

(Opening comment to EEC 2.5.2014)

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with the Committee.

I am an active member of the Deafness Forum of Australia and the LinkAGE program of the Mater Hospital, Sydney. However, this submission is made as a private individual – not on behalf of either organisation.

Members of my family – ranging from teenager to senior – have been and are significantly impacted by hearing loss, some are involved with education. My focus is primarily on assistance to hearing impaired people in aged care. My career was principally in senior human resource management.

I would like to raise three matters relating to TAFE.

Firstly, national industry competency requirements relating to hearing assistance to aged Australians. [TR a) ii]

Secondly, training the current and future aged care workforce: and [TR a) ii & iii]

Thirdly, support to hearing impaired students. [TR principally d) & f)]

My written submission to the Committee (#73 I believe) emphasised the support needs of signing deaf students. These students are particularly disadvantaged however they are a small percentage of overall hearing impaired student numbers, with whom they share some common support needs. However, hearing impaired student needs may vary between individuals.

Thank you

(Submission to EEC 2.5.2014)

As stated in my opening comment I would like to raise three matters with the Committee.

Aged care staff are predominantly TAFE trained.

National industry competency and skills requirements relating to hearing assistance in aged care

A submission is being made to the Community Services & Health Industry Skills Council aimed at rectifying the present *serious* lack of hearing assistance training in units of competency relevant to the rapidly expanding community and residential aged care workforce. This is a critical need as there is a high incidence of hearing loss amongst aged Australians which, if not attended to can have serious consequences, including social isolation and increased depression and dementia.¹

Training the current and future aged care workforce

The Government forecasts a continuation of residential high care and that over time low care support will be provided in-home with consequent rebalancing of funding from residential care to home care packages.² However, with an ageing population considerable demand for residential aged care places will surely continue.

The shift towards high care in residential facilities will increase the proportion of staff needing TAFE Certificate IV as well as some with the Diploma of Enrolled Nursing qualifications. Without adequate funding to appropriately remunerate such up-skilling it is hard to see how this TAFE training will contribute to necessary workforce stability and expansion.

Concerns are regularly expressed by clients and their representatives that some private VET college aged care courses are not meeting required standards.³ Experience is important for care staff. However meeting training standards is of particular concern for Certificate III entry level courses, as budgetary pressures on aged care providers can result in personal carers taking on higher responsibilities.

Clearly fees for community and aged care courses should not be increased in state TAFE colleges and sufficient places need to be funded, combined with effective policing of standards in equivalent private college offerings. Likewise current enrollment incentive and scholarship schemes funded from outside TAFE need to be maintained.

Support to hearing impaired TAFE students

Hearing impaired students have support needs which may vary between individuals.

Ideally a classroom equipped with a quality 'surround sound' system and an induction loop is desirable but expensive. Timetabling to utilise such a room is problematic especially for studies involving specialised equipment.

[Tender advice sheet]

An experienced and respected special education teacher offered the tendered teaching advice but commented, “These strategies are free for the college but classroom teachers require close and continuing support and encouragement to implement them – sometimes even for basic strategies such as not facing the whiteboard while speaking”. Clearly *effective teaching support is needed*.

There is a temptation for colleges with limited budgets for disability assistance to adopt “one size fits all” measures. For example, lending hearing impaired students an individual wireless communication system (costing around \$1,700). These are effective for direct teacher to student communication but generally cut out important incidental class discussion and questions which are common in VET teaching practice. They also depend on co-operation from the teacher. Moreover self-conscious students (especially teenagers) often elect to have inconspicuous hearing aids that are concealed within the ear canal. This type of aid is seldom compatible with a wireless communication system.

Provision of *note takers* is often the best support. They are especially helpful for students who must at least in part rely on the imprecise art of lipreading. Moreover the notes may help other students with learning difficulties, for example – dyslexia, central auditory processing disorder and dysgraphia which together affect over 12% of students⁴ in addition to the hearing impaired.

I would like to add to the comments I made in my written submission concerning distance education. VET training often needs effective work placements. External students are generally expected to arrange their own mandatory work experience. This can be difficult especially in hard pressed aged care facilities or mobile in-home services.⁵

These examples demonstrate that some seemingly simple solutions may be of little assistance to hearing impaired students. These sorts of considerations are particularly relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who have a much higher incidence of hearing loss.

Concluding comment

Relevant anti-discrimination legislation prescribes outcomes rather than inputs. This begs the question – what is the reasonable and adequate balance between cost and the needs of deaf / hearing impaired TAFE students? Hopefully an appropriate balance can be found.

References

1. Including:
NIDCD Researchers Find Strong Link between Hearing Loss and Depression in Adults, 2014
Dementia linked to loss of hearing, The Western Australian, 9/10/13
Hearing loss in older adults linked to faster brain shrinkage
www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/271597.php
2. Minister Fyfield, *ABC 7.30 Report* 31.3.2014
3. For example, article 'Training not up to standard', *The Senior News*, March 2014.
4. Dyslexia: 10% of population are dyslexic; 4% severely so (British Dyslexia Assoc.)
CAPD: 3% - 5% of population, Chermak and Masiak (1998) as reported by Young M L *CAPD White Paper*
Dysgraphia: 5% - 20% of population (2006) F & B Eide *Mislabeled Child* Hyperion Books
5. For example, OTEN NSW TAFE external studies provider states with respect to aged care courses, 'Identifying and arranging a work placement is the responsibility of the student...This can sometimes be a difficult process.'

[Item for tabling]

Advice to teachers of hearing impaired students

- Speak clearly and concisely – at normal rate and volume.
- Keep hands away from face – try not to cover mouth when speaking.
- Rephrase rather than repeat.
- Face the students when speaking rather than the whiteboard.
- Avoid walking around the room when speaking.
- Have the light on your face (avoid standing with your back to the window).
- Encourage students to use a 'buddy' to clarify/confirm instructions.
- Be aware of background noise. Discourage 'side discussions'.
- Use a seating arrangement that allows students to see as many faces as possible (circular or 'U' shape usually best).
- Indicate the speaker by pointing to new speakers. Repeat/rephrase comments/questions.
- Use visual aid as much as possible. The use of graphic organisers and writing of key words and definitions are particularly helpful.
- Use captioned videos as much as possible.
- Provide a copy of lesson plan/notes in advance.
- Allow student to record lesson.