

Dr John Kaye to ask Mr Mark Jewell Disability Consultant, TAFE NSW North Coast Institute

1. Please explain the concept of 'education' in contrast to 'training' and indicate
 - a. Why is it, in your experience, important for the student and for society
 - b. Does Smart and Skilled for a particular qualification provide funding for education that is not directly necessary to achieve training outcomes?
 - i. If not, please explain what the implications are for
 1. TAFE, and
 2. private for-profit providers

Response:

The difference between education and training has been the subject of long and complex debate.

Training in the VET context might be best understood as an increasingly reductionist approach wherein occupationally specific knowledge and skills as defined in training packages is transferred to students via a range of modes including teacher facilitated facility based, work-place based and electronic. A training package is a set of nationally endorsed standards and qualifications in a specific industry, industry sector or enterprise. They are developed by national Industry Skills Councils (ISCs).

Education, in contrast, is expansive in that it can integrate a broader range of knowledge and critical thinking skills with occupational skills enabling learners to comprehend how their specific vocational area fits into a local and global context. Included in this would be developing an understanding of the complex technological and environmental challenges facing their chosen profession. This would lead to education focused on preparing the learner with insights and skills in such areas as adaptability, resilience, resourcefulness, responsibility and accountability that they will need to surmount the challenges they will confront over their working lives.

It has been speculated that 40% of the current jobs will be obsolete in ten to fifteen years. New and higher order skills will be required as technological change disrupts current work structures and roles. If today's learners are to be empowered to successfully navigate careers in the currents of rapid change, specific occupational training would most wisely and effectively be placed in an educational framework that encourages lifelong learning and provides a foundation in areas such as ethical behavior; identifying issues/problem; generating, then testing, creative solutions; making connections and forming networks. The capacity to skillfully use IT tools and social networking techniques are now, and will increasingly be, essential. Neglecting the value of well-rounded and integrated educational and training experiences is likely to create a dull and unresponsive workforce and lead to a stalled economy.

Smart and Skilled, with an overtly stated aim of reducing training costs, has put pressure on all aspects of VET delivery – but most primarily on educational elements not considered to be occupationally specific. Many teaching sections in North Coast TAFE have significantly reduce delivery (teaching) hours because of the decreased funding levels available through Smart and Skilled. In this penny wise, pound foolish approach educational elements needed for understanding and coping with change are, generally, the first casualties.

While it is more problematic for me to speak of the situation relating to profit driven VET providers, my experience in working with many students who have articulated from for-profit providers to TAFE is that they have been short changed in both occupational training and education. TAFE has frequently been required to teach foundation knowledge and underpinning vocational skills to such students even though they have arrived from the private for-profit providers with qualifications indicating that they have already achieved the respective competencies.

In closing, historically TAFE has been an educational provider based on the educational principle of praxis – a combining of theoretical learning with practical application. It has contributed to making the Australian vocational and further education system one of the best in the world. Further, it has provided an important element in Australia's economic success. Our economic future will depend on knowledgeable and skilled people who can invent things, make things, provide services, use technology and rapidly adapt to change. TAFE has been, and can again be, the kind of educational and training provider to shape this kind of future workforce. However, TAFE won't be able to do so if policies such as Smart and Skilled continue to degrade its capacity to educate as well as train.