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By email: ee.reps@aph.gov.au

Inquiry into the role of Technical and Further Education system and its operation

BPW Australia welcomes the opportunity to comment on the role of Technical and further education and has sought input from our members across Australia.

BPW Australia is committed to obtaining equal opportunity for women in the economic, political and social life of Australia. It represents the interests of working women across Australia and takes the voices of women to government policy makers. Nationally our members include employers, employees and the self employed, giving the organization a unique position when lobbying government. As an international organization BPW enjoys consultative status at the United Nations.

The development of skills in the Australian economy

Many of our members have either worked in or with, or used the services of, local colleges of advanced education. They suggest that TAFE represents the cheapest, easiest educational opportunity for many women, including recently arrived women immigrants to this country and there needs to be continued support of this process to ensure integration of the women and their families into Australian society. One BPW member, a lawyer has had much experience with many women clients who have come here on spousal visas. Their first understanding of our country, culture and language is through TAFE English classes and then through Cert III skills training for such jobs as aged care, child care and hospitality. These women are mostly employed in such low skilled jobs but it provides them with friends outside their husband's home and opportunity for some. BPW continues to lobby against systems that see such women often funnelled in low paying, low skilled employment but sees the services of the TAFE system as an essential first rung to employment and financial independence; it has the flow on effect of having such women encourage their children to also participate in the educational system.

The casualisation of our workforce is of particular concern to BPW Australia's membership, and it is highlighted in the casual nature of many TAFE teachers employment status. TAFE teachers should have a right to permanency and benefits as any other occupational group. Increased casualisation of the workforce has an impact on the education experience of the students because of the constant uncertainty of whether teachers can develop their knowledge and teaching skills for their particular students. Many TAFE teachers are part-time and again the employment uncertainty affects their ability to support their families and their opportunity for career development.

As part of this submission we were privileged to hear the stories of some of our members and have included one for your reading. It highlights the multiple benefits and the dire need we have to not just maintain but improve access for those students left behind by the standard education system.

RE: National TAFE Inquiry

As an trained and experienced, [unemployed] Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) Registered Teacher for Secondary Education and TAFE, a member of Australian Education Union (AEU) and Independent Education Teachers Union (IEU), the lack of programs through government budget cuts, teacher redundancy and pay disputes that would constitute potential employment for many qualified teachers who currently do not have teaching employment has become a serious concern for myself and many students who are not being served because of TAFE programme elimination and/or cost prohibitive fees for programmes that do remain.

I not only have an interest in TAFE revival and sustainability in 'Education Australia' from a personal perspective, but I also believe that if we do not continue to encourage further education at ALL levels, Australia will continue to fall sharply behind world powers in many areas that require expertise, training and of course, education to be the best nation this Commonwealth Nation can be.

Since not all students are able, for one reason or another, to complete training at either Public High School or Private High School, it is imperative that everyone is given the opportunity to gain an education or a 'VOCATIONAL TRAINING' through a TAFE or equivalent as a pathway to either employment opportunity or University should that person have the funding, self-esteem and support from community to improve and increase their skill-level.

I can attest that I am one of those people. For too many years, I was told that I was not bright enough to go to university, there was not money to attend and I should just 'be satisfied' if I could get 'a job'. I left the Public High School I was attending and took up a 'trade' at a 'Vocational Training' Institute [where they generally sent the 'dumb' kids] who were not expected to continue higher education.

Not only did I thrive in the vocational environment, but I was inspired by the teachers there to continue education. It was, unfortunately, not until far later that I was able to do that, as I had fallen into the 'TRAP' of belief in what my previous teachers and Counsellors had told me: That I could not achieve beyond gaining a 'vocation'. Of course, that was total rubbish. Since raising two children, I have returned to higher education. Obtaining three Associate Degrees, a Certificate IV, a Bachelor of Art Degree, a Graduate Diploma of Secondary Education and currently a Master's Degree Candidate, I see that my pathway to higher education could have been shorter and smoother with positive support. I encourage the shorter path be encouraged for students who will be getting an education today.

I only state the personal references to emphasise a point and as someone who has worked directly with a 'lower-socio-economic' group of 'marginalised people' and has been one of 'THOSE PEOPLE'. Many at the Secondary High School level have PROMISE of their personal potential but are discarded as the ones who cannot learn. TAFE would be the answer that would motivate them into success.

TAFE Education allows the non-main-stream-learner to be shown how to use their talents in a productive manner. Hands-on training that incorporates an Individualised Learning Program [ILP] for their best understanding. Once the TAFE Student sees how successful they can be, their motivation increases with that self-esteem and soon they are a working, productive part of/and contributing to society and their community. This pays back to the community by eliminating the need for one more person to be at Centre Link for their pay instead of working for an employer or in a self-employed trade situation, by allowing self-support and financial self-sufficiency.

I believe the above account provides valuable feedback regarding the development of skills for a large part of our workforce.

TAFE is an important pathway to success that should be given the attention to programmes and funding to assure continuing TAFE programmes at affordable cost to those who need these valuable training options.

BPW Australia supports TAFE funding and encourages the state and federal parliament to see a high value in supporting TAFE Programs. Australia relies on a future of educated people to remain a strong, viable nation.

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