Inquiry into vocational education and training in New South Wales

TRANSCRIPT AND QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
By Terry Kofod, Head Teacher Information Technology
12 November 2015

To ensure the committee's report incorporates correct information, please return the following documents by 12 November 2015:

- *a corrected transcript – <u>No corrections necessary</u>*
- *answers to questions on notice taken during the hearing – <u>See below</u>*
- *any additional information you wish to provide to the committee – <u>See below</u>*

Supplementary questions on notice - Wollongong Hearing – Monday 12 October 2015
Questions for Mr Terry Kofod, Head Teacher, TAFE NSW Illawarra 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.

2. How many teachers in your section have lost their positions as a result of restructuring or other changes since 2011? Please specify permanent full time equivalent positions and/or part time casual staff.
   a. How many were there before the restructuring began?
   b. Please explain the impacts on students and TAFE of this change.

Answer Q1a
Education and training happen in the delivery of our information technology courses. Training may be taken as a subset of education given the scope of this inquiry. The main contrast between education and training relates to teaching theory is 'education' versus teaching practical skills is 'training' but that's irrelevant to IT education at TAFE. Even in the trades where the practical skills might be the focus of 'training', students still need 'education' in the theory areas like meat cuts, WHS, load bearing walls etc.

Our low level Certificate III information technology networking course has a 50% theory content. The course involves students developing complex theory based knowledge and skills like trouble-shooting and technical documentation writing plus a whole series of network related theory work such as subnet calculations using binary mathematics.

At the higher levels, Diploma and Advanced Diploma the theory education is much more difficult but it is reinforced and made relatable by the use of practical examples such as installing virtual networks across multiple locations. Students do this on-site in the same room they learn theory in.

I think the main strength of TAFE education is that the theory is taught then put into practice in the same practical lab on the same day. Students see the theory working within hours of learning it which helps students retain the information more successfully.

Answer Q1b

Smart and Skilled does not provide enough funding for quality education, not even close. The S&S funding model is woefully inadequate in terms of giving students meaningful learning experiences especially at high levels such as certificate IV, Diploma and above. S&S has reduced the training outcomes for our students by at least 40% because we now only teach the minimum to cover the training package requirements.

We have reduced our face-to-face delivery for all courses by 45% due to budget cuts. Less face-to-face time with teachers means that students miss out on valuable learning experiences. This has meant fewer successful course completions and a reduction in quality.

After a lot of pressure from TAFE management we introduced online learning for parts of our courses but this has been very unsuccessful. To complete online study students need to be highly motivated, very organised, self-disciplined and have excellent foundation skills. Our student cohort are mostly males 16 to 24 who are not at all suited to online learning. They need the routine structure of face-to-face learning. Online learning in TAFE IT has extremely low course completions.

25% of our students have special needs and 60% need study skills support. Smart and Skilled funding falls way short of providing these students with the support they need. I have been head teacher for 25 years and we have always provided disabilities students with one-on-one tutorials which were very successful. Since S&S we are now grouping students with special needs into five-to-one tutes which are not working at all especially for students with autism related special needs.

VET funding changes means that TAFE quality, flexibility and customer service have all suffered. Employers are not getting the quality graduates we once delivered because we no longer have the staff resources to provide the quality education we previously did. All these factors coupled with the poor management of the EBS/SALM project have damaged TAFE's and vocational education's reputation severely.

Private training providers are benefiting greatly from Smart and Skilled because they can get access to large amounts of funding without having to provide a lot of training or education. Private RTOs are focussing on the theory side of VET, focussing on courses and students that don't require a lot of resources. Courses with high theory content coupled with students without any special needs and who are likely not to complete provide the best financial return.

Answer Q2
Pre-2011 Position Information Technology (Northern District – Wollongong Area)
- Information technology had three Band Two Head Teachers (large section, high student numbers means higher level head teacher) positons across three campuses in the Wollongong area – Dapto, Wollongong and Wollongong West campuses.
- 17 full-time teachers across the three campuses (some on overtime, none under-program)
- 32 part-time teachers
- 400+ students per year (At one point a number of years ago Dapto TAFE had 300+ students)
- Funding for teaching infrastructure (hardware and software) $52,000/year

November 2015 - Current Position Information Technology (Northern District – Wollongong Area)
- One Band Two Head Teacher and one Band One Head Teacher (half the size)
- Wollongong West Campus only (nothing at Dapto or Wollongong)
- 11 full-time teachers
- Three of the full-time teachers are under-programmed because of low student numbers
- 5 part-time teachers
- 200 students per year
- Funding for teaching infrastructure (hardware and software) $5,000/year

Impacts on students and TAFE of these changes
- Less face-to-face delivery reducing course completions and quality learning outcomes
- Less depth in delivery, we can't deliver the variety of courses we once offered
- We once had four highly experienced full-time business analysis teachers but now I am the only one left. Similarly for other subjects such as database administration, business programming, cabling and telecommunications
- Because of the projects like the NBN we are getting a bigger demand for telecommunications and cabling training but can't get the staff. TAFE pays teachers $76/hour but trainee telecommunications professionals get $100+ per hour
- Because of low teaching pay rates and higher employment in the IT area we are having a lot of problems getting good IT teaching staff
- Funding for IT teaching infrastructure has been cut so much now all of our teaching computer practical labs use second hand computer hardware. We are given old excess computers which we refurbish as part of our non-teaching duties and use them in the computer labs
- Students are taught using obsolete computer hardware which means employers are not getting staff with skills in current technologies
- We cannot provide enough graduates for IT job demand in local area
- There is a high demand for TAFE IT graduates and we have an almost 100% employment rate of students who complete our diplomas but recently the demand for graduates has exceeded the number of students we are able to train
- Even in the Wollongong area there are a lot of IT jobs suitable for our graduates but we just don't have enough students. Last week an employer rang me asking for recommendations for good graduates to fill a job. Usually I can recommend 5 to 10 students to give the employer a range of options but I could only give them one name
- University graduates are not as job ready as TAFE graduates because TAFE students have a lot more practical experience and hands-on exposure to actual hardware and software used by businesses
- I'm a university graduate with three university qualifications and a TAFE graduate with four TAFE qualifications. University taught me high level critical analysis and management skills and TAFE taught me trouble-shooting and lower level practical skills and knowledge.

Additional information
My background
I have an information technology business analysis and project management background and been head teacher of IT for 25 years but have spent a number of years acting in management positions within the education field. Positions such as project manager, faculty management, systems development management and curriculum development management. I have elected not to apply for permanent management positions mainly because of my children and partly because of the bullying culture of TAFE management.

TAFE Management
- TAFE's current management structure is extremely top heavy with excessive number of senior managers in all areas. This results in over-management, micro-management and inconsistent approaches. In a recent budget meeting with faculty management the two managers present could not agree on a planning tool and I was told two different formulas for calculating my section budget
- Secrecy and misinformation are used as management tools. One of my managers promotes online learning but the other one realises its limitations and discourages it but is too scared to say anything to senior Institute management
- Nepotism is rife throughout TAFE's management with EEO recruitment practices being regularly ignored and friends of TAFE management being able to act in any position they want for however long they want. This is particularly true in the Illawarra institute
- Bullying and fear are also used as management tools. The truth about difficult issues is kept from senior TAFE management because lower managers are scared to report problems

LMBR/EBS/SALM
- I have worked with some of the people involved in the implementation of LMBR/EBS/SALM and they are mostly not suited to IT project management. They are good managers but lack the IT skills and knowledge to work on a project of this magnitude. They can easily be persuaded by any shrewd IT salesperson or contractor through the use of IT jargon that confuses them and they don't want to be seen to be stupid so they agree to anything without a critical analysis
- If I was going to fix the problems with LMBR/EBS/SALM I would do a massive spill and fill across the project using competitive and aggressive recruitment methods to get highly qualified and experience people. Also I would reduce management numbers by 50% and actively work against the cultures of bullying and nepotism.
- As an indication of problems with EBS/SALM, recently two of my faculty managers told me to ignore the enrolment data from SALM because the "data is too corrupt to trust" for planning. When I asked how I should plan they told me to use my best guesses.
- More worrying is that the TAFE Executive Group (TEG) recently decided not to introduce improvements to EBS/SALM because the upgrades are not close to working even though they have been worked on for over a year. The TEG's only choice is to repeat all the problems of 2015 for 2016 because they do not have faith in the EBS/SALM project team.
- There needs to be a thorough investigation into the true costs of LMBR/EBS/SALM. The costs must be well beyond the quoted $570 million, costs are being hidden in other budget areas such as staffing and at local level not reported at all as part of LMBR/EBS/SALM.
- In my section alone in 2015 LMBR/EBS/SALM would have added over $100,000 through having teachers under-programmed, taking myself and my fellow head teacher off classes, clerical support, help desk support, downtime of systems, staff training, sick leave etc
- Those costs would be half the value of the loss of income from student enrolment difficulties. Rather than getting revenue from 200 students for the year we will only get funding for 150 at the most. That's a loss of over $250,000 (50 students X $5000 each).

Decline in student numbers

Information technology students in the Illawarra Institute Northern District (Dapto, Wollongong and Wollongong West) has halved over the last 5 years for a number of reasons -

- Repeated poor customer service
- Decline in the quality of course delivery due to the reduction in teacher numbers
- Increase in student fees
- Lack of location choice. IT was offered across three campuses but now the only location students can do IT training between Nowra and Loftus is Wollongong West TAFE.
- Poor promotion of courses and TAFE in general. Our 98% employment success rate for diploma graduates has never been reported in the press or used for promotion
- Poor advertising in general
- Missing and incorrect information on TAFE website. Our students do most of their research via the web. For most of 2015 two thirds of our IT courses were missing from the website so students had no idea about what we were offering or how to enrol
- Confusion about fees. I can no longer tell students how much their course will cost. If a student rings me for course details I have been directed to not tell them the cost but direct them to a website.
- The websites giving student details on fees are confusing and misleading. Our Institute Director had to personally step in to give one of my disabilities students a fee exemption because he was quoted a $0 fee but TAFE administration chased him for months for fees saying that $0 was wrong.
- Bullying over payment. A number of my students were contacted directly by phone by TAFE staff telling them they must pay immediately or stop attending classes. So they withdrew
- Increase in university enrolment intake
- Private providers – this would be only a small number because IT courses are expensive to run so private RTOs tend to stay away from courses requiring a lot of resources

Online Learning and VET FEE Help

- Online learning is just another tool in the teaching environment. It does not work as a sole teaching methodology and reduces course completions dramatically. TAFE management sees it as some kind of solution for totally unrelated problems

- Students do not understand VET FEE HELP and do not grasp that they will end up with a loan that they will have to pay back even if they fail or drop out of the course
- VET FEE HELP courses should not be advertised as "Study now, pay later!", it is misleading
- The VET FEE enrolment process is confusing, convoluted and lends itself to corruption, quick money schemes by RTOs.
- ASQA seems to be weak and unsuccessful against poor RTOs, quality has actually declined.