

Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training in New South Wales.

General Purpose Standing Committee No 6

Supplementary Questions on Notice - Sydney 23 September 2015

Questions for the TAFE Community Alliance – responses Oct 2015

Question 1.

The Hon Catherine Cusack: “I assure you on that point that there is no unbridled growth of private providers in New South Wales.
Do you have any evidence at all that there has been growth for non TAFE providers?” Page 17.

I refer the Committee to the hearing session report of the 23 September 2015.

Further I refer the Committee to the submission Number 244 from ASQA (Australian Skills Quality Authority). Page 1 of the ASQA submission states “From 1 July 2011, ASQA assumed responsibility for the regulation of approximately 2,000 providers as well as the accreditation of VET courses in NSW...” The submission goes on to explain that there has been a downward trend with the number of providers as at 31 March 2015 in NSW stood at 1144.

Page three of their submission explains that “ In the period 1 July 2011 – 31 March ASQA received 25,389 applications for training organisations. As at 31 March 2015 some 24,796 (97.7%) of these applications had been finalized.

ASQA completed 4,693 audits between 1 July 2011 and 31 March 2015. Outcomes of the 4,693 completed audits were that 3,451 73.5% were compliant; 1002 (21.4%) were non-compliant:”

To my way of thinking the ASQA submission provides evidence of there being extraordinary growth and volatility in the VET sector over the passed 10 to 15 years in New South Wales. I accept that there are concerted moves to bring the volatility of the Vocational Education and Training Market / provision back to more reasonable level of existence. My concern is that there is still a great deal of confusion and concern with how VET is being provided in NSW.

Question 2.

Dr John Kaye: “I have run out of time but on notice would you be so kind as to provide an explanation of the brokerage model that is being instituted to replace the outreach coordinators and can you give us your critique of that system as to why that is inferior to the existing system? “ Page 20.

Situation: TAFE NSW South Western Sydney Institute has been reviewing its provision of programs and services given the planned implementation of the Smart and Skilled system and programs. Part of this process has involved the decision to delete the 12 Outreach Special Education Coordinator and to replace them with 8 /Community Engagement Coordinator (Senior Education Officer) positions.

The primary purpose of these new Community Engagement Coordinator positions will be – to provide educational brokering services to communities, government and non-government agencies to identify demand for skills and funding opportunities to meet community development needs, increase workforce participation and promote the full range of Institute courses and services.

The Outreach positions had been initially established in the mid to late 1970s and has been reviewed and revised over the past 4 decades to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of these critical educational positions and programs. The focus of Outreach positions was to develop and provide relevant programs for marginalized disadvantaged students who face barriers in obtaining access to TAFE and subsequently to VET, Community Development and Employment. Outreach regularly enrolled over 6000 students pa in SWSI.

The rationale of Outreach programs has been to engage, enable and equip disadvantaged, dependent learners to develop their confidence and ability to participate as effective learners in VET, work and community development. Outreach programs were developed in keeping with Government, TAFE NSW and SWSI policies, strategies, priorities and corporate social responsibilities in keeping with resource allocations, collaboration, contestability and commercial opportunities.

Outreach coordinators had well-established working relationships with a wider range of agencies in their communities and colleges. They were generally assigned to local government regions with lower socio economic populations in excess of 100,000 residents. They promoted TAFE in their region and represented SWSI in relation to a wider range of educational developments. They met on a regular basis with local Government agencies, representatives from Commonwealth employment agencies, Housing, Health, Human Services, Inter-agencies, family services, job networks, police, community services, various community groups , juvenile justice and schools. Other groups included Migrant Resource Centers, Women’s Health Centers, Ethnic Community Organisations , Child Care Centers, Aboriginal Communities, Youth Centers, Arts Organisations, Neighbor-hood Centers and Men’s sheds.

Outreach coordinators provided links with Primary and Secondary School and in some cases Higher Education. They provided links to learning programs and in some cases Gateway programs and support for Community Centers and links with community liaison officers. They participated in community meetings and were members of various Boards, Community governance Forums, Community and Public speakers and the distributors of course information and supporters of

bilingual services. They were involved in various initiatives in relation to Women in Leadership programs, Old Department of DEEWR (Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) consultations, Planet Youth, Drug Court programs and Productivity Places Program fee for service programs.

Very significant community developments and racial harmony programs have been provided including regional developments following the Macquarie Field Riots, Department of Housing resettlement problems in MacArthur, Fairfield Drug rehabilitation programs, Refugee resettlement programs, Miller Community projects, Harris Park anti Domestic violence programs, Multicultural Programs in Granville, and Warwick Farm Housing community developments.

Most of the Outreach programs were provided in Community venues, schools, local halls, community centers, migrant resource centers, industry locations and some provided as relevant at TAFE Colleges. The delivery of programs was done in accordance with Australian Skills Quality Authority standard requirements. Outreach students were extremely ethnically diverse with over 75% of the students coming from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). Programs enjoyed over 80% completion rates and high level of student satisfaction measures of over 85%. They were highly efficient as they were amongst the lowest cost per student contact hours.

Target groups for Outreach included people from CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Second chance learners and long term unemployed, Women and men preparing to up skill to re-enter the workforce, retrenched workers skills to support industry restructuring, mature aged potential workers, Youth at risk and disadvantaged learners, people with disabilities, recent arrivals and people who are socially and geographically isolated.

Outreach courses included: (1) Engagement courses – short courses to support dependent learners to identify their skills and to enkindle their learning in a VET environment and to become engaged with vocational and community development opportunities. (2) Pathway and Vocational Development courses designed to provide educational supportive programs for cautious semi self-directed learners who have established ability and wish to progress to a vocational course and or to work. (3) Specific programs in response to customized requirements or in support of mainstream enrolled students. For example: Youth at Risk programs, Correctional Service programs, and Pathway to Education and Employment programs. (4) Development of Referral and Brokerage services where prospective Outreach TAFE students are referred on to Vocational Courses at Certificate and Diploma levels and relevant programs in TAFE or by other relevant providers.

Comments:

The introduction of the Community Brokerage Model seriously diminishes the Outreach educational provision and its focus is on channeling prospective TAFE students into mainstream Training Package courses conducted by TAFE. The Outreach capability with engagement, pathway and specific programs has been

devolved, disbanded and disconnected. Transition attempts have been very unsuccessful this year according to reports from several former Outreach coordinators.

The brokerage model removes the required flexibility and responsiveness as negotiation is most likely to take place between third parties and programs taken off the shelf and immediately relinquishes ownership and belonging to the learners. Many disadvantaged learners have had off the shelf programs imposed on them unsuccessfully with poor results for a long time.

The Brokerage model requires the Community Engagement Coordinators to identify needs in the communities; negotiate and influence faculties and sections to design and implement programs; to develop plans to meet goals; to provide leadership; to establish internal and external community relationships; to develop tender bids to grow their business; to negotiate business opportunities; to report against targets; to raise the commercial profile of the institute; to ensure compliance with standards; to support Aboriginal cultures and communities and to perform other duties as required.

The Brokerage model programs are likely to be working in a more prescriptive commercial framework which takes the focus from achieving optimum educational and skill outcomes for the learners and community as they are forced to meet financial constraints, funding conditions, micro management and other compliance issues.

Several students have been forced to enrol in Certificate courses because the Statement of Attainment courses were withdrawn from the course lists. These students were disadvantaged because they should have been enrolled in a pre-certificate engagement courses; rather than being subjected to a labyrinth of units and assessments as teachers attempted to meet compliance requirements. This raised concerns about the inappropriate fit with enrolling students into unsuitable programs.

The Brokerage model has been criticized as the brokers try to fit students into prescribed programs which will maybe get them some form of work. The worry is that the model tends to rely more on directed learning processes as opposed to engagement, orientation, nurturing, supporting and elementary skill development required to enable self direction and health development of adult learners.

The worry is that the Brokerage model will mean that more students will fall through the cracks of the TAFE / VET system. There are groups of highly disengaged and damaged learners who need engagement and enabling programs to re-ignite their confidence and elementary skills as supported and self directed adult learners. The worry is that such vulnerable learners will alternatively become further isolated, disengaged, disruptive and destructive in their lives, families, acquaintances and communities.

Kevin Heys