

Chemistry Can Lead You Anywhere!

Graham Brophy

“I have travelled on an interesting pathway through various areas of education, always taking the analytical and experimental approach learned from my scientific background, and always listening to, encouraging and motivating those with whom I have come in contact.”

On completing school at Fort Street High in 1960 I decided to pursue a career in science and engineering. After some changes in direction I went on to complete a bachelor degree in science majoring in Chemistry and Biochemistry at the University of Sydney in 1967. After working in both private enterprise and public organisations (CSIRO, Sydney Water, Public Works) I took up a tenured research position as a Professional Officer at the University of Sydney in the School of Chemistry. I worked in the field of nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR), a diagnostic area initially of interest mainly to chemists but later also taken up by the medical fraternity in the guise of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). I completed a Master of Science degree in Chemistry at the University of Sydney in 1973 while working with Professor Sev Sternhell.

Although the investigative nature of scientific research suited my thirst for knowledge, I found myself becoming more and more specialised in a very narrow field of science, and to a large extent isolated from the world outside.

In the meantime I had been asked to undertake some part-time teaching in TAFE at Sydney Technical College in the applied science and biological sciences courses. It was there that I became involved in teaching in a much more direct way than I did in my research position at university. In retrospect this was the start of a change of emphasis in my career from scientific research to a career in education.

After several years teaching at TAFE in a part-time capacity whilst still fulfilling my research activities at University, I decided that the lure of TAFE, with its culture and opportunities was too strong. I became a full-time teacher of Applied Science at Sydney Technical College (now called TAFE NSW-Sydney Institute) at Ultimo in 1980. I completed a Diploma of Education teaching qualification at Sydney College of Advanced Education (now part of UTS) in 1983, where I received an award for excellence in teaching on graduation.

After teaching full-time for seven years I was seconded to the Human Resource Development Division of TAFE NSW where I was able to apply my skills and knowledge towards the further development of TAFE Educational staff. In that position from 1987 to 1989 I was involved in developing a range of programs and

schemes (Project Fellowship, Return to Industry, Interstate and Overseas exchange) with the purpose of maintaining the technical competence of TAFE teachers.

In 1989 I moved to the curriculum policy area of TAFE NSW where I became involved in a number of emerging areas such as course accreditation, copyright issues, and national curriculum. I acted as an executive officer for NSW on TAFE national curriculum issues and worked directly with TAFE Directors. In this role I took to the national stage and was involved in the rapidly developing national vocational education & training (VET) competency-based curriculum era from 1990 to 1996.

Changing structures in TAFE NSW saw me join the Business Services Training Division in 1991 where I was the Quality Assurance Coordinator for a period before returning to the corporate area of TAFE in 1992.

In 1996 I was invited to take up a position in the newly created NSW Department of Training and Education Coordination (DTEC) where I headed up a new unit charged with establishing a VET curriculum service for all providers of VET in New South Wales. The work performed by this unit, which emphasised the acquisition of skills and knowledge as well as the assessment of these attributes, was observed with great interest by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), the peak national body responsible for VET, and by VET providers throughout Australia.

In 1999 I took on the responsibility for Student Recognition policy for TAFE NSW within the Curriculum Resourcing and Operations Unit (now known as the TAFE Strategic Services Unit). I have since worked tirelessly on overseeing the revision of overarching recognition policy, policy implementation, policy implementation guides, the creation and publication of the credit transfer guide and website for HSC/TAFE pathways, ACE/TAFE credit transfer arrangements and closer ties between TAFE and universities for the benefit students in both sectors.

One of the secrets to the success of my career has been to carry the skills and knowledge I have gained in the various spheres of service across into my current role at the time. A source of great satisfaction to me has been to make the often invisible role of a corporate unit relevant and valued by persons delivering the service to the ultimate customer. I have established extensive communication networks throughout the Department and TAFE Institutes which serve to ensure the relevance and currency of education policy which in turn underpins educational achievement.

Since obtaining my first degree in 1967 I continue to undertake formal learning at intervals of approximately seven years and graduated in December 2003 with a Graduate Certificate in Management from the University of Western Sydney. This will mark my fifth postgraduate qualification.

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Sometimes a manager, but always a student!