

Submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee Inquiry into technical and further education in Australia

Terms of Reference

a) i. Educational linkages with secondary and higher education.

As a secondary school teacher having taught in rural NSW, TAFE was a very valued source of directly practical education for our students. The opportunity was gratefully accepted by both young men and women who knew they really wanted the skills to obtain work in local industries, including sustainable agriculture. Some were students who were not high achievers or not motivated by what they saw as unrelated learning to their chosen occupation, others recognised the value later and accepted the opportunity to gain meaningful qualifications through TAFE.

As a teacher, I am concerned about the government trying to split teaching in to “tutoring” and “assessing” as isolated elements performed by people with less qualifications than teachers. Teaching is a combination of these things and will only maintain high standards and worth for our students if TAFE teachers continue to be of the current high quality.

a) ii. The development of skills in the Australian economy.

The skills learnt at TAFE were genuinely valued by businesses in the local community, who knew that these learners would be the local people they would be hiring in the next few years, as other young people left town to attend university. In this way, TAFE served our community as an incubator of skills for the future and local employers were confident that the literacy and numeracy support that is provided by TAFE was a suitable standard for the students as prospective employees. I am concerned that budget cuts will cause local employers to see TAFE qualifications as less worth and leave our students with even more limited employment opportunities.

a) iii. the development of opportunities for Australians to improve themselves and increase their life, education and employment prospects, and
iv. The delivery of services and programs to support regions, communities and disadvantaged individuals to access education, training and skills and, through them, a pathway to further education and employment;

Education and the opportunity to earn meaningful qualifications is a basic human right. TAFE provides this for disadvantaged learners in our low socio-economic community, which also has a proportion of Aboriginal learners. I am concerned that budget cuts will remove programs for students from less advantaged backgrounds as well as valuable arts and creative programs. Affordability is a big issue for our students and government cuts to TAFE will only serve to further restrict this learning opportunity from those who need it most.

b) The effects of a competitive training market on TAFE

I have concerns about the current NSW government approach to privatised training where one-off funding is given to start up a facility so that it appears to be going well, before being taken away and left to decay and suffer from underfunding in future years. These facilities are often unregulated and typically employ people with token educational qualifications. This has serious impact on learners who do not receive the quality of education that is currently provided by TAFE.

These non-government facilities offer far less job security as a result of a casualised workforce to cut costs, making it far more difficult to plan ahead and affecting family lives of those teachers and workers affected.

c) What public funding is adequate to ensure TAFEs remain in a strong and sustainable position to carry out their aims

The impact of budget cuts has already led to less affordability for our students to attend TAFE and has had a crippling effect on important creative courses, such as art. Re-investment is already required to ensure that TAFE continues to provide vocational education and support, especially in rural communities.

State governments across the country have enacted significant unproductive budget cuts. For example:

- \$1.2b over four years in the 2012 Victorian state budget,
- Queensland's proposal to shut 38 TAFE campuses,
- NSW's \$80m budget cut,
- SA's proposal to slash more than 200 jobs as TAFE "adjusts" to Skills for all,
- WA has reduced funding for TAFE,
- Tasmania is cutting budgets in the re-amalgamation of TasTAFE.

TAFE has been underfunded for so long, that it is difficult to estimate what level of funding would be considered adequate under current circumstances. A start would be a reversal of all cuts made by state governments who have not appreciated the value in funding vocational education as an investment in our future. Certainly the funding would need to ensure low or no student fees and maintain broad options of course availability for the interests of learners.

d) What factors affect the affordability and accessibility of TAFE to students and business

Our local TAFE is important for our rural students who would otherwise have to travel such large distances that vocational education would become unfeasible. Our business community also has closer links as a result of TAFE being located in town. Increases in rent due to mining activity, combined with government funding cuts to TAFE have also had a negative effect on affordability for students.

e) Different mechanisms used by state governments to allocate funding

Governments should allocate adequate funding for disadvantaged students (rural, low socio-economic, refugee) and show some foresight in funding courses promoting sustainability in industry. Funding could be allocated to areas where a specific skills shortage is identified. Thought should also be given to student support positions, such as librarians. As TAFE is a "second chance" at education for mature learners, funding should not be cut from specific areas, such as art. Creativity plays a valuable role in every community. Governments should not give priority to specific industry areas at the expense of others.

f) The application and effect of additional charges to TAFE students.

Businesses would certainly be unhappy if they are forced to take the place of state governments providing monetary support to ensure they have enough prospective employees who have specific industry skill-related learning from high quality educators.

Education is a right and additional charges should not become a restriction for people to receive valued qualifications.

Yours faithfully,

Christopher Hayden