

**Submission
No 152**

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

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The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 6
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Re: Inquiry into vocational education and training in New South Wales

Dear Committee members,

Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to provide some insight into the current situation at TAFE NSW.

I have been a part time teacher of Conservation and Land Management at Hunter TAFE for the last 6 years, after many years of working in the restoration industry. I am passionate about my job and the opportunities the training provides for my students! I cannot emphasise enough the value of the "life skills" students receive attending TAFE, in addition to their core skills gained. Many have had negative educational experiences and/or have not participated in training for many years. For these people the regular attendance, supportive environment and mixing with people from a variety of backgrounds, provides them with a totally different outlook on what they may be capable of achieving. On many occasions I have been rewarded by students informing me that their experience at TAFE has been the first time they have successfully completed studies and that the negative opinions they had of education and themselves, were not true! Most of them have continued onto employment and further education, a wonderful outcome from my perspective.

Unfortunately, I have experienced an increase in concerning issues as detailed below:

- Low student numbers: For the first time in 20 years, Conservation and Land Management Certificate 2 has not run this semester at Wyong campus due to low enrolment numbers. In the past 6 years there have been up to 30 students enrolled in this course. Conservation and Land Management Certificate 2 full fees have increased from \$253 in Semester 1 2014 to \$4850 in Semester 1 2015. This is prohibitive for many people, particularly the unemployed or under employed.
- Fewer course levels running: This semester Conservation and Land Management Certificate 4 is the only course running at Wyong campus. Several previous students have not continued their studies, although they have expressed a desire to do so, specifically due to the increase of fees. Certificate 3 & 4 Conservation and Land Management fees have risen to excess of \$9000. Previously at least two levels, often three have commenced.

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- Reduction of full fee paying students: In previous years many full fee paying students were rural land holders and Landcare members wishing to gain knowledge regarding restoration work. These students would then implement their acquired skills on their properties and/or public land, producing great environment outcomes and reducing the strain on the public purse, particularly for weed control. We have no enrolments from this cohort this semester.
- Students forced into higher course levels due to other qualifications: Under the Smart and Skilled system potential students cannot receive a subsidised rate if they enrol in a course at a lower level than any other qualifications they already have. This is regardless of the field the qualification is in, how long ago the course was completed or even the country it was completed in. As a result I have had students required to pay full fees that have had a Diploma in Mental Health, another with a Diploma of Medical Record Administration gained in 1974 and a woman with a degree from Columbia not recognised in Australia. These students have all chosen not to continue their training. It is concerning that students are missing “the basics” of their chosen field because of financial constraints.
- Problems with EBS (SALM) system: Students attempting to enrol online in Conservation and Land Management courses in Hunter TAFE in December/ January 2014/15 were informed the courses were full. This was not the case. Only students who attended campuses or phoned continued onto enrolment. We have no way of ascertaining how many potential students we lost!

The information regarding fee rates at the beginning of Semester 1 2015 were very ambiguous. Some students were informed of 3 different rates depending on when and where they made their enquiry. Overall the system seems very convoluted for anyone to understand particularly the students and continues to have updates and changes.

We are continuing to be contacted by students from last semester with incorrect transcript results.

The system regularly freezes, crashes and generally does not perform as required and still has many problems.

- Loss of support staff: The loss of administration and assistance staff or reduction in hours, has resulted in a large increase in responsibility for casual teachers. Administration requirements, tutoring of students with disabilities, collection of plant material, collecting hire buses, arranging field trips, are all examples of duties additional to their face to face teaching hours.
- Private providers: Student continuing their studies with TAFE after gaining qualifications with a private provider have had varied skills and knowledge. Some have been terrible! As an example one student could only identify 5 common weeds in comparison to 50 by TAFE students completing the same course. This student had also very limited experience working in a bushland setting. He eventually withdrew from the course.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide comment. I look forward to following the inquiry and hope my observations assist.

Yours sincerely,
Robyn Urquhart