



Date: Monday, 15 April 2013 11:18:04 PM

To whom it may concern:

Please find my submission for the "Inquiry into the role of Technical and Further Education system and its operation".

I am currently employed full time in a delivery and assessment capacity in Perth WA. I have been a practitioner in the TAFE system since 1988.

My submission does not necessarily reflect the position of my employer, but does reflect my experience as a practitioner "at the chalkface".

In regard to the focus areas

- The development of skills in the Australian economy;

I see practitioners in our public TAFE striving everyday to improve the knowledge and skills of the students that privilege us with their presence.

They seek to empower these students to contribute to their own vocational career, and so provide an ongoing input into the Australian economy.

Regardless of the "in demand" skills, or those that seem peripheral, the dedication of these staff to put student first is evident.

Industry has had a significant say in how such knowledge and skills should be developed. While it is good for such a major stakeholder to have input, there is lack of awareness of education, which remains the underpinning principle of the VET system. The suggestions on shortened timeframes for skills development do not take into account the time required for students to, not only, develop these skills, and embed them in their practice, but to also develop a maturity to be work ready.

In order for skills development to produce well rounded, capable, mature workers to have immediate impact on the Australian economy upon graduation, time is needed to undertake proper educational processes to build this outcome.

This inquiry needs hard data to make decisions, hence I recognise that this type of statement, based more on 'word of mouth' type evidence is difficult to quantify, nonetheless, as a practitioner of some 25 years, I believe I can make these statements with some sense of authority.

- The development of opportunities for Australians to improve themselves and increase their life and employment prospects;

In reference to perceived peripheral course. Increasing life and employment prospects often comes from course that develop life skills, such as employment preparation programs. This social capital aspect of the VET environment, at least the publicly funded part, remains a vital part of building communities. While strictly speaking such course may not have a direct vocational outcome, they provide the foundation for further skills development, the confidence achievement is possible, and the motivation to continue study.

That these programs are often not seen as "core", in that they are not skills for the resources industry, has seen the funding available to these programs reduced. In some cases, some units, that I have been asked to deliver, have had the timetables hours reduced. As a specific example, I have been required to deliver what was a 50 hour unit in 40 hours, and a 70 hour unit in 60. These cuts impact on the ability of the student to have enough time to embed the necessary skills, to be work ready.

- The delivery of services and programs to support regions, communities and disadvantaged individuals to access training and skills and through them a pathway to employment;

I have spent time working in a regional public TAFE, and from first hand observation, there remains a need to support these regional areas. While there are many exceptions, it is true that regional areas, by their geographic separation, automatically create disadvantage. Smaller class sizes are the norm in such situations, with many students unable to regularly attend.

That funding has been eroded over time means that viable cost effective classes require an

increasing number of students, meaning that classes that would be helpful are not run. Employment pathways are critical for a number of such communities, as they seek to keep the youth in the area. Without these viable vocational opportunities, leading to employment prospects, many will continue to vacate regional areas.

These employment opportunities need to be in potential support and growth areas, such as tourism, and creative industries, rather than just resources and agriculture. This adds dimensions to the community, as well as creating an environment where youth are more inclined to stay in the area. This approach necessarily requires the funding of smaller class sizes, particularly at higher qualification levels to provide the graduates to take up positions in these regional areas.

- The operation of a competitive training market;

A competitive market will necessarily create a profit mindset. While there will remain the desire to produce relevant, engaging and motivating learning experiences for students, there will also be the need to be profitable. If profit is not there, then such businesses will fold.

For a business to be profitable it must bring in more than it spends. For this to happen it must reduce the amount spent on infrastructure, and have a good cash flow. In the VET marketplace, this means high volume courses, with low investment in resources for delivery. Therefore, at some point a business decision is made to jettison some courses as not providing appropriate levels of income, and/or profit, to remain as part of the delivery mix. The more that publicly funded VET institutions are taken down this path, the pressure will mount to drop certain courses that have either high investment requirement, or limited number of enrolments. This negates the social responsibility aspect of such publicly funded institutions, and so reduces opportunities for socially disadvantaged members of society to have a chance of developing employment pathways.

There is the perception that publicly funded VET is unresponsive to the needs of industry. This has been used as a reason to "reform" the sector, however, at the "chalkface", I see that vast majority of local industry bodies are more than satisfied with the product provided by public VET.

That a "competitive" training market place is put forward as the solution, assumes that there is a problem that needs addressing.

- Those jurisdictions in which State Governments have announced funding decisions which may impact on their operation and viability.

Funding cuts have been implied in previous comments. To make this more explicit, there is an ongoing reduction in the amount of money available to provide training. In WA specifically there have been requirements for efficiency. This has been a continued requirement for the last 5 years. At some point, there is no more efficiency to give without reducing the quality of the training provided.

Lastly, by way of concluding comment, the TAFE system, as it remains widely known, continues to play a strong part in the education of future generations.

Many parents I have spoken to at enrolment times express the desire for their child to gain valuable skills and find meaningful and worthwhile employment.

TAFE continues to be seen as a real pathway for students.

While this submission relies on rhetoric, and personal observation, I wish to recommend in the strongest possible terms that there remains a public TAFE system, that is funded to provide ongoing community cohesion, and relevant meaningful pathways, not only for school leavers, but for those later in life who seek career changes, or seeking reengagement in education.

Given the vast number of people who have "done a TAFE course" the impact on the general quality of social life remains a valid reason for governments of all levels to at least maintain, if not increase, the funding provided to the public TAFE sector

Thank you

Tim Riessen

