

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

## Submission into vocational education and training

The NSW Coalition Government's "Smart & Skilled" policy has reduced TAFE NSW ability to provide quality education and training within the vocational sector.

Restructuring of institutes, faculties, colleges & vocational sections has attempted to meet the challenges of operating with severely depleted budgets.

Fees have been increased to levels that deter potential students engaging with education and/or training. Support services have had their budgets reduced to levels that render them impotent to deal with the needs of students with disabilities or socio-economic disadvantage.

Quality education and training is deemed irrelevant in an environment of competition for vocational funding. To survive, TAFE NSW has had to compete for students, against for-profit organisations whose agenda is solely making as much money as possible, from education and training.

Staffing levels have been reduced drastically. Permanent staff numbers are a third of 2011 levels; casual staff members are unable to sustain their incomes, with reduced programs and are forced to seek work across several colleges and institutes or with a variety of RTOs.

Sharp increases in course fees have deterred many potential students from enrolling in higher level qualifications. TAFE NSW was viewed as a "second chance" education for many people, providing qualifications to enhance the employability of adults who had not completed Year 12; wanted to retrain for a new industry or to add to existing employment skills.

In 2013 I witnessed the graduation of students in Travel and Tourism, Certificate III & IV. The overwhelming majority of these students were aged in their 30s & 40s; they had made the decision to gain qualifications in an industry that they viewed as offering good employment possibilities. Very few of these graduating students had completed any other tertiary training.

In 2015, due to fee increase, student enrolments have dropped sharply in Travel and Tourism courses. Certificate III courses are no longer being offered in some colleges.

The same scenario is being played out across a range of vocational courses. Courses are offered, and then cancelled when students are unable to meet the cost of the course and withdraw.

Potential students who require basic language, literacy and numeracy skills, before they can access further education or training options, have been jettisoned from TAFE NSW. TAFE's business plan no longer considers the needs of the 49% of adults who are only functionally literate.

Potential students, whose language and literacy skills are at ACSF 2 or below, are not suitable candidates for entry level to employment qualifications, Certificate III. There is now a huge hole in vocational education; basic level education and training is not funded.

TAFE student services have been slashed. Assistance for students with disabilities; Aboriginal students and those requiring additional language, literacy and numeracy support have had their budgets reduced to untenable levels. This has effectively blocked the engagement of these students with education and training and is highly discriminatory. The demands on existing services are straining the effectiveness of support and many students are withdrawing from courses.

Industry needs trained staff, but it also needs reactive and educated employees, who can respond to the changing needs of industry. TAFE NSW was the outstanding provider of vocational education and training, with the best professional staff of any Australian TAFE.

Unfortunately, TAFE NSW has been faced with such severe budget cuts that it has had to abandon its commitment to quality in order to compete against competitors who view education and training as a for-profit business. The brand "TAFE NSW" is on a path to being irrelevant without a return to sustainable, guaranteed government funding.

Accessible education and training should be a right for all, not simply for the paying customer.