

Questions from transcript

Question 1

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Has the increase of the school age had an impact on TAFE enrolments from school leavers?

Ms CHRISTIE: Yes, it has. We have worked very closely with the school sector to support the raising of the school leaving age and a lot of students who traditionally would have come to TAFE perhaps to complete their School Certificate, we are working very closely with the school sector to try to encourage those students to remain at school. In the transition period when the school leaving age was first introduced some years ago we have and continue to still support students who may not be suitable or successful in a school environment to still undertake a certificate II qualification. So there was some transition funding that facilitated, if you like, that transition to a higher school leaving age.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: That was transition funding for TAFE, was it?

Ms CHRISTIE: It was early school leaving age, yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Can I just ask, and perhaps you might like to take it on notice, if you could describe the impact it has had on TAFE at the time and ongoing? That would be very interesting to the Committee.

Ms CHRISTIE: I think what it has done is to encourage the pathway through to TAFE to be more vocationally focused and to ensure that students who really need to complete their basic skills education remain in schools.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I do understand the impact on the students. I am actually interested in the impact on TAFE enrolments.

Ms CHRISTIE: On TAFE enrolments?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: On TAFE, yes?

Ms CHRISTIE: We have certainly seen some adjustments in the qualification profile that TAFE delivers and I would be happy to provide that on notice because we have been shifting more to a profile—

Answer

TAFE NSW delivers courses to students who want to study for all or part of their NSW Higher School Certificate. In January 2010, the school leaving age in NSW was raised to 17 years of age. As a result, more school aged students are staying at school and there is less demand for the HSC at TAFE. In that time there has been a reduction of enrolments in HSC studies across all TAFE NSW Institutes.

A significant subset of TAFE HSC enrolments are HSC Pathways students enrolling in HSC subjects to improve results or complete HSC requirements.

The NSW Government provides funding to TAFE NSW to provide opportunities to undertake HSC studies at TAFE.

TAFE NSW also offers an alternative equivalent course, the Tertiary Preparation Certificate (TPC). The TPC provides students with an entry pathway to university, TAFE or other tertiary study.

Question 2

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Again you are welcome to take this on notice but we are really interested to understand how TAFE is engaging at a policy level on the NDIS. I know there is a lot of opportunity and there has been a lot of work on disability but if you can give us something more specific about the NDIS. It is profoundly impacting a number of agencies and portfolios. I am really keen for those details in relation to TAFE.

Ms CHRISTIE: I will probably take that on notice but I can say that we are putting a strategy together and I am aware of individual institutes all collaborating to share some of that information so that we can put that forward in a more coherent strategy, so I can provide more detail about that.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Do you see a disabled student enrolling in TAFE as bringing funding for TAFE as part of the NDIS?

Ms CHRISTIE: Yes, there are certainly opportunities going forward but I cannot provide the details for you now.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: If you could provide on notice any of the agencies and how you are engaging with the disability agencies, even nationally, what government arrangements are in place to ensure the best outcomes for clients of the NDIS and the best outcome for TAFE?

Ms CHRISTIE: I would be happy to take that on notice.

Answer

NSW was the first state to sign up to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in 2012. TAFE NSW has and will continue work with government agencies to work with and provide data and other expertise to government as required.

On September 6, Minister for Skills, The Hon. John Barilaro announced a \$10 million investment to support 2,000 more training places in courses including Disability, Community Services, Auslan and Aged Care to support the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The NSW Government recently signed an agreement with the Commonwealth for the full roll out of the scheme. TAFE NSW will continue to support the NSW Government's efforts in the rollout where required.

Question 3

The Hon. LOU AMATO: As a former small business owner I have had kids who have been near completion of their HSC who cannot read and write properly.

Ms CHRISTIE: Well, literacy and numeracy has always been an issue. I cannot make a comment about whether it is increasing or not but I can tell you that TAFE has a lot of capability in delivering—

The Hon. LOU AMATO: Perhaps you can take that on notice as you might have numbers somewhere to suggest whether or not it has been increasing?

Ms CHRISTIE: We do assess our students' literacy and numeracy capability when they are entering a vocational course so that we can provide the right level of assistance but it is not a standardised test. It is more the level of skills appropriate to the qualification.

CHAIR: So you do not collect data on that?

Ms CHRISTIE: It is not a standardised test; it is more a needs assessment but I could give you some anecdotal evidence.

CHAIR: That would be helpful.

Answer

TAFE NSW Institutes have processes in place to ensure learners have the appropriate skills and knowledge required to enrol in courses.

TAFE provides counselling services, tutorial support and reasonable adjustment for students facing disadvantage. This includes literacy and numeracy support for students and continues to offer HSC equivalent courses around the State based on demand.

TAFE offers further support by delivering pre-vocational courses to prepare students for vocational training and short programs for specific skill needs.

Question 4

CHAIR: Did you go back to the Minister or go through the necessary process and give feedback that this system was not appropriate and doing what it was employed to do?

Ms CHRISTIE: We have provided weekly reports.

CHAIR: Who did you report to about this system?

Ms CHRISTIE: Initially to Minister Piccoli early in 2015 and since Minister Barilaro became the Minister for Skills—

CHAIR: I think he has inherited this but can you table for this inquiry the cost, monetary wise, you have poured into this broken system from day one, the financial cost, not just the man hours that you would have put into this for people to fix this or try to work around; the students apparently who were getting pass marks on this when they had not even done the test or something like that, according to the evidence?

Ms CHRISTIE: No, I can say that although there was a problem initially with the issuing of testamurs, that was very quickly resolved and I can confidently say that all students did receive their correct testamurs and we have not had an ongoing problem with testamurs for our vocational education and training students. That issue was an issue. It was caught out and it was addressed but there certainly have been some ongoing issues with other aspects of the system, particularly as they relate to the Smart and Skilled requirements.

CHAIR: I know in my business, when something went wrong on the computer, it took my time and probably my wife's time. It was man hours, which equalled to dollars, and then I had to buy software or get someone to fix it. It all added up to hours and dollars. I want to know what has been the full cost to date to fix those issues.

Dr JOHN KAYE: On the Educational Business System [EBS], when were you first informed by an institute director or by management of any institute that there might be a problem going ahead with using the EBS software for the enrolments in 2015?

Ms CHRISTIE: We were very aware of risks of the EBS—

Dr JOHN KAYE: Sorry, Ms Christie, I asked you a specific question. When were you first informed by an institute director or management of an institute?

Ms CHRISTIE: To answer the question, I think I need to explain that when we accepted or were given the system, there was an assessment of risk in respect of severity of risks, but it was in early January when we were implementing the system that we became aware of the instability of the system. Initially it only appeared to be what we expected were teething problems, so we were not aware in those early days in January—

Dr JOHN KAYE: No institute director wrote to you in 2014 and raised issues?

Ms CHRISTIE: I talk to institute directors every day. In fact, in early January we were having daily meetings with institute directors to monitor the risks and the situation, and that has continued. We still have twice weekly meetings on systems. I had one this morning.

Dr JOHN KAYE: When did you first inform the Minister that you thought there was a problem?

Ms CHRISTIE: The Minister was briefed on a number of occasions—

Dr JOHN KAYE: What was the first date?

Ms CHRISTIE: I would have to take that on notice.

Answer

TAFE NSW regularly provided the Minister for Education, with updates on issues relating to the implementation of the system. The Minister for Skills continues to be updated accordingly.

Question 5

Dr JOHN KAYE: If we take the entitlement funding out, you are left with the operational base funding, your community service obligation [CSO] funding and student fees. Can you give this Committee a rough idea of the breakdown of those three components?

Ms CHRISTIE: I would not like to mislead the inquiry. I do not have the breakdown in front of me.

CHAIR: Could you provide them?

Dr JOHN KAYE: Could you provide them on notice?

Ms CHRISTIE: Yes, I could do that.

Answer

Operational Base Funding and Community Service Obligation Funding are included as part of the recurrent cluster grant. Fees received from student fees are listed under revenue in the financial statements in the Budget Papers.

Question 6

Dr JOHN KAYE: We will put questions on notice to get those, Ms Christie. I will go to the issue of reduction in hours in TAFE courses. We were at Belmont and we were given an excellent tour of the electrical technology section by some excellent professional teachers. The observation was made to us that daily hours have been reduced from eight to seven under Smart and Skilled, and next year it will likely be reduced down to five hours. That is a substantial reduction. Have you heard from any employer bodies that they are concerned about reduction in hours and the impacts that that will have on the quality of training and the impact for trainees who are coming through the TAFE system?

Ms CHRISTIE: I regularly engage with employers and I have spoken to employers about changes in delivery, particularly of apprenticeships, if you are referring to apprenticeship models.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Apprenticeships in particular but other employers as well.

Ms CHRISTIE: There are a number of reasons we changed the way we deliver hours. One of them is cost pressures—that is, the Smart and Skilled fees and prices puts pressure on our budget and the amount of time we can allocate to delivery, but we are absolutely looking at how we can maintain quality in that environment.

Dr JOHN KAYE: Ms Christie, I will interrupt you because we are into the Opposition's time. Could you take the rest of that question on notice?

Ms CHRISTIE: Sure.

Answer

TAFE NSW regularly engages with students and employers on a range of matters, including course delivery.

Question 7

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: The trajectory over time is that the operational base funding will decline for TAFE. Has there been some planning and work done to look at the next financial year or the next cycle to see what we can expect the operational base funding to be?

Ms CHRISTIE: We are still working through the details of our budget but in our budget there was a projection about the revenues that we may be successful in winning through the Smart and Skilled entitlement contract. That is an estimate in our budget.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: What was that, just remind me?

Ms CHRISTIE: I am looking for that figure. I do have it here but I will have to give that to you. It was around \$360 million or something in the order of that.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You can take that on notice.

Answer

Operational Base Funding is included as part of the recurrent cluster grant.