



Australian Federation of Graduate Women Inc.

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**Submission to The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and
Employment Inquiry into the Role of the Technical and Further Education system and its
Operation April 2013**

The Australian Federation of Graduate Women (formerly the Australian Federation of University Women) is one of seventy-one national affiliates of the International Federation of University Women, the only education-based NGO with status with UNESCO. Founded in 1922, it pursues educational initiatives to advance the status and well-being particularly of women and girls privately and publicly, nationally and internationally. We view Education as essential for Empowering Women; Reducing Poverty Improving Health; Understanding Human Rights; and, Maintaining Human Security and Building Peace. Membership is open to any woman residing in Australia who holds a degree from a recognised university or Higher Education institution worldwide.

While concerned with general issues of education, AFGW has a particular commitment to supporting post-secondary and higher education and encouraging access particularly for disadvantaged groups. We see a healthy, publicly funded TAFE system as essential to achieving our objectives and for the advancement of Australian society.

At our Triennial Conference in 2000 we adopted the following resolution on The Significance of TAFE in the Education of Women: *“The 31st Conference of AFUW urges the Federal Government to re-examine its approach to Technical and Further Education; and, in particular, to restore the financial support needed to enable the nation-wide, urban and rural TAFE institutions to continue to provide those life-enhancing and paid-work-promoting courses which should not be funded on the ‘user-pays’ principle.”* We have advocated since, through our state affiliates and through our membership of the national Women’s Alliances – Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) and the alliance for the economic Security4Women (eS4W) to advance this position.

We strongly agree with your premise that TAFEs have played a central role in education of Australians for more than 100 years. For many Australians, TAFEs have provided critical pathways to the training and skills which are increasingly necessary for playing their part as citizens in building and supporting Australian society and its economy. TAFEs have also played a critical role in regional and rural areas and in providing access to disadvantaged groups.

The National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development signed in April 2012 stressed the need for “recognizing the important function (of public providers) in servicing the training needs of industry, regional and local communities and their role that spans higher level training and workforce development for

industries and improved skill and job outcomes of disadvantaged learners and communities” (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency 2012: 73). Historically, TAFEs have held a special position in building the capacity of people and of their communities.

Developing Skills and Opportunities especially for the Disadvantaged.

The attractiveness of affordable fees and concessions, coupled with the provision of support services including language and literacy classes, counselors, libraries and learning support, have made TAFE the pre-eminent provider of quality education and training and of “second chance” education.

Statistics published by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER 2012) showed that in 2010, 1.8 million students were undertaking courses in VET sector. Of these 70.8% were enrolled in TAFEs and a further 8.2% in dual sector Universities. The vast majority (94.2%) were local Australian students. More than one third were enrolled in basic post-secondary courses of Certificate III or lower. 91.2% of these were enrolled in courses which led to accreditation (AQF). Of the effective fulltime students 15.2% were in the lowest disadvantaged quintile as measured by the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage and 39.5%, or almost four of ten students, were from the lower two quintiles. 3.9% were Indigenous students, while 20.5% of domestic students came from a home where a language other than English was spoken. 6.7% of students had a disability. More collaborative community driven and responsive training programs that are not market based are urgently required in remote and indigenous communities.

The NCVER data also support the position that TAFE is a second chance for many students. 50.9% of VET students in 2010 were in the over 24 years age groups. Of these 31.6% were 45 years or older. 7% used their VET qualifications as a pathway to higher education. Many VET students had not previously completed secondary education. 30.2% enrolled in TAFE in 2009 had education to Year 11 or less or had not previously attended school (NCVER 2009). This group includes a number of women who had either not worked at all or worked for short periods before marriage and childbearing and now need to increase their skills in order to enter the workforce.

In VET continuing declining funding for student contact hours is likely to affect quality and the provision of support for individuals with significant learning needs (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency 2012: 73). Funding per student annual hours declined 19.4% in the decade to 2009 in real terms. (Productivity Commission 2012: Table 5A:19)

TAFE and National Productivity

It is indisputable that VET qualifications are significant for our economy. In 2010 16.9% of VET students were enrolled in engineering or related technical fields and 20.4% in management and commerce courses. Of those completing VET qualifications in 2010, 87.7% of those over 24 years were employed or in further training. Without sufficient funding there is a risk of either not reaching Australia’s future qualifications needs or lowering the quality of education and training (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency 2012: 75)

Low-paid workers, especially low-paid women, are significant clients of the VET sector and they are more likely to move to higher-skilled employment after VET than after other training (Skinner 2008) More programme initiatives with a gender informed focus to increase participation of women in training and

employment in ‘non traditional’ industries and occupations is required on both state/territory and a national basis.

Supporting Regional Communities

For many Australians living in regional centres and remote locations TAFE is the only provider of post-secondary education. The NCVER data show that 42.1% of students enrolled in TAFE in 2009 were from regional or remote locations.

A particularly successful TAFE programme addressing the needs of these rural communities is the NSW TAFE Participation Program Initiative (PPI) (Sim 2013). This is a partnership between, schools, TAFE and the community to provide choices for students at risk of disengaging from school. Delivered by every NSW TAFE in 2011-12 it provided a mix of practical, technical skills; including applied language, literacy and numeracy skills; as well as team building, problem solving, communication and employability skills. The training is supported by partnerships with local businesses and community agencies and by individual mentoring.

A significant aspect of the programme is the connection it provides for participants with employment, in teaching them about what is happening beyond the school gate, and giving them the confidence to operate in an adult world of work. Such schemes are critical for meeting the complex and high-level needs of disengaged young people and teaching them the personal and practical skills to achieve employability. VET in Schools programmes have consistently shown participants have a better chance of successful transition to the workforce (Woods 2007) Such programmes are integral to the health of rural communities, in retaining their young people. They are endangered by government funding cuts.

TAFE Directors Australia recently issued a Charter for TAFE which cited among their four principles for how the public provider can operate in an increasingly contestable environment the recognition of TAFE’s ‘full service role’ especially in regional and rural Australia (TDA 2012)

Government Responsibility for TAFE

In recent years the role of TAFE in providing opportunities for the workers, for disadvantaged students and the regional students has been eroded in a shift from publicly-funded TAFE institutions to the support of for-profit privately funded providers. As David McLean, TAFE manager of RMIT University Melbourne observed “People’s rights to well-funded public education have been forgotten to initiate an ideologically constructed user-pays market” (2012). His remarks were directed to the Victorian situation where the 2012 budget saw \$270 million in cuts to the TAFE budget. Although some of this funding has subsequently been restored by the Napthine government it is not enough. It is not even enough to mitigate the increased costs that are already discouraging low-income students, nor to cover the costs of re-instating courses that have been discontinued, or for replacing lost staff.

However, cuts are not limited to Victoria. NSW Opposition Education representative, Carmel Tebbutt MP, states “This is a critical time for TAFE in NSW...the budget cuts in NSW will slash 800 teaching and other jobs in TAFE and increase fees” (Tebbutt, 2013). These cuts particularly focus on TAFE arts education affecting the creative industries sector which contributes more than \$30 billion to Australia each year. In Queensland, the Government is planning to shut 38 campuses. In South Australia, the TAFE sector will lose

200 jobs in the next few years. VET funding per student contact hour fell 14% between 2006 and 2010 in 2010 terms (Productivity Commission 2012: Table 5A.19).

In Victoria the cuts to TAFE funding have also been accompanied by government intervention in TAFE management. In October 2012 the Victorian Government passed amendments to the Education and Training Reform Act giving the Minister power to hire and fire. In justification of the changes Minister Peter Hall said “It takes very specific skills to oversee a large educational institution and selecting people with the right skills and experience to excel in the job is vital” (Hall 2012). In March 2013, Minister Hall exercised this power in dismissing the Chairs of seven TAFE Boards.

This action was taken despite the government endorsement of the report of the TAFE Reform Panel prepared by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in January 2013. In the introduction to the report the Chair of the committee, Dr Ken Latta, strongly affirmed “Our considered view is that Government should not seek to make wholesale changes to structure of the TAFE sector. The aim should be to allow TAFE institutions to make changes required to be a more competitive vocational training market” (DEECD 2013)

The panel did, however, advise a number of measures to make Victorian TAFE more “commercially oriented”. While the government has not given reasons for sackings the TAFE Board Chairs, Brendon Sheehan of the LH Martin Institute of the University of Melbourne states “one can reasonably assume that the chairs were dispatched because of a perceived lack of business expertise” (Sheehan 2013). However, it would not appear to be the case. Jonathon Forster, Holmesglen TAFE, is the founder and now executive chair of Kane Constructions, a company with an annual turnover of \$500 million, 285 full time employees and which operates throughout the east coast of Australia and overseas. David Gittins, GippsTAFE, is the managing director of the LaTrobeValley’s biggest car dealership and has a background in community service.

TAFE Education for Women and Girls

The Terms of Reference for this inquiry have omitted a significant aspect of TAFE education that we consider very important. We are concerned at the neglect of gender perspectives in an otherwise valuable discussion. Any inquiry that fails to recognise the need to address gender as a possible factor in inequity must be seen as inadequate, even if gender issues are raised only in order to be dismissed as already satisfactorily dealt with. The inquiry would need to demonstrate that groups of women who are disadvantaged in other respects – namely women from low socio-economic backgrounds, Indigenous women, rural and remote women, immigrant and refugee women and other women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds - do not suffer further disadvantage in respect of their access to and successful participation in TAFE education. The position for women with disabilities also requires urgent attention. AFGW is convinced that the needs of Australian girls and women are not adequately recognised in current TAFE structures, curricula and procedures. We note particularly

- the poor attention given to informing girls in secondary schools of TAFE programs that are available and well-suited to their further education and career options;
- the financial difficulty in accessing TAFE or obtaining appropriate support within the sector that is experienced by older women seeking to increase their skills in order to return to, or increase their participation in, the workforce;

- the under-representation of females in apprenticeships and traineeships, 66% of which, according to ABS data, are filled by males.

As cited by NCVET (2012a):

If we look at apprenticeship and traineeships, NCVET data shows that from 1995 to 2011 the proportion of women commencing an apprenticeship or traineeship in the technical and trade occupations has remained a steady 15%, with a similar proportion completing. And the women are almost wholly concentrated in the lower-paid trades of hairdressing and food. This contrasts sharply with the approximately 55% of women making up the commencements in the non-trade occupations.

AFGW were actively involved with eS4W in producing a submission to Skills Australia in November 2010 where we affirmed our belief that “It is vital to build the economic security of Australian women and girls by ensuring their access to government funded relevant training that enhances career pathways and equitable employment outcomes through their participation in VET. This includes women’s participation across all programs including traineeships, apprenticeships, and employment creation programs.” (eS4W 2010)

We maintain that it is important to identify industries and occupations with viable career pathways – work that is emergent, in skills shortage areas including non traditional fields where existing participation of women remains at a low ratio in work and study in VET

In this submission to Skills Australia, we recommended actions to overcome this discrimination against women and girls including the need to:

1. Identify, collate & prioritise documented best practice gender sensitive programs and strategies that have been successful for women in emergent and non-traditional areas of work.
2. Identify selected industries and occupations where initiatives including programs for women can be run to increase and support women’s engagement and inclusion.

Such programmes will not only increase the financial security of individual women, they will also increase the financial security of the nation. As the Productivity Commission has frequently pointed out, notably in its findings on paid parental leave, an increase of women in the paid workforce is essential if an improvement in national productivity is to be achieved.

In Conclusion

We welcome the initiative of the Federal Government in initiating this consultation into role of the Technical and Further Education section and its operation. We firmly believe that a healthy, government-funded, affordable and equitable TAFE system has a significant position in Australian society through building the capacity of our people and our communities. Failure to provide such a system will lead to increased social exclusion and greater unemployment for those who leave school undereducated and unqualified. We hope our submission will contribute positively to your deliberations.

Submitted on behalf of the Australian Federation of Graduate Women Inc by

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On behalf of Dr Madeleine Mattarozzi Laming President AFGW Inc

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