



## LET'S TALK ABOUT TAFE

### BRIEF SUBMISSION BY UNIONS NSW

## Introduction

Unions NSW and its affiliates have been very strong supporters of TAFE since the inception of state run technical and further education. As a state educational institution TAFE in its various forms over the last 121 years has played a pivotal role in developing people's skills and knowledge particularly in a range of industries which have driven Australia's economic growth.

Our commitment to TAFE has been demonstrated over many decades through a range of means including but not limited to being represented on TAFE Boards and Committees, advertising in TAFE journals, providing speakers to talk about workplace rights, lobbying for funding and promoting defending TAFE's critical role as the provider of vocational education and training in NSW.

## Situational Analysis

This brief submission into the *Let's Talk About TAFE* process comes at a time TAFE in our view is under enormous attack from the NSW government through cuts to government funding and associated jobs (800). In addition many courses are being cut to achieve the government's budget cuts which will have a detrimental effect on skill development for many young workers in the areas affected.

In addition, many TAFE participants are facing big increases in fees as the NSW Government moves to commercialise TAFE. Unfortunately these government cuts are being introduced in advance of the introduction of contestability where private for profit providers will be seeking to obtain government funding to compete against TAFE.

To complicate issues further many unions who represent workers in TAFE including teachers and ancillary staff have ongoing industrial relations issues including redundancies, wage negotiations and OHS issues to deal with all of which are being affected by the State Governments policies and funding cuts.

## Let's Talk About TAFE

Having regard for the situational analysis above on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2013 Unions NSW held discussions with representatives of the Board. The unions that were present at this meeting included the following;

- NSW Teachers Federation.
- Public Service Association/CPSU
- NSW Nurses and Midwives Association
- National Union of Workers
- United Voice
- NTEU
- SDA
- CFMEU
- Australian Manufacturing Workers union

Following the input from those unions the position of Unions NSW can be summarised by the following;

- TAFE must continue to deliver quality education and training by qualified teachers who have access to fair wages and conditions to attract quality staff. In this regard TAFE must respect the rights of workers to collectively bargain and should not engage in activities designed to break down what has been up until the last few years a good industrial relations environment.
- The ancillary services and infrastructure that TAFE uses must be of high quality to ensure the best possible teaching environment for students.
- TAFE should ensure the courses it runs are available in all areas including persons who live in regional and remote areas. The courses delivered and their outcomes should be consistent.
- TAFE training should be of the highest quality and the services it provides to students, particularly to support its social inclusion objectives must be maintained.
- Access to TAFE should never be based on a person's capacity to pay and Unions NSW believe as a public institution the education and training provided by TAFE should have minimal costs to the users.

In terms of the proposed reforms being considered by the Board, Unions NSW does not support those changes to the way TAFE might be structured, managed and resourced in the future unless they can meet the above objectives.

In support of the above, some of the unions who have members that rely upon TAFE training made the following comments:

**NSW Nurses and Midwives Association noted**

- The proposed cuts to TAFE funding will further impact on the delivery and quality of the Enrolled Nursing and Assistant in Nursing qualifications
- The quality of safe patient care will be affected
- Long standing experienced nursing teachers have been lost from the TAFE sector
- Any increase in private providers delivering these qualifications would lead to a lack of quality outcomes.
- Further cuts to TAFE funding will further impact on the number of nursing students.

### **United Voiced noted**

- The cutting of Hospitality courses in critical tourist areas such as the Central Coast would have a detrimental effect on young unemployed people who see the hospitality industry as a way to get into the jobs market
- Reduced funding by the State Government for TAFE will have an effect on negotiating training clauses in enterprise agreements in the areas of Early Childhood Education, Aged Care and Community Care. Less access to courses will hold back care workers receiving extra pay through qualifications. Ultimately this will have a negative effect on communities as children, aged and people with disabilities will not have the skilled workers they deserve.
- The current plan by the State government to cut jobs and services will ultimately reduce the high quality training that TAFE provide at the moment, the economic effects on the state will be major.

### **The AMWU noted**

- The rationalization of centres of excellence and courses affecting trades in manufacturing areas will make it more difficult for persons to travel to other TAFE institutions.
- There was already a high drop off rate of apprentices completing courses where they had long distances to travel in regional and remote areas. Travel and accommodation costs where of particular concern to trainees on already low wages.
- Australia was already suffering a skills shortage and TAFE should be increasing access not reducing it.

**The NSW Teachers Federation and Public Service Association** have previously stated their case that the State Government cut backs to TAFE would and are affecting the quality of services being provided to students. **NTEU** also expressed its concern that TAFE should not cut back funding to critical support areas for students including access to people with disabilities, people who may require additional literacy skills ,counseling and outreach services. Indeed the point was made that if government funding went to private providers they would not be interested in spending money on these type of student services because it would reduce their profit margins.

Unions NSW is opposed to government money going to private for profit training organisations to compete with TAFE. This type of contestability will not lead in our view to a more efficient and effective TAFE but rather a race to the bottom with respect to quality outcomes and services for the community. The experience in Victoria would suggest that the very outcomes Unions NSW seeks from TAFE would deteriorate greatly particularly as a consequence of the funding cuts being imposed by the State Government and the introduction of contestability.

## **Conclusion**

Unions NSW and its affiliated Unions have always been strong advocates for TAFE. Our desire is to ensure that it remains Australia's and the world's best practice model for vocational education and training. This brief submission highlights our deep concern that notwithstanding the best intentions of the Board to continue to look at ways to improve the

efficiency and effectiveness of TAFE, that the state governments policy of reduced funding and the introduction of contestability simply undermines this process.

Notwithstanding the above Unions NSW will continue to promote greater investment in TAFE and would welcome an ongoing dialogue with the Board.