

Here's to the next 150 years!

We are fortunate that the early Colonial founders of Bendigo identified it as a location for building a great City, and quickly went about building the cultural institutions that would give it permanency, and would support that society to develop and prosper.

Key among those was the development of Education, and the role that has in ensuring that local people developed the skills that were needed to fully participate in the increasingly complex economy and culture of the city on the goldfields.

As we celebrate the 150 year anniversary of the institutions that are now La Trobe University and Bendigo TAFE, it is important to reflect on how much they have brought to our City and Region and to the people who call this place home.

From the earliest days, the Bendigo School of Mines and Industries taught mining engineers, chemists and bookkeepers, but also had a School of Fine Arts, and a wonderful Library.

It is hard to imagine Bendigo existing in anything like its present form and vibrancy, without the myriad teachers, engineers, scientists, nurses, accountants, artists, humanities, IT and other graduates in a range of current, now-obsolete or newly emerging areas of study who have earned their qualifications from the institutions that have evolved across the period since 1873.

As we mark this important achievement, it is also our responsibility to think about the future.

How can we ensure that more of our young people and those changing careers have the opportunity to achieve their potential through appropriate learning pathways?

Do our children and their parents know about the opportunities available to them locally?

Do our local businesses know about the research being done locally that could change the future – and are there opportunities for them to participate in it?

Do businesses think about employing students as interns or for part-time work, as a way of building their future workforce? How do we encourage students who come here from across Victoria, Australia, and the World, to make their lives in our vibrant, culture-rich City?

How do we encourage more high-value businesses to relocate here, attracted by the highly skilled graduates who don't want to leave, and those graduates who continue to return, after spending a few years exploring the World, and bring back their experience and knowledge to Bendigo?

As our World continues to change at an increasing pace, it is apparent that learning, unlearning and relearning will become more and more important for us all – for our community, our economy and our personal prosperity and satisfaction with life.

Let's celebrate this important milestone by recognising that education is what prepares us for the future, and provides us with the skills and knowledge to change it.

Congratulations La Trobe University and Bendigo TAFE – we look forward to continue working with you to create Bendigo's future.

Rob Herbert is CEO of Be.Bendigo, Bendigo's Chamber of Commerce