

AEU Victoria TAFE Inquiry - stories submitted to TAFE4ALL

The development of skills

So I start filling in this form and there's a field that asks, "Are you a: Student, Teacher, etc". Am I a student? Right now I'm not. Not really. I received a letter yesterday to say Box Hill TAFE is discontinuing their Diploma of Professional Writing and Editing. It says I can transition to another institution, but had I wanted to study at another institution I would have from the start. I wanted to take *this* course because the course and the staff who take it had such a high reputation; because the course was practical and industry-focused and I am serious about my writing career. If I wanted to take a hobby course, there are plenty out there. Instead I work full time and study part time so I can do something with my talents. This is why I chose to sacrifice my long-service leave to do *this* course at *this* institution, and now it's gone.

I never finished my degree ten years ago when I was younger and naive. Now in my thirties, when I finally return to study older, wiser and better prepared, I find my course shut down when I'm only half way through. My classmates, many of whom are fresh out of high school, now find their close-knit, supportive community thrown to the wind. My teachers, all such wonderful, intelligent, compassionate human beings, do not deserve to lose their jobs after putting up with so much disruption and stress over this past year as they've tried to keep the course afloat.

I'm in a privileged position in that I'm making arrangements to transfer into an advanced diploma course elsewhere (although if that comes through I will have paid for half of a diploma I will never receive). For many others in the same situation — their courses disappearing around them — may not find things so easy to deal with. I live centrally with good public transport options. Many don't. For many, their TAFE is the only place in their community to better their chances in life. Many talents that cannot be so effectively fostered in larger institutions, such as universities or through expensive private providers, will flounder. People of all ages and all levels of society will find their opportunities in life limited because they can no longer update their skills, refresh their qualifications, and be ready for the workforce. Yes, it affects me personally, but it affects so many others so much deeper and I can't just stand back and say nothing.

Cassandra, student, Abbotsford

I am a student who has completed a Certificate 3 in children services last year at Victoria University. As I completed a Diploma in Community Services in 2001, I am considered a full fee paying student.

My certificate cost \$3500. As a low-income earner I was unable to pay these fees in full. I have organised with the TAFE to pay in an installment plan and they have “permitted” me to continue on to the Diploma.

However, due to my outstanding fees the university is refusing to provide me with my letter of completion and therefore I am unable to work in the early childhood sector. I had to pass up a great work opportunity due to this and currently find myself in a complaint process to fight to get my letter of completion.

This university states on its recorded waiting message that it welcomes students “whatever their economical background”. This is clearly not the case, as they provide little support for students who are low-income earners.

Education should be accessible for all!!

Tania, Melbourne

Because of TAFE, I am now a special needs teacher who supports students to access TAFE so that they may have an opportunity to further their education and increase their life chances.

Because of TAFE, I was able to complete a Certificate as a School Support Officer, which enabled me to gain employment as an Integration Aide.

Because of this experience, I went on to uni to become a primary teacher and was able to do placements overseas.

As a teacher, I was also fortunate enough to support the Solomon Islands in their reconciliation and education efforts after the deadly ethnic uprising.

I have now just completed my Master in Education - Special Educational Needs, so that I am able to be the best teacher and colleague I can be to support our most at-risk students of all.

Without TAFE as the first stepping stone, I would not have become the life-long learner that I am, nor encourage others to be all that they can be.

Because of TAFE, I have hope — for myself, my family, and the students I teach in regional Victoria.

Jacinta Cooke, teacher, Leongatha

[I] recently left my job working for a Melbourne-based RTO after witnessing some major fraud relating to RPL and Skills Vic funding.

After receiving information that the RTO was about to have a Skills Vic audit, I was asked to review over 250 student files to double-check that they all contained the relevant evidence, and to my surprise they were completely empty apart from the student enrolment forms.

The RTO had already claimed for these 250 students, which totalled over \$2 million in taxpayers' money, which they were using to fund other businesses.

On the day of the audit, they hired a heap of backpackers who were sitting in a room photocopying third-party reports etc and forging student signatures to hand to the auditors at their request.

Considering it was only 250 files and all the audits were looking for was enrolment start and finish dates, it should have taken about two days max. I'm surprised that after day 4, when the auditors had only received 150 files, that no questions were asked, because they would have to have been completely deaf not to hear what was happening in the room next door.

Today this RTO has been awarded another year's contract and still have backpackers forging all the work.

Very disappointing to see business people using RTOs as a tool to defraud the government and send our tax-paying dollars offshore.

Anonymous, Melbourne

I started teaching my trade, fitting and turning, in 2006 on a one-day-a-week sessional basis.

At the end of my first day I was asked by the campus manager whether I liked teaching or not, to which I replied that I love it!

Now in my ninth teaching year, and on an ongoing contract, I still love my job.

I've completed a Dip VET, and nearly completed an associate degree, and have a great rapport with my students.

Passing on the skills of your trade to VET students and apprentices who have a thirst for knowledge is most rewarding.

Those who have never taught and would like to see dedicated teachers work part time or teach more hours, just don't get it.

Just remember, without teachers, there is no TAFE.

Alan Long, GippsTAFE Yallourn

The development of skills

In 2011 I graduated from Swinburne Uni TAFE's Advanced Diploma of Screen and Media, a course which I am incredibly grateful to have been a part of. I experienced a level of passion in the curriculum that was unsurpassed with any other training I have had in either an academic or workforce environment, and this was without a doubt the ideal learning environment for me. I am currently completing my first and final year of a Bachelor thanks to my studies at TAFE, but nothing compares to the intensive, hands-on skills I gained there. I have always proudly advocated the practical training my TAFE education has offered and I feel that Australians are fortunate to have such an effective trade-training system that is a major part of our academic and working culture. The Bailleu Government's failure to comprehend the significance of this system shows complete disregard for our education system and the future of a skilled Australia.

Kaylene, student, Tyler

TAFE gave me the opportunity of completing an Advanced Diploma in computer systems engineering as a mature student with family, mortgage and bills, at an affordable price. The quality of the teaching and the skills that I gained from TAFE made it possible for me to have a career and the job that I always dreamed of. I will always be thankful of the teachers who not only taught me the skills but also built up my confidence to achieve my dreams.

Nelly Sobarzo, Berwick TAFE

I undertook a Diploma of Liberal Arts degree at the CAE, completed in 2005. Teachers who were professional, committed and most of all dedicated to positive outcomes for their students. Not necessarily to achieve the highest marks, but also to gain confidence and self-belief, which are of huge benefit. Not all people find school a positive experience or have had their learning curtailed for many reasons. TAFE provides other pathways for further education. We need to be smarter and more adaptable, and to cut funds to education is shortsighted.

Julia McGrath, student, Melbourne

I would not be where I am today without the exceptional training and education provided through the TAFE system. With the growing demand for qualifications, skills and experience required by employers, TAFE is the most accessible option for many people looking to change careers or obtain a better employment position. The Baillieu Government's cuts to TAFE funding are a disgraceful attack on the VET sector that will particularly disadvantage those from a low socio-economic background that may be unable to pay the higher fees. This budget is a disgrace and Victorians will remember it at the next election.

James, student, Footscray

No matter how hard I studied my ENTER was not what I needed to get into uni. I completed a Cert II in Desktop Publishing, which gained me entrance into the Diploma. After completing the Diploma, I was granted access to third year of the Bachelor of Communications. I am now a professional designer. I could not have done this without the help of TAFE. The high-school accreditation system let me down and the TAFE system picked me back up. What will happen to future generations if TAFE becomes too expensive for them to afford?

Katherine Hinkley

TAFE was my saviour and I am very fortunate to have been able to access it. Since TAFE, I have completed two degrees and I am working in a position that I never would have been able to fulfill had I not been able to access TAFE. I also have the experience of a partner who is currently working in the TAFE system. These cuts have had a massive impact on our family. My partner's job is now unstable and even if he does retain it, the cuts in Senior Educators means that teachers are not only teaching, they are also coordinating and fulfilling other administrative duties. It is hard enough being able to deliver a quality service to students without lack of support. Our Teachers and Students deserve better than this.

Rebecca, Ringwood

I enrolled in the Diploma of Liberal Arts offered at the CAE Melbourne. I have never (after 4 years at Monash University and 1 year at an American University) encountered such outstanding teachers — extent and depth of knowledge of their subjects was astonishing.

Helen Cook, Melbourne CAE

I wasn't brave enough until my mid-thirties to take the enormous step of quitting my full-time, permanent, safe-but-misery-making job and apply for the Dip of Professional Writing and Editing at RMIT. I have two undergrad degrees and a Masters in my initial "chosen" field, but the quality of instruction, support and inspiration I have found at TAFE have been far more conducive to real learning than anything I experienced at either of the universities I attended. Without the flexibility, affordability, support and practical applications of my TAFE study, I know this would never have happened.

Anonymous, Melbourne

I am the parent of five boys, four of whom have hugely benefited from the TAFE system. Son 1 went to TAFE, completed two computing courses and then on to Uni where he completed further training in Bendigo. Now works for Google. Son 2 recently completed a Diploma in Community Services through TAFE. Son now at TAFE following his dream: Bachelor in Contemporary Music. Son 4 is an Apprentice Farrier and attends Trade School run by TAFE. Son 5 is still at home but may want to attend TAFE — if the government makes this possible by continuing funding.

Carleen Sing, parent, Shelbourne

Joe is a young student who struggled with personal trauma during secondary school. His father hasn't been a part of his life and he watched as his mum pass away during year 11. Without any immediate family around and living independently he finished Year 12.

After floundering for a while working in bottle shops and pubs, Joe enrolled in a Certificate of Business course at Advance TAFE. He is now completing his Degree in Business Studies through University of Ballarat at Advance TAFE in Sale surrounded by friends. Joe was able to do this against all odds. The entry level Certificate of Business won't be running in 2013 and other higher level new course fees are beyond his financial means. In short, if the Baillieu/Hall TAFE "restructure" was introduced in 2011, Joe would still be working casually in bottle shops and fast food restaurants without a career path, an education cut short and a young man not able to reach his true potential.

Leeanne Flaherty, Sale

[In] 1990 I was very nervous 19-year-old with low self esteem. I found the TAFE teachers to be very support and I came to the realization that I can study! I got my qualification and went and worked with special needs children in a centre. Now, 26 years later I am now teaching at TAFE and inspiring young students just like my teachers inspired me. I love my job as every day I see how we change lives. If TAFE goes, I'm not sure how I can keep growing in my career and I worry what will happen to the childcare industry. TAFE taught me that if you really want to achieve something you can.

Anonymous teacher, Heidelberg

I studied a Cert III in Science after (regrettably) having not completing any Science in Years 11 or 12 at high-school level. Four years later, and I am in my final year of a Bachelor of Biomedical Science, with a stable job in the healthcare sector, some research papers in the pipeline, and a wealth of contacts. To this day, I still use the skills that I learned at TAFE, and [without them] would have absolutely no chance of ever hoping to study to become a doctor. I firmly believe that TAFE is as important as Uni level education in the Science and Technology sector, and the last thing this state needs is less contributions toward this area. I owe a great deal to TAFE and the wonderful and experienced staff who are its lifeblood.

Edward Harcourt, student, Yarraville

What I have in life is due to the TAFE system. My first exposure to it was in high school in the late 1980s, it was the equivalent of VET in schools today and allowed me the opportunity to learn to type and gain some retail skills. TAFE helped me gain my first casual job! After leaving high school, TAFE again came to my rescue. It was a way for me to study what I had an interest in (Mechanical Engineering). There was no alternative in my town, nor did my family have the financial capability to send me away to go to university. I gained my Associate Diploma and gained some excellent life advice from some superb teachers in the TAFE system, which I still use today (more on this later).

TAFE again! came to my rescue when I decide to do a mature-age apprentice course in Fitting and Turning. Ten years on it was still there as I remembered it. Sure, the standard had fallen, but it was still there for me to advance my skills in my chosen field. The cost was reasonable, there were teachers and it was still largely not-for-profit. It allowed me to skill myself and be an active member to society and contribute, long-term, in a positive way. My whole life position is thanks to a TAFE system that worked.

Peter Giljevic, Bairnsdale

I live in a refuge, though I have moved into an outreach home. I began to attend Chisholm [TAFE] at the beginning of the year with this newfound confidence. Here at Chisholm I have friends, and for the first time in years I feel normal. It is my greatest goal to finish my Diploma and to become a support worker to help improve the public health system for other young people who may find themselves caught up in it.

With the budget cuts, as I am a part time student, I fear that I won't be able to afford next year, or the year after. I could never have gone to university, and the fact that TAFE existed always gave me hope that maybe I could have a career. I may have taken this for granted, but now that TAFE's future is in jeopardy I really have taken very seriously the idea that disadvantaged students may no longer have any institution to flock to.

What will be the outcome? Less education opportunities for those who need it most.

Casey, student, Dandenong TAFE

When I started at TAFE in 1990 I had no confidence, I enrolled in an Office Administration course at the School of Mines and Industries Ballarat. It was wonderful, I met new people, and developed fabulous work skills, and grew my confidence. I went on to become a sessional TAFE teacher and am now working as an Information Technology lecturer at the University of Ballarat. Next year I hope to finish my PhD. All of that because of a wonderful pathway through the TAFE system. To the Victorian Government, don't take the opportunity for greatness away from dreamers like me. TAFE completely changed my life. I am forever grateful.

Sally Firmin, teacher, Lismore

After leaving the city to move to Horsham, I enrolled at Ballarat University to complete a Diploma in Art. The TAFE course allowed me to fulfil my artistic desires and help me find my place within the community. It is so much more than just an educational institution! As a result of the budget cuts I am no longer able to finish my course of study. I am left high and dry and my social network has been demolished.

If we take a look at educational policy on an international stage, the most successful countries (PISA) are those that invest in education. Sadly, Australia has lost its way.

Anonymous student, Horsham

When I left high school the transition to university was too great and I left my dream of being an art teacher. Some time later I found a new career path with the TAFE sector studying early childhood. I am now a TAFE teacher and have a degree in Early Childhood and am currently enrolled in Masters. I cannot imagine where I would be today without the opportunities provided through the TAFE sector.

Simone Callaghan Dawson Lucas, teacher, Lilydale

TAFE has been extremely important [to me] for nearly 30 years of my life. As a child and young teenager I was bullied very badly at school (up in Queensland) and ended up leaving at just 13 years of age. After several years of depression and isolation I did a couple of short courses at Benowa TAFE and then did my senior certificate there too, allowing me to go on to University. My first experiences at TAFE allowed me to regain confidence and rejoin the world a stronger person. For the past 12 years I have been teaching in TAFE and have loved the opportunity to assist other people facing barriers of all kinds in their pursuit of education and training. TAFE is truly an emotional subject to me for these reasons. Even in difficult times surely we can save this vital public resource.

Gabrielle Hodson, teacher, Broadmeadows

I was not the first to make the journey from the Diploma to a PhD. There were others before me. Many others achieved a basic degree at university. But I suspect that if these cuts go ahead I will be one of the last to make the journey. That fills me with a great deal of anger. Hundreds of working people will be denied the same opportunity. We must do all in our power to stop these cuts.

Dr Douglas Jordan, Kensington

Fee increases

I work for a Disability Employment Services provider in Gippsland. The people I work with are some of the most disadvantaged people there are, and very often a funded TAFE course is their only hope of gaining meaningful employment. Is the government really going to destroy the only hope these people have?

David Morgan, Korumburra

“Jack”, aged 25 and with 4 young children, has had a few pretty ordinary jobs but now has his sights set on a adult apprenticeship and a career as a motor mechanic. The problem for Jack is that 6 or 7 years ago, after a period of unemployment, he took a Green Corps job. As part of this short-term "job package" he came away with a Certificate 2 in Conservation and Land Management. Because he has this qualification, he now faces a \$4000 bill if he takes the advice of potential employers in the automotive industry [to do a Cert 2 Auto course at TAFE]. Jack does not have \$4000, and his family's situation makes him strongly debt-averse. His job-search provider deems the cost too high. At a time when having a comprehensive set of job skills is recognised as an important factor in employment, Jack's situation shows that both he and common sense will continue to be just "collateral damage" from the Baillieu Government's thoughtless messing with our training system.

Neil Hauxwell, teacher, Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE

I was very disappointed last week when a potential student came to enrol in our Certificate IV course. She was a newly single mum getting her life back in order and wanted to start a new career in nutrition. Eager and enthusiastic, she would be perfect for our little class, I thought. A few questions in, we found out she had completed an Advanced Certificate in Cookery 17 years ago. The course she would have paid \$1000 for would now cost her \$7000. Needless to say as a single mum she declined to go ahead with her enrolment and we lost a student. Surely there can be a time limit on certificates so that people can be retrained in something else? Not everyone is out to rot the system!

Sharon Cini, Industry Trainer and Lecturer, University of Ballarat, SMB

I come from a rural town called Cobram in Victoria. I have travelled such distances because Ballarat TAFE, had shown great value in their education, their teachers, as well as students. I am studying Certificate III Hospitality (Commercial Cookery). I love Ballarat. I thought I would live here for another couple of years, study my Diploma and Advanced Diploma of Hospitality, and then move overseas. Now I am rethinking my entire life goal, and how I am going to finish my last year of TAFE. Don't take our money. We are the future.

Sophie Hyde, student, Ballarat

At our information evening tonight I met a lady whose story convinces me that the skills reform disenfranchises those people for whom TAFE should be there. She has been an at-home mother for 13 years. Before then she had completed a Diploma of Teaching, but never used the qualification. She finally 'got up the courage' to follow up her interest in undertaking a qualification in Library and Information Studies, and came to the information evening. Because of the Diploma undertaken years ago, she will not qualify for any government funding. She will be paying full fees upfront for all Cert IV units, which she cannot afford. She was devastated by the lack of support in the system for mothers returning to work, and for mature-age students looking at career changes. As a staff member I felt helpless and angry at a system that does not support mature-age studies (many of whom have prior qualifications).

Renate Beilharz, teacher, Box Hill Institute

I am a partially disabled person whom is unable to work, to continue to receive my payments I must study. At the moment I am studying a Certificate III in Business Admin. With the cuts it has meant that I might not be able to continue to study next year, leaving me no options at all and cutting me from my entitlements at Centrelink.

Anonymous, Warrnambool

Last year I applied for a course in Advertising at RMIT as it was something I was always interested in. After being accepted I then had to pack my stuff and move to Melbourne. This was big for me, I had never lived anywhere else and moving from a small country town to the city away from my family and friends daunted me. With the introduction of the TAFE cuts I will be looking at paying approximately \$6000 on top of my \$1000 payment. That's for just one semester. As a result I will not be able to afford to study or support myself in Melbourne and will have no choice but to return home to Beechworth where the only education I could pursue is Teaching or Nursing.

Marli Tapsall, student, South Yarra

I enrolled in 2010 in a TAE course with Kangan TAFE which since lead to work as a teacher instructing people with disabilities in the workplace. I enrolled just before the enormous fee hikes that followed in 2011, which would have precluded me from study as at the time I had little income and was supporting (as I am now) two pre-school age children. I have a useful job I love as a result of training, which has now become inaccessibly expensive [for others].

Daniel Diesendorf, teacher, Coburg

I am a disabled adult in rural Victoria. What little hope of employment I have lies in being able to retrain myself in some of the emerging technologies at my own expense. In the last 12 months I have had to save up over \$2000 from my pension just to pay my [TAFE] fees. This has meant cutting back on heating and mobility. I simply cannot afford to continue if the fees go up. This will effectively kill any chance I have of getting my life back. I am appalled that this Government is dismantling a system that is the only hope of those that are in my situation or worse.

Ron Ipsen, student, Moe

I enrolled into three Certificate IV in Horticulture courses (Parks & Gardens, Landscape, Conservation & Land Management) at GippsTAFE Morwell campus in 2009. Because of my passion and interest in horticulture, I thought it would be a great way for me to get back into study, as well as a way to help me improve my chances of gaining employment and work experience in the industry. With only two subjects left for me to complete and gain the qualifications, I discovered that I would now have to pay full fees, due to a previous Diploma in an unrelated field that I had earned years earlier. I simply could not afford to finish those remaining subjects.

Anonymous, Morwell

I am a disabled student studying Sound Production at GMEC. The sketchy information I have, is that because I will have completed Cert III and Cert IV in the same calendar year, I cannot get funding to study the Diploma in the second half of this year. The course will not run, because six of the dozen or so students would need to come up with around \$4000 each for fees to fulfil minimum numbers. The only reason I am living in Geelong, is for the course. Some students re-located here, from rural Victoria, and signed leases. Had we known this would be the situation, our lives would have been planned very differently. The changes have made this year an expensive waste of time for those among us who can least afford it, and desperately need the training to build better careers.

Anonymous, Geelong

I see these funding cuts as the Government blatantly turning their back on assisting Victorians to receive tertiary education and achieve successful professional careers. The TAFE system will be squeezed so hard that more and more people will have no alternative but to look toward private RTOs (who may provide a suboptimal learning experience). There will be a great loss of industry knowledge with teachers being retrenched. The fees are set to escalate considerably. We all need to stand up for the future of Australians and the right for all individuals to access education at a reasonable price from expert industry leaders.

Jacqui Terry, teacher, Geelong

I returned to study at TAFE in 2010, enrolling myself in an Advanced Diploma. The fees for my course are \$2300 in the first year and \$1900 second year. Three years ago the same course would have cost me around \$80 a year, under the old concession scheme. TAFE is meant to offer affordable further education for all students, not just a select few. Changes need to be made to the current system to ensure that everyone gets a “fair go”, and that no one is left out in the cold.

Sonja Holness

For most students the concession rate has increased by between 91% and 118% (I am one of those students affected). I'm a 25-year-old TAFE student with no formal qualifications beyond Year 12 VCE and have chosen to return to study after working various full-time jobs to gain further training and skills. Under the current changes to the TAFE fee structure and eligibility to concession rates, I am only afforded a concession rate for one semester of a two-year diploma. This has equated to a saving of only \$80 for the first year. Many students in my course last year were already planning on not returning for their second year as they hold prior degree qualifications and thus will be forced to pay upwards of \$20,000 for a diploma qualification. To me the real "Skills Reform" should be in supporting the TAFE system and the skills that are taught within the system.

Ryan Jaffe, TAFE student

I couldn't afford the fees for university after high school and TAFE allowed me to start my education. I love my course and the teachers are so helpful and I couldn't have done without their support. If TAFE funding is cut further, I won't be able to graduate and start my career. I thought the government wanted all students to have the chance to study and learn. I was wrong.

Caroline S, student, Swinburne Hawthorn

Competitive training market/contestability

I was enrolled at a private RTO for just over a year as part of my carpentry apprenticeship. It was a terrible experience. When I started I had a vision of what it would be. I thought there would be structured schooling environment. Instead, it was just in a factory with an office, like a shed, that doubled as a classroom. After the first couple of visits, I asked them if there was a book I should have, so they dug out an out-of-date teaching manual and threw that at me. There were a couple of practical projects, but it was more like a woodwork class than a carpentry course. There is no comparison between the quality of the training at Gippsland TAFE, where I am now, and the picture I've painted above. At GippsTAFE there are a practical areas, a proper classroom, a library; the teachers a focused on making sure you actually understand the work, not on just pushing another one through. As part of my GippsTAFE course I have completed a Worksafe Victoria licence to perform high-risk work in scaffolding and elevated work platforms and also a first aid course. It's just a million times better. If I was younger, straight out of school, dealing with that situation with the RTO, I probably wouldn't have known to question it. You wonder what it's going to be like for the kids coming out of that place.

Blake Sherriff, carpentry apprentice, GippsTAFE

The changes to TAFE funding mean we no longer have enough funding to run classes. We're having to shorten courses, we're having to fit more students in the class to meet the financial budget, and at the same time we're being told to be more flexible and all the rest. We're caught in the crossfire. At this stage we're holding things together but only just, due to a lot of extra commitment in our own time. It's making a joke of our trade qualifications. At the end of the day we're going to be putting people out there that really don't know much because we haven't got the resources to teach them anymore. The private organisations aren't interested in courses like ours because they can't make any money out of them, so we're left to do the stuff that needs to be done, with nothing. We want to put quality back out into the community. We're looking for people who want to be really good tradespeople, and to have to try and pass out a less than ideal result is soul-destroying. We're just watching things going backwards.

John Francis, automotive teacher, Ballarat University TAFE

I have worked at GippsTAFE for 25 years in the adult basic education and VCE programs. As I live in the community I teach, I have worked with many students whose lives have been transformed by studying at TAFE. The current Eligibility Criteria has prevented many adults in this area from attending our VCE programs because of paying full fees. One of my neighbours who's in her early thirties wanted to do a nursing course but was not able to afford the fees as she was ineligible, having done a Diploma in Law Administration 10 years ago. This is one small example of many illustrating the barriers placed for adults wanting to return to study. The idea presented to TAFE staff of "funding contestability", of opening up competition as offering "consumers more choice", is an insult to the integrity of our TAFE work. We can see through this veiled government rhetoric. It is all about money, not quality of education and training.

Persephone Minglis, teacher, LaTrobe Valley

AGA provided shocking training to my son. As a result he is unable to obtain employment as a tradesman because his skills were so bad. I sent him to GippsTAFE last year and the experts there took him from unemployable to now a qualified pressure welder. He now has a good job. Without TAFE we face a bleak future. We need TAFE.

Vanessa, student, Morwell

Just recently we sent our students out on work experience with bricklaying contractors. One of those students was a disengaged youth who was having a lot of trouble fitting in. To start with he didn't have a good attitude in class, his attendance was spasmodic, he came to us after he was told to leave a VCAL program because he was disruptive and his attendance was inconsistent. We have spent countless hours with him and his parents — who were at their wits end trying to work out strategies to keep him engaged in learning — counselling him throughout the program, trying to make him understand the importance of knuckling down to give himself the chance of getting a job, and after a while his attitude and his work ethic at TAFE did improve. He returned from a very positive work experience and we have received feedback from the employer that he was very impressed with the way in which he went about his work and offered him a job. I am happy to say that the student has taken up the offer and has started work with his employer already. Now there is a real chance that students like this will not get these opportunities in the future if TAFE is denigrated to a level where it cannot sustain the support needed by these kids.

Steve Lee, program coordinator, NMIT Heidelberg Campus

I am an ESL teacher. Last year we were told we couldn't start a class until 20 students were enrolled, a direct result of management's strategy to deal with the huge cuts in funding as a result of the Skills Victoria policy. This was unprecedented. I have had many years ESL teaching experience, and 20 students is the maximum number, not the minimum, in an ESL class before best practice is compromised.

Graeme Sparkes, teacher, NMIT

As a student I would normally complete my course through a local TAFE, but due to the cost cutting I ended up trying to complete my course through an organisation in another state. I was not so successful. Little assistance was provided, incorrect information and a total disregard resulted in me withdrawing from the course. It should not be about tick a box, buy a qualification, but rather education. I have done a TAFE course before. It was wonderful. The staff were supportive and dedicated to me as a student. I have a slight disability. The staff helped me over and above. The [other] course I did online. No one was really interested in me as a person.

Trish, student, Lilydale

I am a Program Coordinator at NMIT. Last night while travelling on the 86 tram, I was appalled to overhear a young man bragging about his fabulous new job. This is roughly verbatim his boast:

It's the easiest job ever. I get paid \$50 to ring people and tell them that the Government is giving away free Diploma courses. I tell them they don't have to pay a thing; they can do any Diploma course they want entirely online, and the Government will pay the full fees. Every person who signs up means I get \$50. I've already made over \$1,000! Do you want me to get you in on it?

This is the system the Government has created: so easy to rot. It's money made at the expense of teachers like me and my colleagues. I decided not to challenge him, but instead got off the tram despairing that education about which I care so much has been so thoughtlessly and recklessly commoditised.

Catherine Davison, Program Coordinator, Study Skills Advisory Service, NMIT

Impact of courses being cut

The heartache I feel right now is unbearable. I found out today that the Advanced Diploma of Justice will most likely be cut from Chisholm TAFE. I have been at Chisholm since I was 15 years old and [it is] my second home/family. The teachers there worked with my dysfunctional life, not against it, they taught me to believe in myself and worked with me one-on-one to make me interested and engaged in school. The Welfare Counsellor there knew my name off by heart, she knew what I wanted to be, she helped me fill out my subjects and application for Year 11 VCE at Chisholm. I started my Year 11 and fell in love with literature and legal studies. I became one of the top students in the Year 11, only because I was encouraged I was told that I could achieve anything. What I am trying to say is without TAFE I don't know where I'd be, I don't know what I'd do, I don't think I would have accessed my full potential like I have now. I decided I wanted to do an Advanced Diploma of Justice at Chisholm after my VCE, but have now discovered that it might be cut. That would have equalled five years of TAFE education. TAFE shows that whatever family life you come from, no matter how bad those bullies treated you, no matter how ignored you were by teachers, you can achieve, you are worth it.

Katy, student, Chisholm TAFE, Dandenong

I'm a Mum at home [who] was looking to further education at TAFE as a way of making a career change. Having moved from Sydney, I've found that regional TAFE's are fantastic. They are right on our doorstep, offer flexible learning options and provide a high-quality education that is equivalent or better than what you find in the city. It is, or was, more affordable than university for me. If there are cuts, I'm not sure that I'll be able to continue down this career path. I hope that the cuts are reconsidered. We all need access to further education, whatever our age.

Anonymous, Diver

At the end of this semester [our son] will have completed 3/4 of a recognised qualification with no avenue open for completion. Our son is justifiably disillusioned with this government and its commitment to youth and education. The last 18 months has been difficult enough for him having to move away from his home and support network and we ask for what reward? Our family has made many personal, emotional and considerably large financial investment to assist our son and we are left questioning and doubting this state government's integrity and belief in vocational training and the education system.

Leanne Flaherty and Bill Payne, parents, Sale

In the wake of the recent Liberal Government funding cuts, Advance TAFE Bairnsdale sacks 32 staff in the first million dollar cut and another \$4 million is yet to be cut from the operating budget. That must be something like another 120 jobs and countless courses to go from this region in the very near future. There is no more funding in Victorian TAFEs for libraries, student services, disability support, facilities or Outreach Centres. The long-standing Visual Art and Design Department and purpose-built facilities at Advance TAFE Bairnsdale will be closing at the end of the year and Visual Arts courses will no longer be offered in this region. Until last week, when the impact of the cuts started to be released, Visual Art and Design education and training in this region had a strong and exciting future.

Anonymous teacher, Bairnsdale

I'm 20 years old with a fiance, daughter and dreams. For as long as I can remember, I've wanted to become a Veterinary Nurse. This year I came back and began a six-month course in Certificate II Animal Studies, and I was then going to start a Certificate IV in Veterinary Nursing. Three weeks before we finished our Certificate II, we find out that all the animal industry courses have been cut. And now there is nowhere in my area that do Veterinary Nursing courses. This budget cut has practically destroyed my dreams. Getting work in this industry is so hard, and now it is near impossible and I am uncertain of my future in this industry. My whole life I have wanted to do this, and now it has been taken away. I am devastated.

Anonymous student, Werribee

I am currently studying Certificate II & III in Business Administration on campus. The course will no longer be offered on campus at Sunraysia Institute of TAFE and I am having trouble finding a traineeship in Certificate IV because it isn't funded by the government. I want to be able to continue my education in a classroom environment. If people cannot do that then they will not study at all and we will end up with more people unemployed. The Victorian Government really needs to think about what they are doing. I am sure that they could cut back on other things that are less important than education.

Emma Crozier, student, Mildura

The University of Ballarat's response to meet the challenges presented by the State Governments cuts to TAFE funding mean that all but one Cultural Industries TAFE program is proposed to cease delivery from 2013. TAFE arts programs at the Arts Academy are part of our regions cultural fabric, impacting the vitality of our city and subsequent economic activity. The Arts Academy continues a long history of Arts Education in this region, dating back to 1879, when the School of Mines and Industries first held arts classes. Without some form of change in view or funding model, a 133-year history of arts education in this form is currently threatened and possibly gone within the next few weeks.

Paul Lambeth, teacher, University of Ballarat TAFE

There is an extremely high chance my science courses (the last science ones left in TAFE at Ballarat) are going to disappear with these budget cuts. They will not be "viable". If I do have any programs left they will be cut to the bare minimum and we will fall further behind industry standards. I keep hearing from everywhere we have to be more competitive and "act like a private RTO". Well I do not want to compromise my name or that of the University to stoop to their level of low-quality course and lack of care for their students. We are all very fearful for our jobs, our courses and more importantly that the future students will have no options left to gain quality training and will be left with empty qualifications.

Sharon, teacher, University of Ballarat

I am a mature-aged student who never had the ability to commit myself to anything. I finally found something I was good at. I have one more year to go of my Professional Writing and Editing course. Our course has been cut already. I have two children who depend on me to better myself so I can give them a better education. I am trying to better myself so I don't have to rely on the government financially for the rest of my life. If you take more funding away, this is what will happen to me and many others.

Anonymous, RMIT Carlton

I am a mature-aged student and I am currently enrolled in the Advanced Diploma of Building Design. I have been overwhelmed by the amazing staff who lecture me, by their dedication and generosity of knowledge. I am so excited about my future studies and career to follow. But sadly from all angles of my life there is fear and uncertainty. Whatever happened to the lucky country? Education should be accessible to all that desire it. The cost of my TAFE course currently puts a strain on our income, but my family and I have sacrificed so as I can be trained in new skills. What will happen if my fees triple? I can barely afford them now. It is absolutely disgusting what Ted Baillieu wants to do to the budgets for TAFE. What about my children and all the other children in years to come? It is immoral to do this to our education system.

Anonymous, The Gordon TAFE

I am a 32-year-old mother of four children ages between 6 and 14. I left high school in Year 8 with no education. When my youngest twins started Prep, I thought I should be a good role model by gaining an education. I have now completed my first year of my Diploma in Community Services work. I have payed \$5000 so far, and I am a single parent. I will have a \$7000 debt owing when I finish TAFE. That to me seems so unfair for Australia. What happened to education should be free? My TAFE, Chisholm, will lose \$30 million next year alone.

Tabatha, student, Pakenham

I am 29-year-old male. I have just completed my Cert III Apprenticeship. Without the government funding I can't afford to further extending my skills, [meaning] less job opportunity. With no job I'll be forced into living on Centrelink payments. If I do become unemployed, [there'll be] no income for me, no tax income for the government and no one wins.

Min Chen, student, Melbourne

After a painful separation, I became a single parent last year. Finances have become very difficult as I also care for my twin daughters who I am trying to assist through university. I would love to retrain in other areas to expand my employability. I became inspired to do a Certificate IV in Bookkeeping so I could start my own business. The dream of financial security for my family loomed. Then I found out that as I have already completed a Certificate IV qualification (9 years ago), I could not get a subsidised place. It would cost me \$6,500 to complete. This of course is completely out of the question and in a heartbeat my dream was over. I felt lost and shattered. When is the Government going to think about people like me who want to learn and work hard and support myself and be an example to my children?

Liesl Trenfield, Epping

At Lilydale campus we provide an essential education and training service to the entire bushfire region. Lilydale is the transport hub. By closing this campus and many courses across Swinburne hundreds of young people will be forced to travel a great deal further. Many have said that they will not. Many are part way through their education and training. I thought that by signing them up Swinburne was entering a contract with these people. I am bitterly disappointed for them.

Anonymous teacher, Swinburne Lilydale TAFE

I am a teacher/coordinator at NMIT Building Structures and Services. I have 44 years experience in our industry and seen many governments come and go. This time the government has got the timing wrong. We can't reduce the training of apprentices, [when it] takes three to four years to prepare them for the trades, by increasing their fees. Private Registered Training Organisations have been given incentive to increase their training of apprentices by on-site training programs where the apprentices are trained and assessed by their unqualified employers and we are brewing a generation of slap-it-up short cut single experience trainees for our industries. At NMIT we produce an all-experience, quality apprentice and many of our employers have also been ex-NMIT students. This current cut in funding will reduce the capacity of TAFE colleges to continue to train apprentices for future industry and place our gross domestic produce for future generations in jeopardy.

Brad McLuckie, teacher, Heidelberg

Turns out that despite having a health care card and no relevant qualifications, because I have Cert IV qualifications already (however useless to my employability), the Cert II in Engineering Fabrication would cost me \$3,600! I can't afford that. Pity. I think I'd be a great welder.

Anonymous, Preston

Recently, my daughter started a certificate course at Swinburne Prahlan. She has been working very hard and is actually ahead, in spite of another stay in a psychiatric unit. She has plans and wants a future, and with a little support, will be able to do this. She was telling me about the great support she has had from Swinburne, from the teachers, and also from the other services such as a disability liaison officer. So for her, it has not just been about the teachers, it has been about the extras that TAFE offers to disadvantaged students. This is in contrast to her efforts in the private educational sector, e.g. promised hospitality courses that don't eventuate or don't continue. Obviously, she depends totally on walking or public transport, so distance is a real issue for her. Education can mean the difference between an individual becoming a productive, economically valuable member of the community, or becoming an ongoing expense.

Ellie, parent, Rowville

I work as a Cert 2 teacher for a large TAFE in a trade skills shortage area. Today I had to tell a 26y/o student if she stays in her Pre-Apprenticeship course she would get a \$8000 bill. Even as a teacher I believe no Cert 2 course is worth an \$8000 bill. If you are unemployed or on a low income you have no way of ever paying back such a large debt.

This all came about as the student had a higher qualification, a Cert 2 in Catering and Cert 3 in Retail. The higher qualification was RPL by a private RTO. The Cert 3 involved no training. The RPL was done during the student's own time, not during her working hours. She was forced to do the RPL on the Cert 3 in Retail by her large employer at the time. I hear of these stories in my own classes 3 or 4 times a year. I'm also betting these employers get paid a kickback for this service by the private RTO. The poor unknowing students are forced to do a Cert 2 or 3, get little training, if any, their qualifications are not portable and are rarely valued outside the chain, and the skills are not readily transferable to other jobs. The victim of these RTO cash-grabs give up their right to do ANY other Cert 2 or Cert 3 course in their lifetime.

Greg Peters, teacher, Melbourne

[My son's TAFE] studies, along with his personal attributes, allowed him to secure an excellent job allied to fitness, which he still holds today. Along with the specific discipline skills and knowledge in fitness, my son grew in confidence at his ability to organise his time, write assignments of quality and apply his knowledge in a very practical way. My son now wants to complete an Advanced Diploma in Management. TAFE gave my son a chance he would not have had otherwise. The fitness courses are now being cut from the Ballarat TAFE. How many young people will not be able to pursue study for a career now? Slashing TAFE funding is wrong at every level. By all means, reign in the debt. But don't cut money to the well-established public sector to prop up the private sector, which is out to make money out of training.

Sandra, parent, Ballarat

I am an IT teacher, as well as a student of Kangan Institute. The course I had planned to enrol into next year has been cut. In fact we will lose six courses and four staff by July in our department alone. KI's entire hospitality department will close. By next year I may be jobless and not able to study in my chosen field. It's a sad time for Victoria.

Anonymous, Kangan Institute

Impact of full services funding cuts

As a student who is deaf, I need a Communication Aide to enable me to be able to participate in the class. The support workers in the classes, such as Communication Aides, Interpreters, Note-takers, Participation Aides, Tutors, are for some students the only way of accessing the courses they have a right to be able to study. Without them, myself and many other students with disabilities can no longer have access to TAFE because of Mr Baillieu's funding cut. Thanks for taking away my rights to education.

Deaf Student, Bendigo

TAFE has not made it easier for me to return to study; TAFE has made it possible. I have been on a Disability Support Pension for many years. Although I have skills and talents that could be well used in our community, I have not until TAFE had the support required to find a new vocation. If it were not for the support of TAFE staff, such as learning support, counsellors and teachers, I would have no hope of studying or ever returning to work. Cutting my opportunities at TAFE does not just deny me; it denies all the people I will help in my future vocation. How much is that worth?

Keren, student, Benalla

As a grown woman with two young boys, Janice decided that she "had to do something about my education". She enrolled in a General Education class at GippsTAFE.

What got Janice through the first stages of her return to study was the presence of a Disability Support Worker in her class. Even in a multi-level class such as the one she attended, Janice was always able to get 1:1 help as she needed it. Janice has become an independent learner. The presence of a Disability Support Worker in Janice's class was possible because GippsTAFE was a Full Service TAFE provider. The State Government funding cuts to TAFE now mean that the program has been dramatically reduced for the remainder of this year. In 2013 the program will not be funded. One of effects from the cutting of "Full Service" funding to regional TAFEs will be that the quality of the Further Education in TAFE will decline. Janice's experience may not be repeated.

Neil Hauxwell, teacher, GippsTAFE

As a parent of two special needs students, I have seen them progress because of the courses which were specifically designed to enable high-functioning students such as they are to transition to the workforce. Take away that opportunity and you are increasing a dependency on the welfare system. Education in Australia must remain affordable and inclusive. Discrimination on any level is not allowed in employment, nor should it be in education.

Len Sherrott, Hoppers Crossing

This year [our son] has travelled for almost four hours each way, which is still a mammoth effort, requiring two buses and a train, travelling 169kms and a day that starts at 5am until he arrives home at 6pm.

Our son has required an aide and without that support the course was initially beyond his abilities. The staff at TAFE have worked hard to help him to be an independent worker.

His personal commitment at an enormously difficult time of his life has been massive and he has been able to gain a Certificate IV, with dreams of continuing his study. Thanks to the help of the Disability Support Officer he has a had the possibility of succeeding with his studies.

Sue and Mark, parents, Bruthen

I am a volunteer English tutor working with refugees. Often, though they are operating within a totally alien culture and environment, and it is my understanding that TAFE and other related institutions had been working at tailoring programs to combat the exclusion some can feel within the education system. Most refugees have suffered horrific events and some have been languishing in camps for decades. So counselling services, learning support and libraries are essential to sustain their enthusiastic participation. The diminishing support services on top of the new fee structure will put serious impediments on the ability of these people to participate in learning and proudly make their own valuable contributions to society.

Asago, Ringwood

I'm a support staff member who the Government's TAFE funding cuts will directly have an affect on. [But] it's the students with disabilities I work with that are going to suffer much more than me. TAFE is for some of these students their only opportunity to obtain an education with help in the classroom from people like myself. I am an Interpreter — a deaf person's way of communicating/hearing what is being said in class. Mr Baillieu, have you thought about the people you are discriminating against by taking away their rights to access and participate in education with support for access just like any other student at TAFE?

Irene Hill, Bendigo

Job losses/impact on communities

I have been a TAFE teacher for almost 13 years and have enjoyed working and sharing my knowledge and skills with students. I have never felt the uncertainty of my job as I do now. I am a sole single parent and I have worked hard to maintain a safe and secure environment for my 6-year-old son, but recently I am wondering if my son and I are not going to be out on the streets. What I thought would be a secure and hard working career has me now in a constant state of being on a roller coaster. Please make it stop!

Jennett, teacher, Box Hill

My partner and I both work within the same department at Kangan Institute. We don't want to lose our jobs, not now or the end of the year, but if we do stay there will be no certainty and it will not be an enjoyable place to work. I love Kangan, I love teaching, but these changes are not going to allow quality education for our students who need us the most.

Krissi, teacher, Airport West

My husband and myself have worked at Sunraysia Institute of TAFE for 5 years. He has just been told he is redundant, along with 25 other fellow workers. This is going to have a massive impact not just on my family but on the community we live in. Both my daughters go to TAFE, but I can no longer afford to pay for the course my youngest daughter is enrolled in and we may have to sell our house as we can't afford the repayments on one wage. This means we may look at moving interstate to find alternative employment. These cutbacks will result in more and more rural communities struggling to survive. We don't blame our local TAFE for this. We blame the government.

Debbie McDonald, Mildura

I started teaching at TAFE five years ago. I enjoyed teaching and was exceptionally passionate about changing the lives of my students. I had invested considerable time into developing my teaching practice through a VET Diploma and TAA Diploma, not to mention personal expense buying industry tools to teach with. I had ambition to become a leader at my institute. Within 12 months of the skills reform policy being implemented I have witnessed a big decline in students in my department. Next year I am faced with now delivering all of my courses with delivery hours slashed by 30% in an effort to make my courses cost effective, because we are burdened with a ratio of one manager/admin to five teacher ratio at my institute. I'm still only 42 years of age and have decided to leave the TAFE system because there is absolutely no future in it. I had a full-time ongoing contract. It's just not worth the workload stress. It's quite simple: exploiting the TAFE system and our managers exploit us.

Darren Tolley

Cuts to VCAL/VET

I am a VCAL teacher at Heathmont College. As a teacher of VCAL I have the privilege of teaching students who are studying under a SBAT arrangement. Currently I have a number of students in Year 11 VCAL studying hospitality, business administration and retail. They are disappointed that they will not be able to continue their TAFE studies in 2013 because they are unable to pay the full fees. Nearly all come from homes that are single parented and far from wealthy. Often, just meeting the weekly bills is a struggle for these families. As an educator of students who have in the past struggled, how am I now to tell them they are not going to be able to pursue the career they have chosen. What will become of these students?

Jo Trigg, teacher, Heathmont College, Croydon

The students in my school who study school-based apprenticeships and traineeships won't be able to afford them under the new proposal. The students from my school who accessed tertiary studies at TAFE also won't be able to afford it now. I work with kids from disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds, who need hope for their future and the Government's decision steals that from them.

Anonymous teacher, Croydon

It looks as though VET in schools will have to increase next year, which could lead to the loss of one teacher in the fitting side of our engineering department. Apparently the students have “to shop around”, according to a spokesperson from Peter Hall's office. Unfortunately that means, here in Gippsland, having to go back to AGA — who deliver, at best, second-rate training. It was only four years ago when the schools in our area decided to send their students to us as the kids just love "coming to TAFE". Why doesn't Peter Hall take a survey from the secondary colleges and see where they'd like to study VET in Schools?

Alan Long, teacher, GippsTAFE

My son is in Year 12 at Narre Warren South P-12 College this year and thanks to the VCAL program that is run through our school and the other local schools and TAFE colleges in the local area has managed to keep my son in school and gain an education.

Please don't take this VCAL program from our children. They are this country's future and if they cannot see any clear direction for their lives, then what future does our country have?

Marianne Macumber, parent

As a Careers Adviser at an inner-regional school, I am outraged that carefully planned Student Pathways to Post-Secondary Education and Training (developed via a well-taught Careers Ed program beginning at Year 9) have been smashed to pieces. Where will exit students go in 2013, and how much will they be forced to pay? Our VETIS options are being priced out of existence! Local National Party MPs just don't seem to get that regional and rural business and tourism enterprises need well-trained graduates from the TAFE Business and Hospitality courses, which have now been destroyed by shonky cut-price operators. Access to an actual campus will now be restricted to those with the geographic and financial resources to move to the city. This is frightening. Success in most Uni and TAFE undergraduate courses actually require human contact, group work, workshops, laboratories, libraries etc. Welcome to the brave new world!

Chris Bromley, teacher, Kyneton