

## CHAPTER 3

### **The delivery of services and programs to support regions, communities and disadvantaged individuals and groups**

#### *Support for students with particular needs*

3.1 Support for students with specific needs is one example of the service TAFE provides beyond its core function of skills training. Many submitters provided evidence of the extent of support it provides to assist students to attend TAFE. There were also questions raised over whether that level of support could be provided by private providers.

3.2 Deaf Australia NSW described some of the supports required for a deaf person to fully participate in training and further education:

[T]he deaf people require interpreters, but often it is two interpreters because the interpreters cannot work on their own all day, so they work alternately throughout the day. But, if a deaf person has not had adequate education and they do not have the English skills to enable them to do the course, they often require extra tutoring or support. They might need one-on-one support twice a week or tutoring. Some deaf people have captions and they may need assistance to work through the captions. Also, if the person is in a remote location or has a remote interpreter, that makes it more difficult to access interacting with students in the classroom. There are other support needs that are required depending on the level of education of the deaf person.<sup>1</sup>

3.3 Deaf Australia NSW also provided figures detailing the cost of providing these supports. Mr Hill from Deaf Australia NSW gave evidence that it costs \$50 000 to provide an interpreter for the duration of a full time TAFE course,<sup>2</sup> and illustrated how prohibitive this figure is in the context of how much support an individual receives:

I will give you one example. One smart skills course, for example, a certificate III, for a general course, will be about \$6 800, for example, for one course, for the full course—the entire duration. So the 10 per cent loading fee will be \$680. That is for interpreters, note takers and mentors. If that person is deaf, they will need an interpreter and a note taker for each individual class. But, suppose one class is one hour; the interpreter's fee is generally \$66 per hour. So can you imagine—\$680 for a full three-year course is just not going to go far enough.<sup>3</sup>

3.4 TAFE Community Alliance was of the view that only TAFE as a public provider could come close to meeting these requirements costs, and this is only possible through the economies of scale and cross subsidisation:

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1 Deaf Australia NSW, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 April 2014, p. 11.

2 Deaf Australia NSW, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 April 2014, p. 11.

3 Deaf Australia NSW, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 April 2014, p. 11.

I believe the value of a system is that it offers economies of scale. You have a collaborative framework and you have specialists who are available, who are on tap, who are already employed. Economies of scale, from my understanding of the terminology, enable you, for something that might cost a single provider \$50 000, to lower those costs considerably, because you are spreading those costs across an entire system. That is the value of the public system. It has many other values, but that is one value of that system.<sup>4</sup>

3.5 Witnesses in Wollongong provided accounts of students with disabilities being unable to access the supports required through private providers. Ms Ljubic discussed one of her students who is from a non-English speaking background and has multiple disabilities:

We had our intellectual, physical and vision impairment person working with me because she was from a non-English-speaking background, and we also had to work with the disability service in the area. She had used up her 510 hours of English and then, because the government allocated the 800 hours of English to a private provider, she was referred to that service as part of the contract. The private provider refused service because she was too complex. They did not have the facilities, the staff to support or the help to be able to work with this student, so she was sent back to TAFE and she received reasonable adjustment from the various consultants.<sup>5</sup>

3.6 The Australian Federation of Graduate Women (AFGW) argued that cutting money for support services for people with disabilities will reduce participation and consequently increase costs in other areas of the economy:

[I]t is a false economy because, if we hypothetically cut funding for students with disabilities of any sort in the TAFE sector, we make it harder for them to succeed and participate. We say, 'Look at all the money we saved in education.'<sup>6</sup>

### ***Committee View***

3.7 The committee is deeply concerned that services to people with disabilities may become a casualty of opening up the training market. The assistance provided to people with hearing impairments for example is manifestly inadequate to provide the level of assistance that is required for some students. The alternatives to students with disabilities attending TAFE and potentially entering the workforce in whatever capacity they are able, is that they are isolated and deprived of the opportunity to participate in society. This not only has personal and social implications for the person and their families, but also a potentially huge life-long economic impact for the country.

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4 TAFE Community Alliance, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 April 2014, p. 21.

5 Ms Angela Ljubic, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 May 2014, p. 11.

6 Australian Federation of Graduate Women, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 April 2014, p. 5.

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## Recommendation 2

**3.8 The committee recommends the Commonwealth government work with its COAG partners to develop a partnership agreement establishing a minimum and adequate level of support for people with disabilities.**

### *Disadvantaged groups*

3.9 The pedagogy administered in TAFE is a feature that allows better access for disadvantaged groups. The AFGW contrasted the teaching methods in TAFE to those in University and concluded that TAFE is more accessible to those who require assistance to meet their potential:

University is not necessarily the best environment for people who need twice as long to read a piece of text, who struggle to understand it or who have difficulty remembering the beginning of a passage when they have got to the end of it. This is why I alluded to the actual teaching practices and the modular structure which mean that tasks in a TAFE program are more easily broken into small discrete segments that people can do. Tasks can be scaffolded. I am not suggesting standards are higher or lower. They are, however, different. The things that people are expected to be able to do and do on their own are different at TAFE and university.<sup>7</sup>

3.10 Many submitters argued that TAFE provides a service beyond that of a training provider. TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) informed the committee that there was a long standing tradition in legislation across most of the States and Territories (excluding Victoria) that TAFE's meet community service obligations.<sup>8</sup> These obligations are encapsulated in the following objectives that TDA argue are central to the contribution of TAFEs:

- Building local skills and capability for improved productivity and efficiency in key sectors of the economy;
- Increasing workforce participation where completing a VET qualification assists around 98% of students who want a job after training (and 99.9% of students who want to go on to further study)<sup>10</sup>;
- Providing a 'second chance education opportunity' for people and contributing to community welfare through the social impact of education attainments and through training workers in areas of skill shortage and growing need, such as health care and aged care; and
- Participating in local planning and development activities as valued members of the community.<sup>9</sup>

3.11 According to TDA these activities lead to the recognition in communities of the value of TAFE and the contribution it makes to both local and national

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7 Australian Federation of Graduate Women, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 April 2014, p. 5.

8 TAFE Directors Australia, *Submission 176*, p. 12.

9 TAFE Directors Australia, *Submission 176*, p. 13.

economies. TDA carried out a survey in Queensland which found that 85% who responded regard TAFE 'as an extremely important and valuable community asset'.<sup>10</sup>

3.12 The TAFE Community Alliance also emphasised the community role that TAFE has and saw this role as being integral to the service that it provides. The Alliance argue that the role of a public VET provider is to work with those in the community who need assistance, as well as contributing to the economy overall:

We view public education and training as focused on building a productive and skilled workforce and also an inclusive and fair society. Our submission has comprehensively focused on those issues to do with social inclusion, affordability; the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable people in our community, the needs of retrenched workers and so on.<sup>11</sup>

3.13 The Australian Education Union (AEU) provided an example of a partnership between TAFE, the private sector and a number of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) that is working to provide VET opportunities for disadvantaged people in Inner Sydney:

We have a professional partnership with St Vincent de Paul down in Woolloomooloo, a level 4 learning, we call it, and Sydney Institute runs courses down there with Matthew Talbot and clients in the Woolloomooloo public housing community as well. Once we have worked down there, we bring them onto campus and then they are on their way, on their journey. At the same time, we are creating communities around the classes. We are creating networks. We are creating really good, strong community and social networks for people to spring from, I suppose, into other life opportunities.<sup>12</sup>

3.14 According to the AEU, TAFE in this sense is very much a part of a broader social policy framework that works in tandem with governments and the NGO sector to create the educational opportunities for those disadvantaged in the community:

TAFE [is] that very important pathway for people who are very disadvantaged to take that step into something that may well get them off the streets if they are at risk of homelessness and get them into temporary accommodation. They can work their way through the whole spectrum of TAFE courses, up to diploma level, and come out the other end being, in effect, taxpayers—rather than being on income support—and living in appropriate circumstances.

[W]e take a very holistic view of what we do. [...] Basically, I can go out and do this sort of work in the community because I know I have a very strong TAFE system behind me.<sup>13</sup>

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10 TAFE Directors Australia, *Submission 176*, p. 14.

11 TAFE Community Alliance, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 April 2014, p. 20.

12 Australian Education Union, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 April 2014, p. 56.

13 Australian Education Union, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 April 2014, p. 56.

3.15 The Australian Industry Group stated that they were also of the view that TAFE's role as a community provider was important and was distinct from other training providers in this respect:

It is in some senses quite a distinct role from other providers, particularly in regional communities and also for providing programs that are not necessarily cost efficient or are less cost efficient such as disadvantage programs for young people.<sup>14</sup>

3.16 The Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency also acknowledged that TAFE played a significant role in providing training opportunities to disadvantaged groups and individuals:

TAFE makes a considerable contribution to the provision of vocational training opportunities to disadvantaged Australians, as do some other providers, and has a critical role in providing second chance education, including in language, literacy and numeracy. Studies have shown that people with poor language, literacy and other core skills are less likely to find a job or benefit from training that depends on those skills. In this way TAFE provides an important part of the nation's institutional framework, by offering a training safety net for those without the means to engage within the job market.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Second chance education***

3.17 The Agency also gave evidence demonstrating that close to 30% of students accessing TAFE were 'second-chance' students, defined as 'early school leavers aged 24 years and below, and adults aged 25 years and over who have not completed a non-school qualification'.<sup>16</sup> The importance of providing adequate and appropriate opportunities for these learners was supported across the evidence given.

3.18 The Australian Federation of Graduate Women saw this opportunity for a second-chance as one of TAFE's key principles:

One of the key principles of TAFE that is mirrored in the policies of AFGW is equity in education and the development of disadvantaged students. TAFE provides second-chance education for many Australians wishing to enter or re-enter the labour force, retrain for new jobs or upskill from an existing job to something more sustainable. Many of its students have not previously completed secondary education.<sup>17</sup>

3.19 The Australian Education Union also thought that providing this pathway for those who did not succeed at school was one of the main roles of TAFE:

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14 Australian Industry Group, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2014, p. 31.

15 Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 April 2014, p. 41.

16 Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, answer to question on notice, 9 April 2014.

17 Australian Federation of Graduate Women, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 April 2014, p. 1.

The Australian TAFE system plays a crucial role in initial vocational education for young people entering the workforce for the first time, in providing retraining and career change opportunities for workers made redundant, in providing second-chance learning for those who did not succeed at school and in providing pathways for many young people and mature age students into further education and university.<sup>18</sup>

3.20 This was a view shared by the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency:

If you look at the Australian VET system, by international standards it is an amalgam of two things. It is an industry skilling system. We are providing training in specific occupations for particular groups. But it is also a further education system which is providing second-chance and initial training in foundation skills and core skills.<sup>19</sup>

3.21 This issue of whether private providers could provide such support services is one that came up frequently throughout the inquiry. The provision of these services requires extensive resources and specialist staff to be able to provide the kinds of support required for people from disadvantaged groups to be able to participate in vocational and technical education. Mr Rorris from the South Coast Labour Council agreed with the TAFE Community Alliance with regard to the economies of scale, and highlighted the impact that having a reduced TAFE sector could have on the provision of these services:

You no longer have the one provider—whether it is in a regional area or not—which has the ability to fund, on an equity basis, a certain portion of services. As administrators I am sure you would have that work—you take a bit from each area and put it together so that you have the critical mass again to justify that position. Whether these are multicultural services officers, language and literacy officers, or those dealing with disabled and others, if you have one provider you have the ability to provide this. How are you going to do this if you have 10 providers? We know the answer to that question, too. As I am sure you will hear in further evidence, TAFEs have begun cutting these services or have begun to question the need for them to continue. It is cutting our noses to spite our faces. TAFE exists for students like that, to give them those opportunities.<sup>20</sup>

3.22 The role that TAFE plays in supporting people from disadvantaged groups is beyond doubt. The Australian Federation of Graduate Women quoted from National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) data that breaks down those participating in the TAFE system by a variety of socio-economic and other factors:

We note that, of the effective full-time students in TAFE, more than half are drawn from the lower three quintiles as measured in the index of

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18 Australian Education Union, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2014, p. 30.

19 Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 April 2014, p. 42.

20 South Coast Labour Council, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 April 2014, p. 29.

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relative socioeconomic disadvantage. Almost 21 per cent of domestic TAFE students come from a home where a language other than English is spoken as a matter of course. Seven per cent of students at TAFE have a disability. Data sourced from NCVET shows also that the Indigenous population of VET is double that in the general population. If we look at regional and rural Australia, in many places like regional centres and remote locations TAFE is the only provider of post-secondary education. NCVET data from 2009 shows that 42 per cent of students enrolled in TAFE come from remote or rural locations.<sup>21</sup>

3.23 Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE) pointed to the contribution that TAFE makes by providing educational pathways to women and girls who may be returning to the workforce, or have missed out on vocational education earlier on in their lives and TAFE provides that second chance:

It is important in this country that we have a strong public vocational education and training provider, and that it has a role in providing low-level access courses and second-chance education courses for those who have missed out on earlier opportunities. This is critical for many women. TAFE has a proud tradition in running outreach courses in the community that provide opportunities for many women to learn new skills and/or gain confidence to re-enter the workforce.<sup>22</sup>

3.24 WAVE also gave the example of TAFE offering tailored learning for different groups to assist them in their return or entry into the workforce:

In some of the outreach courses there are women only classes. Some of the women are from migrant groups who feel the need for that. There are also women coming in to re-start their lives and careers who have been victims of domestic abuse. They need that sort of support as well.<sup>23</sup>

### ***TAFE as a regional provider***

3.25 The ability of TAFE to deliver courses in regional areas that would not be commercially viable to private training providers is a further distinguishing feature of the sector. The Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council informed the committee that almost half of participants in their training courses come from rural and remote areas:

We know that about 44 per cent of people who do our training packages come from rural and remote areas, which obviously have higher numbers of people from a lower socioeconomic background. In particular, we have got a high uptake of Aboriginal people who are doing our training packages and come from regional and remote areas.<sup>24</sup>

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21 Australian Federation of Graduate Women, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 April 2014, p. 1.

22 Women in Adult and Vocational Education, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 April 2014, p. 49.

23 Women in Adult and Vocational Education, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 April 2014, p. 52.

24 Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2014, p. 1.

3.26 The Council emphasised that if TAFE did not put on courses in regional areas then essential skills and qualifications would be lost from those areas:

[T]he bulk of the qualifications that the health and care sector needs and provide them in areas where a lot of commercial operations will not go: markets such as rural and regional areas and qualifications that, while not highly used, are essential to maintaining our health and care system.<sup>25</sup>

3.27 TAFE is often the only training provider in regional areas. In Western Australia for example '36 per cent of students come from non-metropolitan areas'.<sup>26</sup> This is particularly important in some states because of the high level of youth unemployment. The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) discussed a Brotherhood of St Laurence report which shows youth unemployment nationally as above 15 per cent in 2013.<sup>27</sup> Some areas across the country have far higher rates as the table below shows:

Region [For a full list of locations in each Region, see Appendix]	State	Youth Unemployment Rate (%)
West and North West Tasmania (including Burnie, Devonport)	TAS	<b>21.0</b>
Cairns	QLD	<b>20.5</b>
Northern Adelaide (including Elizabeth, Gawler)	SA	<b>19.7</b>
Outback Northern Territory	NT	<b>18.5</b>
Hume (including Goulburn Valley, Wodonga, Wangaratta)	VIC	<b>17.5</b>
Mandurah (including Dawesville, Falcon)	WA	<b>17.3</b>
Parramatta	NSW	<b>16.8</b>
ACT	ACT	<b>11.3</b>

Table 3: Worst Youth Unemployment Hotspots in each state, year-to-January 2014  
(Source: ABS. 6291.0.55.001 - Labour Force, Australia, Detailed - Electronic Delivery, Jan. 2014)

3.28 YACWA argued that a lack of access to learning is the key factor in areas of high youth unemployment, and it is here that TAFE can make an impact:

[T]here is a huge number of young people in that area who are unemployed, to potentially the extent of systemic unemployment. A lot of that has to do with the fact that they do not have access to flexible learning. They do not have the option to be engaged in education that is designed for their experience or what they are interested in. You

25 Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2014, p. 1.

26 Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 April 2014, p. 9.

27 Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Australian Unemployment 2014: Snapshot*. 2014. Available at: [http://www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/MyChanceOurFuture\\_Youth\\_unemployment\\_snapshot\\_Feb2014.pdf](http://www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/MyChanceOurFuture_Youth_unemployment_snapshot_Feb2014.pdf) (accessed 2 May 2014).



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suggested that they would be left on the scrap heap. I think we have already started to do that.<sup>28</sup>

3.29 The Gippsland Education Precinct gave evidence to the committee describing the partnerships between industry, further and higher education, and how in their view, this approach can serve regional areas effectively:

It was about making sure that the key providers were working closer together to provide a seamless pathway and to increase opportunities for, in particular, low- socioeconomic students that surround the campus. The idea was that you could have the high school, you would have a TAFE, you would have an apprenticeship group, you would have a university and the local shire as well. All of those partners have been working very closely together and as a result of working closely together we have managed to put in for a couple of [Regional Partnerships Facilitation Fund] RPF<sup>29</sup> projects and been granted some money.<sup>30</sup>

3.30 This type of partnership facilitation is where the Gippsland Education Precinct would like to see the Commonwealth adding value to the process by acting as a nexus between industry and education at a national level.<sup>31</sup>

3.31 The Holmesglen Institute was another example of innovative partnership development in the TAFE sector. The Institute was keen to inform the committee that TAFE does not only deliver technical skills training, but is a community asset that delivers training over a broad spectrum of courses and education levels. As a consequence of substantial funding cuts the Institute has entered into a number of partnerships to reduce costs and attract investment and income. One of these partnerships has been with Healthscope, a private healthcare provider, who intend to build a private hospital on the one of the Institute's campuses. This will provide both rental income and training opportunities for those students undertaking health related qualifications. Through innovations such as this Holmesglen hope to consistently meet their target of 50 per cent of government funding and 50 per cent on funding from other sources.<sup>32</sup>

3.32 The impact that TAFE has on people's lives is often profound. The committee heard numerous accounts from witnesses who regard TAFE as being the thing that altered their course in life dramatically, providing not only educational achievements, but also self-confidence and assurance that has allowed them to prosper.

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28 Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 April 2014, p. 12.

29 The Regional Partnerships Facilitation Fund (RPF) is a \$20 million competitive grant fund established by the Victorian Government to support increased alliances between higher education institutions (universities and private higher education providers) and VET organisations (TAFE institutes, private training organisations and Learn Local organisations). <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/training/providers/pages/regpartnershipsfund.aspx>.

30 Gippsland Education Precinct, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2014, p. 24.

31 Gippsland Education Precinct, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 15 April 2014, p. 28.

32 Holmesglen Institute, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 16 April 2014, pp 60-63.

3.33 One such account was from the West Coast Institute of Training's 2013 Student of the Year, Ms Aliesje Kolovis, who is now a youth worker:

I was lucky to have had someone push me into TAFE. My first experience with TAFE was when I was 15 at West Coast Institute of Training, and I completed a course in gaining access to training and education. That was the start of a change in my life. I was not able to hang out with the people that I had been hanging out with, so I was slowly distancing myself from that negative, destructive behaviour because I was at TAFE five days a week, full time. From there I decided—because I was getting some perspective on my friends—that I wanted to be able to help other people, because they were not in education and they did not have jobs. They had nothing, pretty much. So I started a cert III in community service work. I went on to do my cert IV and, in 2012, I completed my diploma. From that, I am now West Coast Institute of Training's 2013 Student of the Year... If it was not for TAFE being available and being so affordable, I would be either in jail or dead because of the behaviour that I was engaging in.<sup>33</sup>

3.34 Ms Kristine Highet, who gave evidence as a representative from the Australian Education Union, discussed the importance of TAFE in providing formative education and life skills at different stages in her family's lives:

My parents and grandparents were skilled workers, but they came through the system where it was mostly on the job or self-educated. They left school at 15... My uncle did retraining at what was the arts college that belonged to TAFE postwar; he was one of the ex-servicemen who did the retraining through TAFE in that way... I went to teachers college— it was CAE then—but later on I went to Ultimo TAFE and did Indonesian. That gave me a whole new perspective in my life and also put me on a pathway to upgrading my skills so that I could also teach Indonesian as well as being an entrance primary teacher. My mother went to Ultimo TAFE after she retired and did a welfare course, and that gave her a whole new perspective in her life and a way of being that was quite different for her and kept her really active. She is still going at 90. My younger sister left school before she completed her HSC. She went to Ultimo TAFE and did her HSC there after a little time out. She then went on to do pathology at Ultimo TAFE and then went on to university, did a science degree and kept travelling until she started to do a PhD, so she had a successful pathway in that way as well. That is just one family's connection with TAFE.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Committee View***

3.35 The committee, and all of the contributors to the inquiry were in no doubt as to the value of TAFE. This value and uniqueness is especially evident in its provision of services for people with disabilities, people from disadvantaged groups, and people in rural and regional areas. There is no alternative to the services TAFE provides to

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33 Ms Aliesje Kolovis, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 April 2014, p. 36.

34 Ms Kristine Highet, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 April 2014, p. 55.

these groups and all governments should consider closely the social and economic impact of these services being diluted and removed from some groups or some areas.

3.36 The committee urges COAG to work together to ensure that this asset to the country is not weakened to the point where it cannot provide skills training and further education to those most in need of it.