

Opening Statement to the Senate Inquiry into VET

From Lindy Kemp Director TAFE Services North Coast NSW
2015

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this hearing. I too would like to acknowledge the Bundjalung people as the traditional custodians of this land. I also want to acknowledge Aboriginal people who are here with us today at Lismore for this hearing. We welcome the public hearings at both our Wollongbar and Lismore Campuses.

We see these hearings as an opportunity to pay attention to the importance of skills in our region and to discuss how, together, everyone in the sector can prepare for the future.

As an organisation, North Coast Institute of TAFE services regional communities from Bulahdelah at the southern end of the Institute to the Tweed at the northern border and we deliver our services across the country online as well. We employ over 2000 people and are one of the biggest regional providers of education and training in Australia, with over 50 000 enrolments last year, which was up from 45 000 the year before. While it's unlikely that any provider, including us, can continue to grow at this rate year on year, we are still experiencing – and meeting – strong demand for our services in 2015.

The drivers of user choice are changing, the global economy is changing, and so is the economy in the north coast. The nature of work is changing, and so are jobs in our region. So all of us in the skills sector – TAFE, industry, community, other providers – we do need to keep changing as well. North Coast Institute continues to change and adapt to keep pace with these changes especially in terms of work and technology. So much has shifted in those spaces. And student and employer expectations have also changed.

And of course all of these changes are reflected in changes in government priorities, these too have shifted as they always do and as they will continue to do.

Revenue to provide our services

In 2014 NCTAFE won a large Smart and Skilled Contract and so far in 2015 we've used this funding to provide subsidised training in

- Foundation skills
- Apprenticeships and traineeships
- Full qualifications up to Certificate level 3.

We bid for and win other TAFENSW and federal contestable funds and deliver commercial services designed to provide skill sets and higher level qualifications.

We also have access to Community Service Obligation funding which enables us to provide specialist support to disadvantaged students. This funding supports our disabilities, counselling and learner support activities in particular.

In addition we provide significant fee for service training opportunities

Demand

Growth industries in the region include health, aged care, nursing, community services, civil construction and some transport and primary industries, so North Coast Institute of TAFE has introduced new programs in recent years in each of these sectors to skill up people in our communities for jobs, in order to respond to industry and community needs.

Many of these programs include partnerships with industry or private providers who bring additional capabilities such as the latest equipment or industry current practices or new technologies to the training environment. They also include partnerships with Aboriginal communities across our region and interstate.

Since the introduction of income contingent loans, we have seen more people access higher level qualifications. This is a very important trend as we know that people's job prospects improve markedly once they achieve a Certificate Level 3 or higher. These higher level qualifications also provide strong pathways to university.

We have strong and developing relationships with universities in our footprint and nearby (SCU, CSU, Griffith and Newcastle to name a few). These relationships include very particular agreed direct pathways to these universities for graduates from our qualifications.

In addition, we have a large VET in Schools program in partnership with schools right across our footprint.

Changing expectations

More of north coast TAFE's students want to study at times and places that suit them. With the advent of new technologies and increasing demand for workplace delivery, up to 40% of our students choose to study off campus either online or in their workplace while on the job. Students also study with us at a community site in one of our growing fleet of mobile and or community based learning spaces.

Nevertheless, our campus-based simulated training environments are valued by our students, particularly students who are not yet in work, and who need lots of practice and a supported, group learning experience.

Employers also want choice: some want their workers to attend a campus; while many others prefer our staff to train their people in their workplace and we meet those needs wherever we can.

Our response

Providing choice to meet today's expectations of a personalised learning experience is not without its challenges, but it is the focus of what we do.

North Coast Institute of TAFE has continued to change its assets and job roles in order to meet these demands and expectations. More of our assets are mobile now; more are technology-enabled; more of our jobs are specialised to ensure that what we do is as relevant as possible.

Clearly, changes are difficult for many, but for others they are exciting. They open up new opportunities. For instance, through our online business we have created many jobs for local people who are teaching students all over Australia.

The changes we are making, and will continue to make, are a strong symbol of our determination to stay relevant to our communities and to the industries we serve. We are evolving and will continue to do so. We are working at defending our traditional core market and we are growing our business with new opportunities