

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

**Name:** Ms Stephanie Hayes

**Date received:** 16/07/2015

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Partially Confidential

16<sup>th</sup> July 2015

Stephanie Hayes

**For the attention of:**

***The Inquiry into Vocational education and training in New South Wales***

My name is Stephanie Hayes. I am a home educator of my 13 year old son, living on the Central Coast of NSW. I very much appreciate the opportunity to address this Inquiry about vocational education and training.

My son, like many other home educated children, will be undertaking a TAFE course in the coming years as a component of his home educated program. Moreover, as home educated students are not eligible for the award of the NSW Higher School Certificate, he will be using TAFE courses as his main pathway to higher education. Thus we have always planned for        to be able to access TAFE courses once he completes his home education.

My son suffers from learning and social disabilities, like many other home educated children. In fact, children with disabilities are overrepresented amongst home educated students, primarily because schools are unable to meet the diversity of their needs. School environments are unsuitable for many home educated students, for example, many have experienced severe bullying and serious mental health issues as a result of school attendance- these students cannot be returned to school. Alternatively, TAFE provides a supportive environment for home educated teens in their entry into formal education. I have firsthand experience of this, as my elder son completed his last three years of schooling at TAFE and we both found it to be a very safe, supportive environment for him.

Unfortunately, although registered home educated students in NSW meet the compulsory education requirements of the NSW Education Act 1990, they are nevertheless not considered to be "school students" by the Department of Education and Communities (DEC) or TAFE, because they are not technically enrolled in a school. Home educated students also receive no funding whatsoever from the NSW government, unlike all other children.

Furthermore, School students who wish to undertake TAFE studies are directed to school based apprenticeships or traineeships or TVET courses as a pathway to vocational education – but here too, home educated students are excluded from these courses. Access to TVET courses and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships require that students be enrolled in school and therefore TAFE and DEC policy is that home educated students cannot undertake these programs.

Even if school based apprenticeships and traineeships were to be made available to home educated students they would not meet the needs students who wish to use TAFE as a pathway to university. This is because they are generally only to Certificate II and III level. However, a Certificate IV provides an ATAR that is sufficient to allow home educated students to access a wide variety of university courses. And due to the inability of our children being able to be awarded the HSC, they therefore need to be able to access TAFE courses at a Cert IV and above level.

From the viewpoint of home educators, it would be a good outcome if policies were developed that echoed other directives and determined that home educated students are not school students. Alternatively if home educated students were considered to be "at school" it would be beneficial if being home educated was considered an "exceptional circumstance" that allowed home educated students to qualify for Smart and Skilled funding regardless of being "at school."

The final important point to make is that vocational education and training is vitally important to all the children of NSW, not just home educated children. Many children will have need of these services. I would argue to the huge increases in costs for these courses is putting this type of education out of the reach of average families, and will result in many children having a less effective education, as well as few life chances as a result of this. In the interests of maintaining equality in education in our country, I urge the inquiry to recommend the return of TAFE fees to their previous structure.

Many thanks for your time in considering this submission. It is much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Hayes