

**Submission
No 268**

**INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND
TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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**Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training
in
New South Wales**

General Purpose Standing Committee No 6

Lorraine Watson

Date: 11th August 2015

I wish to begin by thanking the NSW Government for the opportunity to make a submission to General Purpose Standing Committee No 6 Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training in New South Wales. I am very grateful that an Inquiry is being held into VET in NSW and optimistic that this will afford an opportunity for the implications of Smart and Skilled on the needs and rights of the disadvantaged, the disempowered and the disengaged are represented to be considered.

Personal Information

I trained as a special education teacher and I have worked in the disability field since 1978. While I have worked primarily in education I was employed as the Manager of MacArthur Disability Services, MDS, for 7 years, 1982 – 1989, where I was regularly called upon to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities in the development of government and community services. For the last 26 years I have worked for TAFE NSW as a Teacher Consultant for students who have physical disabilities or medical conditions.

On a personal level, I am the mother of a young man who has a disability who left school with a very basic level of education and little hope for employment. However, after completing two prevocational courses at TAFE my son was ready and able to undertake and complete an apprenticeship. For the last three (3) years he has been employed on a permanent basis as a welder/boiler maker and in September 2014 he purchased his own home. Therefore, the role that TAFE NSW played in enabling my son to move from the Disability Support Pension into employment was life changing.

I was also a member of Disability Services Reference Group, DSRG, a working party formed by the Minister for Education, Mr Adrian Piccoli, that was comprised of representatives of Peak Disability Organisations, TAFE Teacher Consultants and AEU Officers. This group was formed, following considerable lobbying by Teacher Consultants and Peak Disability Organisations, to consider the implications of Smart and Skilled on people with disabilities. The group met with Mr David Collins, Manager of NSW State Training Services, on two (2) occasions to discuss concerns in respect to the impact of Smart and Skilled on services to students who have disabilities undertaking VET programs in NSW.

I have chosen to take a holistic approach to addressing the terms of reference of General Purpose Standing Committee No 6 Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training in New South Wales. I trust that the information I have provided below will be of value to the Members of this Committee.

Fees

As you are aware, on the first of January 2015 the NSW government introduced VET Reform under the name Smart and Skilled. What this means is that TAFE NSW now has to compete against private training companies for government funding for the funds to deliver VET courses and to generate sufficient income from this to remain sustainable. The NSW government stated that the implementation of Smart and Skilled program would encourage private training providers to deliver courses and that this would improve the diversity and quality of the training provided.

Unfortunately, it is now evident that such rhetoric is just a smoke screen to hide a move that is on across Australia to deregulate and privatise post school education and shift the costs of funding for training programs onto individuals. Therefore, Smart and Skilled is nothing more than an orchestrated plan to set up a user pays system for VET programs.

The implementation of Smart and Skilled in January 2015 has resulted in an enormous decline in the number of students enrolling in VET courses. This is because many individuals do not have the disposable income to pay upfront course fees and purchase books and other resources. Therefore, the fee structure that is now in place in NSW for VET courses has taken away the motivation to study of people who simply do not have the means to pay upfront fees.

It has been suggested that there has been a decline of 30,000 in TAFE enrolments since the implementation of Smart and Skilled but I think that this figure falls far short of the mark. For this reason, I believe that it would serve the interests of the people of NSW for the members of General Purpose Standing Committee No 6 to access actual statistics on enrolment patterns and completion rates of students undertaking VET courses over the last 5 years and compared these statistics with student enrolments in VET courses since the implementation of Smart and Skilled.

There is still provision under Smart and Skilled for some disadvantaged students to receive fee exemptions but not all courses are eligible for fee exemptions. As a consequence of this, many students are choosing not to study or are enrolling in Diploma level courses where they can access the VET Fee Help loan scheme.

One of the problems that relate directly to this is the huge increase in the number of courses offered at Diploma level that have access to a loan and a decrease in the number of courses being offered at Cert II and Cert III levels that require upfront fees. Subsequently, many students are now enrolling in courses they do not have the capacity to complete. Undoubtedly failure to complete a VET course will impact on the morale of such individuals and their motivation to undertake any more appropriate courses of study in the future.

Another problem with the new fee structure is that RTOs are able to generate greater income from Diploma level courses and for this reason some unscrupulous RTOs, some of whom are currently under investigation by the ACCC, have been luring individuals into enrolling into Diploma level courses that they simply do not have the capacity to complete. This is being done with the promise of free iPads or other devices and on the understanding that there is no need to pay course fees upfront or to make any repayments until an annual income of more than \$53,000 has been achieved.

In my capacity as a TAFE NSW Teacher Consultant for students with a disability, I am personally aware of individuals who have disabilities, that I would not recommend for a course above a Cert II level, who have been signed up by agents of private RTOs to enrol in Diplomas in Business and/or Diplomas in Management leaving them with VET Fee Help debts of in excess of \$35,000. Unfortunately there are numerous examples of this and many have featured on the ABC and in articles in the Sydney Morning Herald and the Daily Telegraph.

Students who enrol in VET courses, unlike students enrolling in university courses, are no longer required to present evidence of their Higher School Certificate results. However, while no-one can incur HECS debt unless they can produce evidence to demonstrate the potential to complete a university course, anyone can access a VET Fee Help loan.

Until a few years ago students were required to produce copies of their Year 10 school certificate or HSC to gain entry into some VET courses. While this created difficulties for some students to gain entry into some courses it did assist in preventing students from enrolling in courses that they did not have the potential to complete and ending up with huge debts for no gain.

While the practices of some unscrupulous RTOs are simply disgusting another associated problem in issuing an individual with a Diploma, regardless of the fact that they did not have the capacity to complete the course, is that this will result in such individuals being denied the means to secure a fee exemption to do a more appropriate course. This is because a student who already has a diploma level qualification is not eligible for a fee exemption. Therefore, if students later try to enrol in a Cert II or Cert III level course, ie a course that is appropriate to their potential and could lead to an employment outcome, they will be required to pay the full cost of the fees. The consequence of this is that they will lose the motivation to pursue more appropriate training programs.

However, under Smart and Skilled, the unscrupulous training provider does not need to care about the consequences of enrolling students into inappropriate courses and issuing them with worthless Diplomas. They are able to receive payments from the tax payers of Australia through the VET Fee Help scheme regardless of how this might further disadvantage students in the future.

Another issue with this is that an individual can accrue almost \$100,000 worth of VET Fee Help Debt. Therefore, someone who has a disability, eg someone with cognitive impairments or a mental illness can access up to \$100,000 of tax payer funds enrolling in one VET course after another without ever achieving any real outcome. The question this raises is, how is Smart and Skilled protecting the interests of people who do not have the capacity to understand the terms and conditions of an agreement before they sign such documents?

In March 2015 the total expenditure on VET Fee help loans was reported to be over \$1.6B. What this means is that \$1.6B of revenue raised from the tax payer has been paid into the pockets of training providers to deliver courses to students. It is anticipated that this VET Fee Help Debt will increase to more than \$4B by 2017.

In November 2013, "Vocation", a private Training company was listed on the Australian Stock Exchange. What this means is that education is now a commodity that is being traded on the stock market and the long term consequences of this on VET in NSW are surely something that the Members of General Purpose Standing Committee No 6 need to ponder. Between November 2013 and August 2014 the share value of "Vocation" rose from \$1.50 to \$3.80 approx. However, by November 2014 the Victorian Government, realising that there were some major problems with the standards of the training provided, withdrew its funding from "Vocation". At this time the value of its shares dropped to 19c and at one time may even have reached less than 7c.

Since this time "Vocation" has been placed under administration and is currently facing three class actions from disgruntled shareholders and possible investigation by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, ACCC. But, what about the 7,000 students who invested money, time and effort undertaking courses delivered by "Vocation" to find their qualifications to be worthless and not recognised by many employers? Who is representing their interests and how does this motivate such individuals to invest the money, time or energy into undertaking further study?

Another concern is that Vocation was one of the RTOs being considered to deliver courses funded under Smart and Skilled in NSW. This raises the question about what is being done in this state to protect the interests of individuals who enter into a contract with a training provider on the understanding that the goods purchased, in this case training, is of industry standard? And, what process is in place for individuals to return the goods, ie withdraw from the course, and claim a refund without penalty?

Alternatively, what is ASQA doing about this? On the 29th August 2015 I rang the ASQA hotline seeking information about the recourse available to a student who paid \$3000 to undertake a course that was promoted as having 15 hours a week of face to face teaching but later had the face to face hours reduced to 6 hours per week. The response I got was to be asked which state I was calling from and told to contact the NSW Dept of Fair Trading. I also have to add that this information was not forthcoming and provided reluctantly only because I persevered and challenged the fairness of marketing a course with more face to face hours than is actually being delivered.

Indeed, the personal knowledge I have about the experiences of an individual with a disability who tried to have a VET Fee Help Debt refunded, for a course she did not even commence, has demonstrated that not one Government body seems to be prepared to genuinely and actively assist students who have been basically defrauded by an RTO. Responsibility for advocating for individuals in such circumstances is resting with solicitors working in community legal centres, bodies that are also under the threat of funding cuts.

Efforts are made to discourage young people from smoking or indulging in other unsafe practices and most have limits on their credit cards but nothing appears to be being done to explain the long term consequences of signing up to a VET Fee Help debt of up to \$98K or the process open to students who find that the course that they signed up to do is totally inappropriate to their needs or potential. The question this raises is what is the value of an organisation such as ASQA if it is not prepared or able to protect the interests of “consumers”, in this case, students?

As a Teacher Consultant for students with Disabilities I fully appreciate that people with disabilities cannot be denied access to VET programs and that Discrimination legislation, eg the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, must be taken into consideration in providing reasonable adjustments, access and support to students with disabilities wishing to undertake vocational training programs. However, I also appreciate the need to put in place policies, procedures and agencies to protect the most vulnerable in our society from people who evidently have no moral compass.

Access to information about courses

One sure way to take away anyone’s motivation from doing a course is to make it difficult, if not impossible, to access the information needed. This is one of the reasons why I believe the number of students enrolling in TAFE NSW has declined since the implementation of Smart and Skilled.

Not all that long ago TAFE NSW produced handbooks with all of the courses it had on offer across NSW. This included information about the cost of the course, the eligibility criteria to gain entry into the course, the subjects covered by the course, the number of course hours per week etc etc. but these handbooks are no longer produced. In addition to this, many TAFE institutes employed Course Information Officers, who had a wealth of information and experience built up over many years, to provide information over the phone to prospective students about courses and who to speak to for more information.

The rationale for ceasing to publish the TAFE NSW Handbook, and for terminating the services of Course Information Officers, was that the web and general customer service officers would be able to provide prospective students with the information they needed. This would be fine if the information provided on line was useful and included links to access people who are able to offer more information.

The first problem with this system is the total inability of the SALM/EBS system, (ie the \$575M computer administrative system the NSW Government implemented to manage student enrolments under Smart and Skilled), to upload course information onto TAFE NSW and TAFE institute websites so prospective students are able to access online course information. Head Teachers are constantly complaining about how they spent hours, if not days, preparing and uploading course information to the website only for this to randomly disappear so prospective students are not able to see the course options. This problem is so bad that many teachers have questioned if this is being done deliberately to reduce interest and enrolments in TAFE courses across NSW.

Another problem is the way that courses are marketed to potential students. The information that students are looking for primarily centres around the name of the course, where it is offered, the subjects covered, the cost, eligibility criteria, etc etc. But, the way that courses are required to be promoted on TAFE NSW websites and flyers focus more on National course codes and institute branding, ie information that is of little value to most people and does not compare to the way that other RTOs market their courses.

As the course information and marketing for TAFE NSW is so bad some teaching sections are using alternative strategies to promote courses directly to relevant community organisations and businesses. And, in many cases teaching sections that use alternative strategies have been able to attract more students than others who relied on the website.

However, rather than encourage teaching sections to use their initiative to attract students by sending simple user friendly flyers to promote courses to potential students via their networks some teachers, including myself, have been challenged for taking such pre-emptive action. The question this raises is, why challenge teachers for taking action to inform the local community about the courses that are on offer in particular when such action has been via email, ie at no cost to the institute, and has resulted in courses attracting sufficient student numbers to be viable?

Manager to me:

I don't think this flyer is up to the TAFE (Institute) standard - the formatting looks unprofessional and has no branding, the language is not in plain English – is it fully accessible?

Can you urgently liaise with Media and PR to get this flyer rewritten and approved for release.

My response:

This flyer is not intended to replace the formal branded information that is distributed by the faculty. However, as the only information that appears on the branded Faculty information, (and on the website), is **one line with a course number and the course name**, I thought that it might be useful to send information out to compliment formal marketing resources by offering relevant individuals with specific information about how this course will operate and what units will be covered as this may enable them to see if this course is suitable for their clients.

Another major problem for students since the commencement of Smart and Skilled has been access to accurate information about the level of fees to be paid. The fee structure that is operating under Smart and Skilled is very complicated and has been a nightmare for administration staff, teachers and students to navigate. I am personally aware of a number of students who have disabilities who applied online to undertake TAFE courses who received a print out from the TAFE NSW Course Cost Calculator stating that they would be required to pay \$0.00 fees who later received letters demanding fees. One such student received a bill for \$15,500 and at this time, over 6 months after he commenced his course, the matter is still to be resolved.

Another student who received a statement that he had to pay \$0.00 before he commenced his course was later accused of providing false information on his online course application with the intent of misleading the system to avoid having to pay for another course. This was not the case. The student concerned clearly stated on his application that he already had a Diploma and this was easily substantiated by a print out of copy of the application he submitted. However, even though it was later agreed that this problem was caused by a system error, consideration was still paid on whether or not to pursue the student for the fees.

Surely, the NSW Government has a responsibility for ensuring that under Smart and Skilled, all RTOs including TAFE NSW Institutes, have access to an administrative system that enables them to provide accurate information to potential students about the level of fees that they have to pay before they enrol in a course of study.

In addition to this, so many potential students who went on line to enrol in TAFE NSW Courses received no follow up from teachers. This was because the information provided on line could not be accessed by teachers so no one had any idea who had tried to enrol in a TAFE course. For this reason many courses did not have sufficient numbers of students to be viable while others were only able to get off the ground because teachers were able to follow up on the contact details of prospective students who had attended information sessions held at the end of 2014.

As a consequence of all of this, ie not being able to provide students with information about courses and fees and no follow up with students who tried to enrol on line, many prospective TAFE students looked to alternative training providers who were able to provide them with the information that they needed to make an informed choice. Therefore, changes to the way that information about courses can be accessed by the community is resulting in individuals losing the motivation to enrol in TAFE NSW courses and to consider and/or select private VET providers instead.

Access to appropriate courses

Another problem that has intensified since the implementation of Smart and Skilled is the availability of "Access Courses" ie courses that target the needs of disadvantaged people, in particular people with disabilities. Access courses are courses that are designed and tailored to the specific needs of people who have disabilities, in particular those who have an intellectual disability, and have been offered in TAFE NSW campuses across NSW for over 35 years.

Access courses have generally been designed in consultation with community groups and services and developed and managed by Outreach Coordinators and/or Teacher Consultants for students with disabilities. However, in many institutes Outreach Coordinator positions have been deleted completely and the number of Teacher Consultant positions reduced. The impact of this is that very few courses are now available that specifically target the needs of disadvantaged groups and this will make it harder for such students to develop vocational skills.

There are numerous examples of access courses that have been offered by TAFE NSW to students with disabilities in the past. These have also included courses specifically targeting students with physical disabilities and those who are blind/visually impaired in how to use assistive technology so that they are able to undertake mainstream VET training (eg. Jaws, Zoomtext, speech recognition technology).

Also, students with intellectual disability, like many other disadvantaged VET students, need pre vocational skills prior to undertaking mainstream courses. In addition to this, they also need vocational programs that provide more time and highly specialised teaching to enable and reinforce skill acquisition, development and transfer. Therefore, such students need special VET courses to meet their needs and to create pathways into vocational courses and employment.

The Draft IPART acknowledged that 'in some circumstances, referred to as 'thin markets' provision of additional funds through "Community Service Obligation" or CSO payments may need to be made available to TAFE to deliver services to meet such needs. Indeed, all TAFE NSW Institutes received CSO funds under Smart and Skilled for this calendar year. However, there appears to be no consistency in the way that CSO funding is being used by TAFE Institutes resulting in what appears to be a very discretionary use of such resources.

This is evident in the fact that some TAFE NSW Institutes provided Teacher Consultants for students with CSO funds to deliver "access" type programs targeting students with disabilities to commence in Semester 2 2015. This has not happened in all institutes so the question this raises is will additional funds be available through CSO funding in the future to deliver access courses to disadvantaged groups in particular students who have disabilities and if so for what purpose(s)?

The deletion of course 9999 Learner Support, a course that provided the flexibility for a program to be tailored to the individual needs of students and a course that was fee exempt, occurred without any consultation with Teacher Consultants or representatives of Peak Disability organisations. Not only has this resulted in making it harder to address the training needs of students, the deletion of this course also makes it very hard if not impossible to track how funding allocated for the support of students with disabilities was expended.

The IPART Draft Report also recommended that under "Smart and Skilled" students who have disabilities, irrespective of the nature of level of their disability, will receive a 10% loading on *'the base price for the relevant qualification to reflect the average (or typical) additional cost associated with providing training to a high cost learner'*. There was no indication as to how this *'average additional costs loading'* was determined and, furthermore, such provision did not reflect the nature of disability or the degree of the functional impairment of an individual. It also failed to consider the impact of multiple disabilities and comorbidities and the compounding effects of multiple types of disadvantage.

The NSW Government, after considerable lobbying from disability organisations, increased the loading that RTOs would receive to support students with disabilities from 10% to 15%. However, in real terms this means that a loading based on the average cost of courses now equates to an additional \$660 per Certificate II qualification and \$1320 per Certificate III qualification to cover the cost of student support needs.

However, considering that students with disabilities may need a variety of support services, eg note-takers, reader/writers, 1:1 learner support, mentoring, counselling and advocacy, to enable them to successfully engage in VET. A flat 15% loading (or an additional \$660 or \$880 per Certificate III qualification), fails to recognise the individual leaning needs of students with disabilities and will not provide the type and level of support needed by some students to reach their potential and gain employment. For example, a deaf student undertaking a three (3) year trade course is now eligible to receive a loading of \$1320 to pay for additional support which means that the institute will be provided with funds to pay an Auslan interpreter for 20 hours for a course that is 3 years in duration. Already, a number of legal actions about the level of support available to support students with disabilities have commenced on the basis of discrimination under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992). The outcomes of these actions have not been determined.

If anything is going to take away the motivation of students to undertake VET programs in NSW it is the failure of the system to recognise their needs and to make appropriate accommodations.

In addition to this, a flat rate of 15% loading to cover the cost of student support is not in keeping with the statement made by Minister for Education, Adrian Piccoli, to the NSW Parliament on 23rd October 2012 that under Smart and Skilled “students with disabilities will receive the same support that they have always received through TAFE and also non-government providers”.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: It is an extensive reform. Our Government provides information to people, something the previous Government did not do. I have in my hands five facts sheets that are available—and I know the member for Mount Druitt does not know this—on the internet. I say this for the information of members on the other side of the Chamber who know how to use a computer. When I heard the question asked earlier of the Minister for Disability Services I wondered whether we have hidden the fact that we continue to support students with disabilities. I am proud to say that the fact sheet entitled “Smart and Skilled overview” under the heading “Greater support for equity groups” states:

Some students need additional support to access training. Smart and Skilled will help improve participation of disadvantaged learners. Concessions and fee exemptions will continue for Aboriginal students, students with a disability and welfare recipients. Community service obligation payments to TAFE NSW and approved ACE providers will guarantee training to key equity groups. Approved training organisations will receive additional funding for training of disadvantaged learners. Foundation skills training through TAFE NSW will give students basic language, literacy, numeracy and computer skills.

The fact sheet for individuals states also:

Concessions and fee exemptions will be retained for Aboriginal students.

Mr John Robertson: Point of order: My point of order is under Standing Order 129, and relates to relevance. My question specifically asked whether staff employed will be axed. The fact sheets to which the Minister refers does not answer the question. He is going out of his way to avoid answering the actual question.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister is specifically answering the question. There is clearly no point of order. The Minister is being directly relevant to the question.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: I am not sure whether the Leader of the Opposition is concerned more about the people who are employed in those positions, who do a great job, or about students with disabilities. **Students with disabilities will receive the same support that they have always received through TAFE and also non-government providers.** Two or three other fact sheets refer to that also. As in some instances these changes may be unpopular with some sectors—

Smart and Skilled also identifies ‘greater transparency’ as being one of the key changes to the NSW training system but funds provided to RTOs for the support of students with disabilities through loadings or CSO payments are not being quarantined for this purpose? The reality is that there is no longer any transparency in NSW on the annual allocation on funds to support students with disabilities or how such funds can be accounted for.

This is an issue of particular concern to Teacher Consultants for students with disabilities and Peak disability organisations. At both of the meetings that I attended of the Disability Services Reference Group, DSRG, concern was raised with Mr David Collins, Manager of NSW State Training Services, about how funding allocated to TAFE NSW Institutes for equity target groups would be quarantined and tracked to ensure that such funds could not be used for other purposes. However, in spite of this issue being raised by the Peak Body and Teacher Consultant Representatives at each meeting, State Training Services did not acknowledge the need to quarantine and track use of CSO or funds derived from loadings.

Therefore, I would be very grateful if the members of General Purpose Standing Committee No 6 could ask the NSW Government how it is demonstrating transparency and accountability in ensuring that registered training organisations (RTOs), public and private, honour their contractual obligations for the way they utilise public monies provided under Smart and Skilled for disability support. This would need to include Operational Base Funding (OBF), Community Service Obligation Funds, (CSO) and the 15% loadings. In addition to this, it would be good to know what system is being used to ensure consistency in tracking and reporting against the enrolments, support and completions for students with disabilities by all VET providers to identify if enrolment and completion rates of students with disabilities are being maintained under Smart and Skilled.

Another point of interest here is that in May 2015 NSW State Training Services advertised additional funding for the delivery of programs to students with disabilities and I, like other TAFE Teacher Consultants, developed an application for funds to deliver a program to people with disabilities.

Additional information about this funding program is available from the following link.
https://www.training.nsw.gov.au/programs_services/funded_other/dtp/index.html

After I documented my application I met with the appropriate person in the institute where I work to discuss budgetary requirements for my program before my application was sent to State Training Services. During this process I learned that the cost of delivering the course, as calculated by the relevant section Head Teacher and I, would be doubled, ie multiplied by 2, prior to the application being submitted. The reason for this, apparently, is to enable the institute to pay for on costs of delivering courses. Consequently, TAFE is pricing itself out of the market and needless to say neither the program I proposed nor any other proposed by my TAFE colleagues received funding.

Unfortunately, in light of the other difficulties TAFE NSW staff are currently encountering in developing, promoting and delivering courses, one is left to wonder if costing TAFE out of the training market could be used to justify transfer of funds to private RTOs while also providing the opportunity to inflate equity statistics in favour of such companies to demonstrate that they are delivering programs to disadvantaged groups.

Only last week we were asked to submit new applications to State Training Services for another round of funding for special programs. It has been suggested that I could resubmit the application that I sent through in June. But, what would be the point as I cannot see why my application would be considered any more favourably unless the institute is able or prepared to reduce its overheads? The members of the Standing Committee may be able to seek information from State Training Services about which RTOs were awarded funding in August to deliver programs under the 2015 People with Disability Training Program.

The reasons for why TAFE courses cost so much to run is, according to documents recently produced by the TAFE NSW Enterprise Agreement bargaining team, that TAFE NSW teachers are paid too much and need to be replaced with cheaper alternatives on lower pay rates. However, over the last 3 years while huge numbers of part time teachers have lost their teaching positions and over 2,000 full time positions have been deleted from TAFE, the number of new non-teaching positions appears to have increased substantially. While this is a matter that is constantly refuted by management many teachers are concerned about how they will be able to generate sufficient income delivering courses under Smart and Skilled, or from other sources of funding, to cover the costs of non-teaching positions. For the purpose of clarifying the actual cost of delivering TAFE courses the members of the inquiry could ask the NSW Government for an expenditure report for TAFE staff over the last 3 years, in respect to variations between teaching and non-teaching positions, in particular since the implementation of Smart and Skilled and the SALM/EBS system.

The Quality of the training provided

Another problem with Smart and Skilled is that TAFE NSW Institutes, and ethical private training companies or organisations, are looking at ways to cut course delivery costs so that they can compete against unscrupulous training providers for government funds. What this basically means is looking at ways to reduce the number of face to face course hours to be delivered by qualified teachers. Therefore, under Smart and Skilled, the quality of training and the standard of qualifications are being compromised to reduce delivery costs of students.

As a consequence of this, a number of TAFE courses have had hours cut and have been condensed into a shorter time frame. Trade courses are being cut from 3 years to 2 ½ or even 2 years. Alternatively, students are receiving fewer hours of face to face training on a weekly basis. While this might appeal to some employers and/or students it will inevitably mean that students will be rushed through their training and this could impact on the level of skills that they achieve and capacity to produce high standards of work.

Another solution proposed by some is to offer more and more courses online as a means of cutting costs. While online learning works for some areas of study this style of delivering courses has been found not to be successful in the VET sector as very low numbers of students actually finish online courses. This is because not all VET students are able to learn how to do things from reading a manual or watching a video. Many individuals, in particular those who are disadvantaged in some way, still need to be taught, guided and supported by a teacher. The question this also raises is how many people would be happy for their cars to be fixed by a mechanic or treated by a nurse who earned his or her qualifications through watching DVDs or moodles?

Also, not that long ago most courses at Cert III level and above required students to undertake Category A and B Examinations, ie examinations that were set and marked at a central level. This was done to ensure that all students had achieved a standard level of competency before they could be awarded trade or other vocational qualifications. Very few, if any, courses now require students to sit for exams. While I personally see many advantages to using alternative strategies to assess the skills of electricians, motor mechanics etc I am very concerned about how standards are being maintained and the implications of this on WH&S. However, as it appears that the Free Trade Agreement will enable electricians etc who do not hold appropriate licences to be brought into Australia to work for large building companies, one has to wonder how far the Australian Government is prepared to compromise the safety of workers and the general public in the interests of reducing labour costs.

The problem is that when education programs are run on a commercial basis, where profit margins depend on how fast students can be churned out, it is in the interests of the provider to lower their standards and to use what are colloquially referred to as tick and flick assessments to increase productivity. Unfortunately, all of this has the potential to result in lower levels of competency of electricians, motor mechanics, engineers, nurses, child care workers, aged care workers, hairdressers etc etc and one only has to consider the death toll of the poorly constructed “pink batt scheme” to appreciate that poor training results in fatalities.

Another problem with the SALM/EBS system was that the gross failure of this system resulted in huge numbers of students not being able to complete the TAFE enrolment process leaving many students attending courses without being formally enrolled. One of the associated problems with this has been that many students were threatened by Centrelink that they would lose their benefits because they could not produce evidence of their enrolment in a course of study.

In a report I submitted to my line manager in early May 2015 I noted that of the 61 new students with disabilities I had interviewed in a personal capacity only a handful appeared on a report generated through the SALM/EBS system as being enrolled in a course. The question this also raises is how are TAFE Institutes being refunded by State Training Services the cost of issuing fee exemptions to students who do not appear on the SALM/EBS system and how are they calculating the loadings of 15% to assist with the cost of providing support to these students?

Another problem with the system used under Smart and Skilled to allocate fee exemptions and loadings is that this eligibility for exemption depends on students declaring that they have a disability on their enrolment application. However, my 26 years of experience in working with students in the VET sector has taught me that many students very deliberately choose not to disclose that they have a disability at the time of enrolment and many have valid reasons for doing this. Firstly, if there is no information provided to explain the advantages of declaring that they have a disability people see no positive purpose in identifying. Secondly, the experience of many people with disabilities, in particular those who have epilepsy, a mental illness and even those with a back injury, is that once they declare their disability they will be subjected to some form of discrimination and will be denied entry or opportunity to participate. Therefore, many people think that it will not serve their interest to declare that they have a disability on an online application or before they commence a course of study.

However, while many individuals are not prepared to declare on a TAFE NSW online application form that they have a disability they are prepared to speak to a Teacher Consultant in private about this and to amend their records once they are assured that they will not be denied a place in a course and that such information will be treated as confidential and protected. Unfortunately, under Smart and Skilled there is also no provision for people who identify or who develop disabilities and/or medical conditions after enrolment to access the support that they may need. This is evident in the Email below sent to one of my colleagues by David Collins, Manager of NSW State Training Services below;

From: "Collins, David"

Date: 13 November 2014 11:22:23 am AEDT

Subject: RE: Disability question

That is correct. The eligibility requirements for a needs loading for students with a disability and the eligibility requirements for a fee exemption/concession for students with a disability were first published in April 2014, in the Smart and Skilled Training Provider Guide to 2015 prices, fees and subsidies

http://www.training.nsw.gov.au/forms_documents/smartandskilled/prices_fees/2015_provider_guide.pdf)

The Smart and Skilled Fee Administration Policy states that eligibility for a fee exemption/concession is determined at enrolment and cannot be adjusted after enrolment (see bottom of Appendix 6 page 25)

http://www.training.nsw.gov.au/forms_documents/smartandskilled/contract/fee_administration_policy.pdf.

Given that the same criteria apply for needs loadings for a student with a disability this means that eligibility for the loading will be determined at the same time that eligibility for an exemption/concession is determined.

As you can see from this email, Mr Collins stated very clearly that “eligibility for a fee exemption/concession is determined at enrolment and cannot be adjusted after enrolment” and that this applies to eligibility for the loading as well as for an exemption or concession.

The question that this raises is, does making it compulsory for a student to declare that they have a disability on an online course application form impact on the motivation of students to enrol in a VET course and does this requirement constitute direct discrimination under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 because it is removing the right on an individual who has a disability, who may need some special considerations, to privacy.

In addition to this, it is stated in the email above, “eligibility for the loading will be determined at the same time that eligibility for an exemption/concession is determined”. Therefore, what provisions can be made to refund an RTO that incurs expenses in supporting students who develop a disability through injury or accident after they have enrolled? How does this policy assist with the motivation of students who develop a disability or illness post enrolment to continue with their studies?

Reasonable adjustment

Many students with disabilities also require a modified attendance program to accommodate for their disability as part of their reasonable adjustment. For example, a student who has a physical disability or a medical condition may have the capacity to undertake a course of study but they may need 12 months rather than over 6 months to complete the course. It has been common for TAFE NSW to facilitate access to VET courses by individuals who have high levels of disability in this way while ensuring that students were not discriminated against because of their inability to undertake a VET program on a full time basis. However, very recently it has become apparent that under Smart and Skilled, students who have disabilities are unable to extend their course of study at TAFE over a second semester in the same calendar year unless they pay a second enrolment fee at the concession rate. Therefore, students who have disabilities who are not able to keep up with the demands of a mainstream vocational course are being penalised financially because of their disability.

The student, who features in the video clip in the link below, is only one example of many students who could not study on a full time basis but was able to complete a Diploma in Building Design and gain employment. Unfortunately, students in similar circumstances will now be required to pay additional fees because they are not able to complete a course within the designated timeframe.

<http://youtube/Uqg-iGoOTto>

If students with disabilities are going to have to pay additional fees so that they can extend their studies over 2 or more semesters to accommodate for their needs they will be discouraged from enrolling in VET courses in NSW. Therefore, the implementation of Smart and Skilled in NSW is resulting in people who have disabilities being denied their rights to undertake and complete VET programs, the opportunity to develop skills and acquire formal qualifications, the means to compete for and to gain employment and their right to realise their potential. I firmly believe that this is an issue that constitutes direct discrimination and needs to be addressed urgently.

What is also interesting is that the National Disability NSW Implementation Plan 2012 – 2014, which was supposed to underpin the successful implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, NDIS, by “improving access for all people to mainstream services and community resources”, made not one reference to Smart and Skilled. In consideration of the issues raised above, the question this raises is how is the introduction of Smart and Skilled helping the NSW Government to “remove structural and attitudinal barriers by focusing its efforts on improving access to mainstream services so people with disability can enjoy equal rights and opportunities including access to education, entertainment, health, recreation, transport and housing”?

Indeed, as a former member of the Disability Services Reference Group, DSRG, formed by the Minister for Education, Mr Adrian Piccoli, and State Training Services, I learned that at no stage, during the development of Smart and Skilled nor the IPART costing of the reforms, was there any direct consultation with representatives of the disability peak bodies, disability organisations or students with disability until the DSRG was formed. People who have disabilities, other disadvantaged groups and/or their representatives were never invited to the table, in the same way that industry groups were, to participate in the discussions and decision making processes that preceded the development of Smart and Skilled.

This became clearly evident at one of the meetings of the DSRG that I attended with Mr David Collins, Manager of NSW State Training Services, when no assurances could be provided that RTOs awarded government funds under Smart and Skilled to deliver VET programs would be accessible ie operate out of buildings that had wheelchair access and accessible toilets, to accommodate for students with disabilities? Evidently, physical access was something that had not even been considered until this was raised as an issue at this meeting.

If one wants to remove the motivation of students with disabilities from attending courses one sure way to achieve this objective is to offer courses in facilities that are inaccessible.

Therefore, for reasons outlined above, I believe that the Smart and Skilled reform agenda does not reflect the principles of the agreed National Disability Strategy NSW Implementation Plan 2012 – 2014, which is based on extensive on-going consultation with the disability community and the principle of individual assessment and individualised support across the six policy areas: Inclusive and accessible communities; Rights protection, justice and legislation; Economic security; Personal and community support; Learning and skills and Health and wellbeing.

SALM /EBS

As stated above the implementation of the SALM/EBS system, which is part of the LMBR program, that has cost the tax payers over \$573M, has been an unmitigated disaster. Why the NSW Government went live with a system without consulting with the end users, ie teachers, and before it was properly tested and seen to be operating effectively, is a question that most teachers would like answered.

The NSW Auditor General in a Media Release of 16th December 2014 stated that the annual savings per year of this program is \$26.3M. Therefore, at a cost of \$573M, basic arithmetic demonstrates that it will take the NSW Government nearly 22 years to recoup funds invested in the development and implementation of this program. However, like most other software programs, it is inevitable that this system will be shelved and replaced with another program long before the 22 years needed to break even.

“The Department expects that it will have spent a total of \$573 million on the LMBR program by the 30 June 2015 and not have fully implemented the program. The Department needs to allocate significant additional funding from its budget to implement the HR/payroll system to corporate areas and the 229 pilot schools, and fully implement LMBR to the remaining 2,000 schools”.

“The Department has not effectively managed the planned outcomes and benefits for the LMBR program. Importantly, it cannot accurately report on the value of the benefits achieved”.

“The Department has not been able to demonstrate that benefits are achievable, as it has not validated the quantity, value or type of benefits”.

“The governance and program management for the LMBR program have not been fully effective. This is despite the Department investing significant time and resources into developing the governance and program management arrangements for the program”.

“Governance groups have not always had the right people or information to effectively oversee activities and make informed decisions. Financial reporting was limited until mid-2013 when a financial oversight committee and improved financial reporting were introduced. The Department has not always adequately addressed the concerns raised by the independent quality and assurance advisors”.

In addition to this, the Department has not addressed the problems with the system that have and continue to cause untold stress among staff, but most particularly Head Teachers who are responsible for course offerings, class registers, course results etc etc. The problems with this system have resulted in endless complaints from students and employers. In the words of one Head Teacher SALM/EBS is perceived to be “basically a soul destroying waste of public money and staff time” and another “If I wanted to drive someone mad, I'd do exactly what they've done”.

In March I conducted a Risk Assessment on the impact of SALM/EBS on teaching staff in the Illawarra Institute. I did this as I was becoming alarmed about information that I was receiving about how the health of teachers was being compromised and how many had been forced to take leave due to ill health. I later documented the findings of this survey in a report that was sent to management with a request for an urgent meeting, a request that was later denied. A copy of this report is attached below for the consideration of the members of this committee.

However, recently when I raised the failure of TAFE management across NSW to accept that there was a problem with the system and to act on this I was told that managers were “not allowed to acknowledge there were any problems with the system”. I understand that no government wants bad publicity, in particular around the time of an election, but to deny that this system was compromising the health and safety of its work force is simply appalling. When the citizens of any country, whether they be doctors working in detention centres or teachers and managers working for a state government organisation, are denied their human right to speak the truth to ensure the wellbeing of others, for fear of losing their position or other ramifications, it is the government of the state or country that should be held to account for its conduct.

For this reason I believe that a Royal Commission should be held into the failure of the SALM/EBS system before any more funds are injected into a system that is a total failure.

I am a tax payer like most other people. Therefore, I appreciate that the funds to deliver educational programs and to support disadvantaged students come from the public purse and that there is not an infinite amount of money available. However, the financial and social costs of not enabling our young people, and those who need a second chance at gaining skills and employment, also need to be considered.

The Federal Liberal Government is looking at ways to save revenue by encouraging people to move from welfare into employment but in the modern world it is virtually impossible for anyone to do this without the skills and qualifications that are needed to compete for employment. Therefore, the question this raises is why is the NSW State Government, through its implementation of Smart and Skilled, prepared to destroy TAFE NSW, an organisation that has a proven track record in creating opportunities for those who were marginalized or dispossessed.

Also, at a time when it is forecast that there will soon be huge shortages of skilled trades people to work on the large government infrastructure programs that are planned for NSW, it is interesting that instead of trying to address these anticipated skilled shortages by providing more training opportunities we are instead planning to bring semi-skilled workers in from overseas to meet this need. Does it not make more sense for us to invest in Australian youth and to give our children and grandchildren the opportunity to develop skills and a future for themselves in the same way that the previous generation provided for us?

TAFE NSW as the primary provider of VET in NSW was about lifelong learning, not lifelong debt. It was about giving people who did not do well at school a second chance to gain an education and a job and giving students with disabilities and those from regional areas and NESB backgrounds access to courses and the support needed to assist them to complete qualifications. But, Smart and Skilled is undermining the future of TAFE and unless something is done to prevent its destruction the Australians of today and tomorrow, our children and our grandchildren, the marginalised and the disadvantaged will not have the opportunity to gain skills, recognised qualifications and employment.

Recommendations

Somehow or another TAFE has continued to operate under Smart and Skilled. This is simply because, in spite of all of the problems outlined above, the teaching and nonteaching staff who understand the significance of TAFE in changing the lives of the disadvantage, have invested hour upon hour of their own time in evenings and on weekends to develop ways of overcoming everything that has been thrown at them. At a cost to their own health and wellbeing such individuals have come up with alternative means to promote courses, to enrol students, to provide evidence for Centrelink, to deliver courses, to produce results, to generate income and provide support services. Therefore, TAFE has survived the first year of Smart and Skilled, albeit with a lot less students, only because of the dedication of its staff to its students and to local communities. (Refer Risk Assessment Report below).

However, things cannot continue the way that they are as people are suffering. First of all, the SALM/EBS system needs to be hibernated indefinitely until a system can be implemented that actually works. In the interim the old CLAMs system should be resurrected to account for student enrolments, attendances and results and sufficient funds provided directly to TAFE NSW to deliver courses and services to students on an ongoing basis.

In addition to this, the management of Smart and Skilled in NSW should be placed into the hands of an independent administrator who should be engaged to consult with the community, TAFE teachers, TAFE managers, private RTOs, students, industry and representatives of equity groups to consider the problems of the current system and to develop a VET system in NSW that will work in the best interests of all.

Risk Assessment on the Impact of SALM/EBS

Summary of Survey Results

Respondents

This survey, which commenced on Monday 3rd March and concluded on Friday 7th March, received a total of 58 completed responses. However, it should be noted that additional emails were received from staff indicating that they did not feel that they could complete the survey for fear of retribution.

While staff were not asked to indicate whether they were engaged on full time or part-time basis it was evident, from the responses received, that the vast majority of respondents were full time teachers. The full time teachers who responded were representative of a cross section of faculties and all campuses except for Dapto.

It was also brought to my attention that non-teaching staff did not receive the email I sent with the survey although I had included the distribution list for CSO staff on my original email. For this reason, as non-teaching staff were not able to participate, the result of this survey does not represent the difficulties that they are enduring at this time. However, I did receive 2 responses from support staff members who were forwarded the survey by teachers and their responses were consistent with those of teachers.

Furthermore, until I commenced this survey, I had no appreciation of how many staff are currently absent from work due to ill health, some apparently with very serious and life threatening conditions. Nor had I realised how many more have taken leave, only weeks into a new term, as a means of trying to maintain a reasonable standard of health.

“I am accessing my leave to cope with a problem not of my making in an effort to find some relief and to respond in a rational and mature manner rather than just disappear on stress leave. I am very concerned about the collective mental health of my colleagues”.

Therefore, although I did receive completed surveys from a couple of teachers who are currently off on leave, most of the people who are absent i.e. those who may be suffering the most, did not participate in this survey, which is something that needs to be seriously considered.

Statistical Response to Survey

(Scale of 1 – 5, with 1 being low and 5 being high)

Average level of stress 2015	4.2
Average level of stress 2014	1.9
Average level of anxiety 2015	4.11
Average level of anxiety 2014	1.83

A spreadsheet with the rating provided for each staff member for stress and anxiety will be submitted with the Risk Assessment.

In addition to increased levels of stress and anxiety, as recorded above, a large number of teachers reported that they were suffering from the following symptoms and medical conditions;

High blood pressure,
Irregular heart rate,
Chest pains,
Stomach ailments,
Headaches,
Vomiting,
Chronic infections,
Exacerbation of medical conditions e.g. diabetes,
Problems with short term memory,
Cognitive impairments,
Confusion,
Neck, shoulder and back ache,
Difficulties sleeping,
Fatigue,
Mood swings,
Irritability,
Aggression,
Worried about things that have not been done,
Worried about things that cannot be done,
Exhaustion,
Depression,
Increased consumption of alcohol,
Feelings of inadequacy,
Poor work/life balance.

Some also stated that they are often teary while others claim that they have cried uncontrollably for prolonged periods or have been distressed by seeing their colleagues cry openly. Most disturbing was that a couple mentioned suicidal thoughts and many reported that they are currently under the care of a doctor and/or a psychologist and have been advised to take sick leave. However, as there is apparently no money available to cover sick leave, and in some instances no part time staff left to replace absent teachers, many are feeling that they have to come to work even though this is compromising their health further.

Major problems as identified by staff

1. SALM/EBS System failure.

SALM/EBS the new administration system implemented in NSW to manage student enrolments and results, at a cost in excess of \$575M to the tax payer, was stated to be the major contributing factor in almost all responses. The system is not working and this has resulted in thousands of students who are attending TAFE courses in campuses across NSW still not being enrolled while others are awaiting accurate results for 2014.

The reality is that if it had not been for the efforts and determination of teachers to navigate around the failure of the SALM/EBS system to create hard copy registers and class rolls most courses would not have commenced, leaving students without opportunities to develop skills and qualifications and teachers without classes and jobs.

"If it was not for the determination of teachers and support staff TAFE NSW would have been systematically shut down by deliberate funding cuts combined with sheer government and managerial incompetence."

"SALM, a system that should have been implemented in June/July, was implemented in October thereby creating more pressure on all Staff & Teachers at the busiest time of the year. "

"The introduction of SALM was a nightmare and should have been better organised and why October? Everyone I have spoken to asks why the 2 systems didn't run parallel until all the bugs were sorted out."

"To not even have a plan B (ie CLAMS as a backup) was terrible. Plus the timing could not have been at a worse time. Also, old policies (ie enrolments, Training Plans, etc) are being written on the run. All this should have been organised prior to the rollout."

"Appears to be a deliberate destruction of TAFE by design/default...or else a monumental stuff up."

"Corporate system EBS not functioning." "I am unable to use 'the system.'" "I am unable to log on."

"Not able to record results" "The simple task of recording results now takes hours because of system".

"Students are still missing results from 2014. Managed to get 2 trainees results finalised".

"Courses not on website until end of January = no students."

"Loss of over half of my teaching program due to failure of SALM system – course wasn't online until first week of teaching 2015, therefore limited interest and enrolments from prospective students. Subsequent advertising by TAFE has failed to secure any more students – they have committed elsewhere."

"System can't enrol students." "Unable to set up registers now because students are not enrolled."

"Continually answering enquiries and explaining fee structure and then saying to students they can't enrol."

"SALM cannot find students that are attending so it is impossible for me to find out where they are in the system even though I know the student has applied."

"Working far more hours than paid for due to SALM."

"SALM, I am p/t and have spent more than 15 hours extra each week to try and make the system work – I have only been allocated 6 hours per week teaching – I have gone above and beyond the call of duty to make it all work – it is NOT working at all."

"I would say I am doing 20hrs a week or more doing administration than this time last year."

"The inefficiencies of SALM are blamed on us as if we are a pack of idiots. It is not about the hrs we have spent at training (40 hrs) it is about the system not working and not meeting the needs of flexibility in delivery".

“Can’t access rolls, put in attendances, access to student information/contact details – I’m doing everything manually, hand written on paper. This will all take extra (unpaid) time to transfer over when all comes online.”

“Frustration as I am normally an orderly person so not being able to do simple things such as record attendances/results stresses me out to no end as this is the students welfare and future in our hands and if it is incorrect or (heaven forbid) lost – it is unforgivable.”

“Yesterday I felt unproductive and walked away at the end of the day throwing my hands in the air just laughing.”

“Every reply back from reporting SALM incidences says they have remedied the problem, but they have not.”

“Dealing with repetition of tasks and re-entering data. Now have to send through another updated lists of students currently attending to customer service because the system doesn’t work.”

Sent: Tuesday, 3 March 2015 9:50 AM

Subject: FW: BULLETIN - Template and Instructions for 2015 Student Listing By Class

Colleagues,

Please refer to the attached bulletin regarding reconciliation of student enrolment data.

- **Action:** Complete the attached spreadsheet with details of all students currently attending or intending to attend (for Block release programs that have not occurred as yet) for all classes.
Once completed send the spreadsheet to your local Campus Customer Service Centre staff for processing.
- **Deadline:** Friday March 6 2015

“SALM I have a feeling that tasks are never complete and tomorrow there will be more demands which cannot be met. I have not felt this previously.”

“I don’t think SALM will ever be working properly. It is poorly designed, unwieldy and extremely time consuming.”

“Looks like HT’s are responsible to fix NSW state-wide and Institute failures.”

“The realisation that if SALM is ever up and running there will be a huge back log of work for teachers to catch up on.”

“This new system is a waste of money and of my time which I would prefer to be spending teaching.”

“SALM I am seriously thinking of taking stress leave to alleviate my need to actually resign.”

“It is so hard to believe that over \$575M of tax payer money has been wasted on a system that is totally dysfunctional and that does not included all of the millions of extra paid and unpaid hours of overtime that staff have had to put in to try to fix a system that is broken”

2. Attitude of Management

The attitude of management was also raised by many respondents as something that needs to be urgently addressed. Statements from managers and also the NSW Minister for Education, Mr Adrian Piccoli, broadcast via the media that have downplayed the severity of the problems with the SALM/EBS system are considered not only insulting, to staff who are trying to work through the mess, but are claimed to be exacerbating levels of stress and anxiety.

“Advised by my Health Professional to look at seeking work outside of TAFE. It beggars belief that we are literally on our knees and the senior management seem to think everything is progressing ok with a few issues”.

“Comments by minister and very senior staff about how well things are going - meaning that they are certainly not existing in my universe.”

“Denial by Senior Management – the lack of basic acknowledgment and concern for well-being is distressing for all staff.”

“Don't seem to have any support from management - they keep saying enrolments are doing well.”

“Frustrated that emails come through from above saying enrolments are up, only small glitches in the system that are readily resolved etc – no support of assistance to help teachers on the coal face. This does not validate or address teachers concerns in any way – no real-time or honest communication.”

“Failure of Institute to acknowledge openly what issues we are facing and work in a transparent way to find solutions.”

“Nobody taking responsibility for the system being in chaos.”

“Lack of faith that management know what they are doing at all.”

“Much of what they want is dependent on them performing actions they have not yet done ...such as approving courses/unit in courses. I don't think we can take them seriously.”

“I have no confidence in Institute Management to address the issues presented by SALMS and EBS”

“Lack of faith in anyone in management above HT managing or responding to ongoing issues.”

“This situation just seems to be dragging on from one mess to another.”

“I won't touch SALM until the Institute can provide me with better direction, instructions and step by step procedures. This completely goes against my principles and work ethics.”

“I have literally given up until they sort it out. I refuse to keep doing and redoing things. I'll do it once when they have their act together.”

“This has been the worst mismanagement of TAFE in over 30 years of employment. It is now week 5 of teaching and very little is in place for us to function.”

“SUPPORT US – MANAGEMENT what are you doing????? Do you not understand?????”

3. Student related issues

It is the teachers and the customer service officers who have to deal with students who are experiencing difficulties accessing accurate information about courses and fees, enrolling in courses, payment of fees etc. This is also adding to the workload of teachers and support staff who are also trying to perform their standard duties at the busiest time of year.

“We are having to deal with irate students who are blaming us for the problems with the TAFE administrative system in NSW.”

“Students do not understand that the problem lies with the system and not with the teachers as the Government does not want the public to know as there is an election in NSW.”

“Feeling like I am working in a 'call centre' fielding phone calls from students who haven't received transcripts or have incorrect information on them.”

“Dealing with student complaints about no results 2014 and seeing them cry.”

“Spending too much time trying to fix up problems with student results and enrolments and smoothing over constant stream of angry students and employers”.

“Turning away students who cannot afford to pay for their courses under Smart and Skilled. These are typically mature women with working husbands and/or part time work themselves.”

“Dealing with students frustrated by systems not functioning properly, having to ring prospective students several times to inform them of possibility of classes running then postponing the start date.”

“Dealing with stressed and angry potential students and those that have not heard from us as we have had no information to know they exist.”

“Students in class with no ability to account for them in any TAFE system. “

“Even the students are starting to get anxious as they have the money to pay to be enrolled but can't and the employment agencies and Centrelink are getting on their backs as to proof of being enrolled and attendance to classes.”

“Trying to explain paying students why they are still not enrolled – no TAFE cards, couldn't access internet – trying to maintain a professional veneer to the students while being extremely frustrated by the failure of the system.”

“Knowing that if students need support they will not be able to receive this unless they go through the RU ready on line assessment process and then they will be given 3.5 hrs total for help. This is a downgrading of services to disadvantaged groups.”

“Not knowing what to say to students as we receive conflicting information from various sources so it is hard to decipher what is correct and then articulate this information to our clients.”

“Some students were given incorrect information about their fees and some chose not to do a course because of this.”

“I cannot do anything for trainees, I've had no direction how to manage them and their administration. I am unable to give information to any student.”

“Not able to assess students as they do not have a user name or password they can use and we are in Week 5.”

"Inability to fully implement programs as students cannot be sent on work placement as not enrolled."

"Now have less time to prepare lessons with all the other duties expected in related duty time"

"Pressure to cut course costs means that lesson prep revolves around reducing delivery whilst trying to maintain ASQUA requirements."

"Trying to deliver a program with very limited hours to teach units."

"Delivering 37.5 hours straight teaching, one week in every three."

"Trying to develop new courses and resources without adequate time to prepare due to time wasted trying to fix problems with SALM."

"The rapport and the relationships that we have built over many years with students, employers and communities are being eroded and could cause untold damage. But the fault lays purely with a system that does not work correctly and was incompetently implemented and handled"

4. Staffing Issues

A considerable number of respondents mentioned that their section had sustained cuts to clerical support and/or stores officers and that they had received very little support from management on how to offer assistance to staff who now only have a few hours of work or no work at all and therefore little or no means to maintain their livelihood.

"Teachers are also having to manage staff and courses while also dealing with part time staff who no longer have work and are distressed by way they have been treated."

"We now only have our storeman part time which means I am spending even more time preparing for class both before and after class each day with such duties such as the issue and return of tools, materials and operating equipment that has to be moved and stored safely. This increased work load is greatly reducing preparation time and increasing my anxiety and stress levels!"

"No First aid officer available in our section for 50% of the time."

5. Technical issues

Staff also raised a number of problems with technology that are creating difficulties.

"New software, Office 2013, was only loaded the week before classes started, we had to order new text books which we are not familiar with and to create new study plans, assessments, handouts and all other resources within a week. Do Computer Services have any idea of what needs to be done to prepare for a class when software has been updated? There is a lot of work and a few days are not enough. As well, some of the software was not loaded correctly."

"Not able to log onto Moodle site"

"Computer classrooms decommissioned without consultation with teachers."

"Systems and the technology is not working at a basic level and spending days trying to make it compatible or to work."

"Lack of internet and facilities for new learners and myself (only one computer room regularly functioning and often it is unavailable no printing access prior to students starting more students than computers, 18 students in class with 15 computers."

6. Standards

A considerable number of teachers also raised concerns about how they do not feel they are able to maintain appropriate standards and comply with legislative requirements.

“The safety of staff and students and compliance with legal requirements are other issues are causing teachers much concern.”

“No longer able to provide appropriate supervision to students in workshop as now required to undertake work formerly undertaken by storeman. This is compromising safety of students in the classroom. ”

“Students not enrolled which raises concerns about insurance and liability if something does go wrong and a student is hurt or injured.”

“Workshop designed for 16 students now has 22.”

“Class numbers far too large creating huge risks and safety issues with equipment & tools in the learning environment.”

“The reduction in time of delivery, but still required to maintain unit criteria’s, content and value in course outcomes.”

“I am worried about professional standards being maintained, ethical concerns about what we are doing, and who we are potentially sending out into the workforce.”

“This time 2014 I was in the middle of an ASQA audit. I had systems in place to show compliance. Now I have nothing.”

“A WHS risk assessment on teacher welfare is definitely a good idea.....as would be one for having un enrolled students in classes under teacher direction/instruction for which it seems there is WorkCover liability should something go wrong. Only trouble is that HT’s will be required to do it and add to our already outrageous workload.”