Community Owned Tertiary Education Campus

A Community Owned Tertiary Education Campus (COTEC) is one where the land and some or all the facilities are owned and/or managed by the community through a trust, incorporation/company structure or directly by local government, and where the tertiary education provider/s operate on the campus under an agreement with the community and for the benefit of that community.

COTECs are highly applicable in situations where there are thin markets with a resultant reluctance for education providers to commit to a physical presence in a region, or where market failure has resulted in significant under-servicing of existing sustainable student populations. They are also useful for managing a campus of multiple providers as a means of delivering the optimum program mix to achieve a community’s desired employment, social, economic and educational outcomes.

The key characteristic of a COTEC is that the educational providers are accountable to the local community for their performance and can be removed in the event of non-performance. The conventional tertiary education campus model is one where the provider/s own and/or manage the campus with no enforceable accountability to servicing their local community.

A COTEC requires significant investment from other than the educational providers to maintain their accountability and the ability to remove non-performing providers if necessary. The facilities within a COTEC could be managed to accommodate multiple providers and uses, and could include major community assets, thus maximising usage rates and minimising operating costs and commercial risks for any single user.

COTECs can be classified as small scale, where there is no permanent presence of academic staff from the partner universities, or large scale, which accommodate a full satellite campus of an existing university with a permanent academic presence, and may include other providers.

Over time, all or part of a COTEC may evolve to a more traditional satellite campus model, although the maintenance of ongoing accountability to the local community is highly recommended. When applied to a satellite campus of a university, a large scale COTEC fundamentally seeks to achieve the same levels of commitment to, engagement with, support of, and servicing of the local community and student body as would normally be seen at the parent campus.

Importantly though, regardless of scale, a COTEC structure provides a community the ability to grant a social licence for an academic provider to operate, and to withdraw it if their performance is unsatisfactory.

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1 Tertiary education includes vocational education and training (VET) being certificate to advanced diploma level (AQF Levels 1-6) and higher education (university) being bachelor to doctoral degrees (AQF levels 7-10)
Definition developed by Dr Doug Fraser July 2015 in consultation with Natalie Nelm, (Geraldton Universities Centre), Meredith Wills, Zoe Dawson (Cooma Universities Centre)