

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 teacher I am concerned about the impact of the restructuring of TAFE will have on the quality of education for students. In a recent literacy screen of students enrolled into a certificate IV qualification; 3 of the 3 year 12 school leavers had a very low score. Immediately we put into place tutorial support for these students. TAFE through government funding has always provided this student support with successful outcomes. There are many successes with students enrolling in Certificate courses and progressing to University. My concern is on the competitive market short, cheap and poor quality training will occur due money driven market. Private RTO's will and do not offer intensive support for students, they refer them to TAFE. Five years ago I had a student with a drug addiction attend the first day of her TAFE course, this day was a life changing moment for her, and she now has a job, a mortgage and a University Degree. She still keeps in contact with me and has often told me, 'you know I enrolled in TAFE to keep my benefits, you hooked me in'.

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

Investment in education and training is fundamental for the health of any country's people and economy. It is also a human right. Let's stop thinking about money for a minute and think about investment in the people of Australia and the future of our workforces. Not every qualification needs a university degree. We are holding up our most valuable workforce in universities. How many stories do we constantly hear of graduates not workplace ready? Nurses who cannot take blood pressures, dental technicians who have to be 'trained on the job' by senior staff. Let review the apprenticeship model if we want to get serious about developing skills and improving the Australian economy. Students can study at TAFE, graduate and if they want to progress into bachelor and master level, university pathways are available as a choice.

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;

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. I work in rural NSW and have the highest numbers of Aboriginal students. Unfortunately Smart and Skilled and the implementation of the entitlement funding will mean no exemptions at Diploma level for Aboriginal, Disabled and low income earners. Fees are predicted to be \$5,000- \$18,000 for Diploma level courses. I have anecdotally asked my Aboriginal students about them progressing onto a Certificate IV or Diploma with negative reactions. "No, can't afford that"...."my kids come first" "my workplace would never pay for me to do that", "can I pay off a Certificate 3 if I have used my entitlement?"

b) The effects of a competitive training market on TAFE

I hope this will not end up like the ceiling bats debacle, where we see shonky private providers popping up offering cheap courses, incentives like a free laptop and poor training. I am very concerned 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 leaving students with a qualification that has a poor reputation, tainting them. These facilities are often unregulated and typically employ people with token educational qualifications. They also do not comply with standards and regulations. For example offering free courses when TAFE cannot due to regulatory compliance. This does not put TAFE on an equal playing field

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. NSW TAFEs have had a budget cut of \$80m. That means wages/ permanent positions have been cut. Selling off the farm is not the answer. A review and funding analysis is needed. The adequate amount to support the TAFE system should be based on; location, student numbers, types of courses offered (for example trade courses have higher running) 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 TAFEs are scattered throughout Western NSW. It is vital that 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. VET Fee help is only offered to Diploma level courses and should be open for all courses.

e) Different mechanisms used by state governments to allocate funding

Funding for disadvantaged students (rural, low socio-economic, refugee) should be considered. Funding should not only be allocated to areas where a specific skills shortage is identified as on the smart and skilled list but to the student support areas that TAFE has invested over 100 years. These areas include literacy and numeracy support, student libraries, counsellors, disability support and buildings and equipment. TAFE's are part of community's they are opportunities for learning that can change and improve lives of people, their families and community.

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

The prediction of substantial fee increases for people who do not have entitlement's for example Cert III from \$700 to \$4000; Diploma from \$1800 to \$18000 will disadvantage students who are low income earners.

Yours faithfully
Keeley Morgan