

MIN23/386

The Director
Portfolio Committee 4
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

RE: Inquiry into the veterinary workforce shortage in New South Wales

Dear Committee

As the State's public provider of vocational education and training, TAFE NSW teaches courses relating to animal care and is a key provider of training to the State's veterinary nurses. I am happy to share the following information, but please note that this is not intended as a formal submission.

Over the last decade TAFE NSW saw a slight trend of declining enrolments across a range of Animal Care qualifications, however more recent trends show that enrolment numbers have been steadily increasing.

Strong relationships with industry are essential to ensure that TAFE NSW's training is up to date with emerging trends and able to meet workforce demands. TAFE NSW is in the process of developing and formalising an external Industry Collaboration Reference Group (ICRG) in this sector. TAFE NSW has recently become a sponsor of the Veterinary Nurses Council of Australia. Through these relationships, TAFE NSW is aware of the range of complex workforce challenges facing the veterinary industry including mental health and wellbeing challenges faced by workers.

Prolonged and repeated exposure to experiences can negatively influence an individual's physical and mental wellbeing and also has the potential to compromise quality of animal care. TAFE NSW has been proactive in responding to this identified skills gap by providing additional training to better equip teachers and students working in this industry with the strategies, tools and resources needed to protect animal care workers and promote a resilient and sustainable workforce.

These responses include currency activities for teaching staff facilitated by highly respected industry members. These sessions highlight the impacts of moral distress and compassion fatigue on animal care workers, along with Mental Health First Aid training to better equip teachers with the skills to train students. So far 40 staff have completed this training, with an additional 40 staff who will receive this training this financial year.

In Semester 1 2023, TAFE NSW developed a short course 800-001084 TAFE Statement in compassion fatigue and self-care in the animal care industry. Delivery of this is planned to commence in Semester 2 2023.

Recent updates to the accredited ACM training package include the introduction of a unit of competency ACMGEN304 – Promote positive wellbeing in self and others in animal care workplaces. This began to be added to a range of ACM qualifications from April 2021, with TAFE NSW delivering this unit from July 2022.

The use of Non-Nationally Recognised (NNR) training like short courses allows TAFE NSW to be agile in addressing immediate skills needs, and to equip our graduates with the skills and experience they need to achieve their career goals and longevity in the animal care industry. TAFE NSW continues to engage with Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs) to address more long-term solutions like influencing future accredited training package changes, and to support workforce growth in this sector to meet future labour market demand. Demands include a heightened focus on workforce retention and enhancing digital service capability. Increases to digital service capability provides opportunity for veterinary clinics to expand their use of telehealth for a variety of services and appointments to meet demand and to improve customer satisfaction and patient outcomes.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Brady
Managing Director
TAFE NSW
21 July 2023