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TAFE pay claim a bit rich

EXCLUSIVE

BRUCE McDOUGALL

TAFE teachers are taking home bloated salaries substantially higher than police, fire and ambulance officers and nurses — starting their career on $78,442 for a 35-hour week.

By comparison a police officer starts out on $65,000, a fire officer on $58,500, a nurse on $56,723 and an ambulance officer on $56,200 for a longer working week.

The TAFE teachers' generous salaries and conditions have emerged amid revelations they are paid up to 70 per cent more than private operators and other Australian TAFEs. It is understood around 95 per cent of the 3000 frontline TAFE teachers are on the highest wage band, boosting their pay to $93,029 and more than 40 per cent of them are aged over 55.

The $2 billion training giant plans sweeping efficiency reforms that will determine the organisation's future. TAFE chiefs claim the changes are vital as it faces intense competition from private providers for student enrolments.

But, if costs cannot be reined in, TAFE chiefs warn they face the prospect of lost business, plummeting revenue and fewer jobs.

TAFE NSW managing director Pam Christie denied the pay and conditions of 18,000 staff would be affected but said reform was needed to modernise the way the organisation did business.

The NSW Teachers' Federation said student numbers attending TAFE had fallen by 83,000 since 2012, and more than 2500 teaching and support positions had been lost.

In negotiations for a new enterprise bargaining agreement TAFE bosses have offered staff a 2.5 per cent pay rise in return for reforms that include major changes to employees' work roles.

TAFE, pivotal to providing the skills needed for Western Sydney's infrastructure and development boom, faces an uncertain future if the unions succeed in opposing the changes.

A spokesman for the federation said it would oppose any salary increases of less than 2.5 per cent and any loss of working conditions.

"These moves will be opposed at the negotiation table and if necessary by all available industrial, legal and political means," he said.

Deputy president of the federation Gary Zadkovich said competitive salaries were needed to attract good teachers to TAFE.

Ms Christie said the reforms to TAFE were a response to changes in the environment that required more flexible and convenient training.

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