I am very happy now. Thank you, boss lady.)"*

The broader impacts of the training and its acceptance by the wider community as well as those taking the course have given the process and the product legitimacy. This is part of how communities "invest" in skills training. Anecdotal evidence of the impacts of training on social norms – when wives report that their husbands are no longer violent towards them – indicate that skills development has effects that reach far beyond the classroom.

## VANUATU: "THE FIRST FLUSH"

In the Vanuatu community of Teproma area around Bombua High School on the island of Santo the need for proper plumbing facilities has grown in recent years. This was caused in part by the impacts of Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015 and the resettlement of community members from nearby Ambae after the volcanic eruption of 2018. Discussions to address the community's humanitarian needs, and plans to develop a plumbing course converged. What emerged was a collaboration between the Torgill Rural Training Centre (RTC) (formerly located on Ambae), the Department of Rural Water Supply (DRWS), and Australian-funded programs APTC and the Vanuatu Skills Partnership.

This collaboration resulted in sixteen Torgill RTC students completing training in plumbing that was nationally accredited through the Vanuatu Qualifications Authority (VQA). The training was developed with APTC Plumbing Trainer James Matariki, also an APTC plumbing graduate and affiliated trainer with the Torgill RTC. In the process of their upskilling, the students completed an amenity block at Bombua High School to serve the needs of the surrounding community.

*"We had to complete the half-built building and proceed on to the plumbing section. This helps the students to look beyond the pipes and fittings, and see the big picture of the final product – an amenity block."*

These students are Vanuatu's first cohort of plumbing students since 1982. They have the potential to make a significant contribution to the construction sector of the country. Importantly, the training included aspects of teamwork and leadership, while equipping them to help fill what has been a critical gap in available skills and expertise in Vanuatu:

*"This is more than just another training – it's about building the pool of tradesmen in Vanuatu, making a positive impact in the community and sharing expertise together. All participants in this training have had the chance to lead the team and implement their leadership skills."*

## APTC AS A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY CREATION

Adopting a 'community impact' lens leads to the identification of other ways in which our work has contributed to a collective as well as to individual students. For example, in 2017, APTC offered a 'Master Trainer' program. This allowed trainers to obtain both a technical qualification in their area of professional specialisation and a Certificate IV in training and assessment. The cohort brought together trainers from cookery, automotive and carpentry fields, drawn from six Pacific island countries<sup>[1]</sup>. One of the unintended outcomes of this is that the course participants have formed an online network, which they use to share information and provide peer support.

At an institutional level, APTC has coalition building at the heart of how it operates and delivers on the objectives of the program. This mode of working prompts and supports the initiation of new relationships as well as the sustenance and enhancement of existing ones. Whilst not all partnerships can be accurately described as 'communities' they all have the potential to extend the visibility and impact of our work to parts of the wider community where there has been limited exposure previously. A good example of this is the collaboration between APTC and the Fiji National Council for Disabled People (FNCDP) through the FNCDP's Include Disability, Employ this Ability (IDEA) Program. Under this collaboration, 15 students with disabilities undertook training for a Certificate II in Skills for Work and Vocational Pathways (FSK20119) to develop their skills and capitalise on their unique abilities. This linkage has had direct impacts by way of providing additional training opportunities and accreditation to people who may not have readily approached APTC otherwise. More indirectly, the collaborative approach can form the basis of APTC's offering being introduced to a new community by a trusted interlocutor.

## DISCUSSION

APTC is at the forefront of skills development in the Pacific islands region. We have an established presence and reputation as a provider of high-quality training in numerous fields. With more than 12 years of learning to draw on, we have much to share about the impacts that our work has in the region. An emerging aspect of how we look at the impacts of the training we deliver is to examine the 'beyond the student' impacts and effects. This is particularly relevant within a Pacific context. By taking a closer look at these effects and sharing them with stakeholders and more widely, we are providing important reference points for future students, their families, employers, peak industry bodies, and governments.

[1] PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Fiji.



This is important for two reasons. The first is that it underpins how we can build political, industry and community support for skills development more widely, including for the work done by APTC. This is important for bringing about key policy shifts, such as making government scholarships available for TVET pathways. This is something that will likely require a shift in societal mindset in several Pacific island countries. Showing how quality TVET has benefits to the communities from which students are drawn, and to which they will return, can help in effecting such a shift.

Secondly, demonstrating these 'beyond the student' impacts is part of how APTC can promote the importance of co-investment in TVET. Individual employers may be able to point to positive impacts on their businesses overall beyond an increased level on technical proficiency on the part of individual staff members (Cain; 2014). Certainly, we can expect that peak bodies and government agencies will respond positively where it can be demonstrated that investment in skills development strengthens the performance of a given sector. As noted above, this may include addressing critical skills shortages.

Whilst there are many impediments to the successful delivery of services to communities, lack of skills in those locations is one that is not often discussed. Where communities, whether urban or rural, are in a position to self-fund development projects, such as building new infrastructure, there is an incentive to put some of that communal investment into skills development to support these activities. Similar drivers exist for national and local governments who want to be seen as able to deliver services to the communities they serve.

In addition, the coalition building work that APTC is doing provides another aspect to the consideration of how investing in skills has impacts on communities. Here, there is scope to interrogate how APTC's participation in collaborative efforts by communities of practice and other coalitions can create flow-on effects and impacts. The preliminary examples that are identified above highlight some points of interest in this area. Perhaps most notable is the appetite that students express to maintain and be active in the community that they become part of when joining an APTC cohort. Where this extends to countries other than their own and, across multiple sectors this opens up many opportunities for knowledge sharing, collaboration and peer support.

There are also important opportunities to be further explored as to how APTC catalyses the creation of and participates in communities and networks at the institutional level. This is an important area of work as reflected in the term 'Coalition' in APTC's name. Understanding and mapping these linkages and seeing how they grow into networks, and communities is central to progressing the work APTC does in relation to enhancing the TVET sector, at national and regional levels. It is also key to how APTC can contribute to policy influencing activities.

## WHAT MORE DO WE NEED TO KNOW?

As discussed in the 'What have we learned?' section of this paper, there are aspects of the Graduate Tracer Study and the Employer Survey that provide data that point to the wider impacts of TVET, in families, communities, businesses and beyond.

There is scope for interrogating these issues more directly by including questions that specifically address how upskilling individual students contributes to more widespread effects and impacts, including over time. In terms of understanding what motivates people to take up TVET opportunities, there is likely some benefit in asking students questions about how, if at all, they see the training they receive being able to benefit people other than themselves.

Knowledge of this type can contribute to how APTC presents its offerings to employers, communities, and governments. There are many applications for data of this type, including as part of commencing and progressing conversations about co-investing in TVET.

## ALIGNMENT WITH APTC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Documenting and finding robust ways to measure the wider impacts of APTC's training are vital to the achievement of the program's objectives. This broader, contextualised perspective can support the improvement of employment outcomes for our graduates by tracking how they grow in value as employees in relation to their respective workplaces, colleagues and supervisors. We can also capture how these interactions influence their career progression in terms of promotions, level of responsibility in the workplace, remuneration and sector-wide contributions. As we are better able to understand and share with stakeholders the barriers and opportunities in growing labour market sector and community recognition of the value, quality and relevance of training, we can progress key conversations around increasing co-investment in skills training. We can support our TVET partners to demonstrate quality training delivery by sharing the knowledge we collect by way of monitoring sector and community engagement with them.

To gain a better understanding of sector and community dynamics and 'beyond the student' impacts, APTC is undertaking Political Economy Analysis (PEA) to contribute to a robust foundation for nationally nuanced Theories of Change. This is adding depth to insights gained from Course Completion Surveys (per semester), Graduate Tracer Surveys (annually) and Employer Engagement Surveys (annually) that APTC has undertaken since its establishment in 2007. At a programmatic level, key evaluation questions in APTC's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework (MELF) include criteria on Sustainability and Impact. These questions look beyond individual students to examine how local institutions and stakeholders are providing the functions formerly undertaken by APTC and the degree of quality to which they are provided. They also elaborate on what the long-term impacts are of APTC's training programs on graduates' lives and workplaces, as well as the impact of TVET training on skills and productivity in the Pacific.

Going forward, we are committed to better track and document the broader impacts of our work through a series of interventions in our MELF. These include scheduled reflection and learning opportunities where shared case studies can be an avenue for drawing on others' perspectives on APTC's progress. Through the MELF, APTC will use gender sensitive indicators to differentiate between the experiences of women and men benefitting

from skills training investments and will also work closely with people living with disabilities (PLWD) and key stakeholders in monitoring, evaluation and learning. This will provide a broader lens through which to document and evaluate impacts of gender equality and social inclusion in training, employment opportunities and labour mobility beyond individual graduates to their families, communities and workplaces.

## REFERENCES

**Cain, Bernie (2014) "Investing in people and building a business in Vanuatu" on Devpolicy**  
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**Schueler, Jane, Stanwick, John & Lovedar, Phil (2017) A framework to better measure the return on investment from TVET published by UNESCO-UNEVOC and the National Centre for Vocational Educational Research**