

## **Norm Cahill Additional Questions and Answers**

### **1. Could you please expand on the following statement provided in response to a question from Mr Farlow, and in particular, explain how you think TAFE should be funded?**

The funding for TAFE and private providers should be the same for the delivery of training. In my opinion TAFE are being hamstrung by their management who are taking approximately 40% of the training dollars for management. The teaching sections are then expected to compete on an equal footing with private providers. All RTOs whether public or private have overheads for learning resources, teaching staff, classroom and workshop equipment, tools, workplace monitoring etc. But it appears to me as an outsider that TAFE are diverting training dollars to pay for a top heavy management, a range of services such as psychological and intellectual counselling careers advice and specialised IT systems specifically designed for TAFE NSW. While these services are nice to have and they do support students that have issues, I doubt the funding allocated for the delivery of training took these additional costs into account when they were set.

TAFE has a community service obligation. I am led to understand that this funding may be slowly reduced in the future, which will put even more pressure on teaching sections. If NSW wants to continue these additional services through TAFE these items need to be funded through other funding models, not by reducing the real dollars set aside for training delivery by teaching sections.

### **2. Changes to TAFE funding have resulted in a reduction in face-to-face teaching hours in electrotechnology apprenticeships:**

#### **a. Were the pre-Smart and Skilled hours of face-to-face excessive?**

Face to face delivery hours have for a number of years been set by the Victorian purchasing guide. Victorian Purchasing Guides contain nominal hour allocations for units of competency and maximum hour allocations for qualifications within training packages. They also contain sample training programs that have been developed for nationally endorsed training packages. I have attached a copy of the UEE11 Purchasing guide. The hours allocated in NSW prior to the implementation of Smart and Skilled were consistent with this document and were consistent with all other states and territories allocation of hours.

The following link will take you to all current Training Packages on the Victorian Purchasing Guide page of the Victorian Education & Training web site.

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/training/providers/rto/Pages/purchasingguides.aspx>

A number of electrotechnology qualifications have what is commonly known as a capstone assessment embedded in the qualification. This is a distinct unit of competency that has all other units including workplace experience and evidence as a prerequisite and is delivered at the closing stages of the apprenticeship. This has usually occurred in the fourth stage of the apprenticeship and is an additional cost to the RTO. There is also an amount of revision that is undertaken prior to this final assessment that is another cost to the RTO. To gain the workplace evidence most apprentices utilise an electronic profiling system such as eProfiling or Skills Tracker which are also a cost to the RTO.

This information, while collected electronically, still needs to be analysed by the RTO to ensure its integrity. If the apprentice chooses to have a log book to gather their evidence this is even more expensive to check and verify. All of these factors were considered when determining the face to face hours of delivery to be funded. While the Victorian Purchasing Guide sets 1100 hours NSW allocated 1064, for the Electrical trade course, but the actual face to face hours have consistently been 864.

Therefore I would say that the pre- Smart and Skilled face to face hours were not excessive.

**b. Will student outcomes suffer?**

As I mentioned in my evidence, there will be some students that will successfully complete the electrical trade's course, whatever the delivery method. However for the vast majority I believe that it will be more difficult for them to successfully complete with less face to face delivery. The electrotechnology curriculum is a highly specialised. It contains high level mathematics and physics as well as hand and power tool skills similar every other trade. Apprentices in these trades need to be able to conceptualise the theory behind the trade. For many people this is a difficult concept to grasp. This is why at a trade level students need guidance from specialised teachers and assessors, otherwise student outcomes will suffer.

**c. It has been suggested that online learning creates greater flexibility. What has been your experience of students in online learning, particularly those that do not have strong literacy and study skills?**

Online learning can be a great tool for some students. The highly motivated will excel in this environment, where others that find the concepts articulated in the theory difficult to understand will struggle. Students with poor literacy and numeracy skills will quickly be left behind in this learning environment, unless there is a large amount of support provided to them.

The Electrotechnology industry recently completed a thirty month trial of a competency based progression model for the electrical apprentice. The project was commonly known as Energise Oz and funded by the Commonwealth Government. One of the keys to this project was the development of a blended learning program through an online Learning Management System. In a recent industry report about the project Mr Leon Dickson from the National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) NSW Branch stated that "The NSW TAFE's that were involved with the Energise Oz Project struggled with computer access, teacher resources and the system of learning that was foreign to them. After initial hurdles, the students in the project showed acceleration through their topics in most cases." This shows that a blend of face to face and online learning can be successful.

Another initiative in this project was a readiness assessment that ensured apprentices commencing the course were at a standard with literacy and numeracy that would allow them to successfully complete the program. After thirty months the dropout rate of the program was just 5%. This compares favourably with the usual apprenticeship cohort figure of 20% dropout rate at the same stage of the traditional apprenticeship.

I have attached a copy of Mr Dickson's report for your information.

**3. You observed that private providers have lower overheads in part because most of them do not provide facilities such as libraries and advanced laboratories and services such as counsellors. What are the consequences for students and for learning outcomes?**

There is a major difference between private providers and the public provider. Private providers have more choice about who they train, the public provider does not, and they must take all students engaged in apprenticeships and traineeships. Private providers do provide many facilities that assist students with needs, but not anywhere near to the extent of the public provider.

The vast majority of private providers do not have facilities that match TAFE NSW facilities. A lot of private RTOs lease their training facilities and only engage counselling services when required. While they may have a library, it would not be anywhere near the facilities available at TAFE. As the private RTO can be more selective about their cohort of students that can usually provide an adequate service to assist students to successfully complete their training.

But the huge advantage private RTOs, especially in the sectors that our ITAB covers, have over TAFE is the huge managerial costs. No private RTO could survive if they had overheads of forty percent. It is unrealistic to expect TAFE teaching sections to carry this burden and still deliver the same quality outcomes that we have come to expect. In saying that, there is plenty of room for TAFE teaching sections to improve. But saddling them with a forty percent cost before their own costs are taken into account is a recipe for disaster.

As I do not have access to completion rates of all students in both public and private RTOs I cannot give a definitive answer to the question, what are the consequences for students and for learning outcomes. It might be a good research project to discover what is actually occurring.

I trust this additional information is of assistance.

Norm Cahill  
Executive Officer  
NSW Utilities & Electrotechnology ITAB